

*Through the Church the Song Goes On:
Preparing a Lutheran Hymnal for the 21st Century*

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Through the Church the Song Goes On is an effort by the LCMS Commission on Worship to foster theological discussion on some of the critical matters in developing a new hymnal for The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and probably some congregations of Lutheran Church–Canada. It is evident that two major goals of the Commission for the new book are theological faithfulness, and wide-adoption within the LCMS. Many see a potential for the next hymnal to be a partial return to the “glory days” when *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) was used almost everywhere in the LCMS and in the majority, back then, of Synodical Conference parishes.

This collection of essays covers several of the hot button issues regarding liturgy among Lutherans. Lectionaries, eucharistic prayers, music, variety, the role of assisting ministers, and private absolution, are among the several issues under consideration. Simply the idea of publishing such a volume in preparation for a new hymnal is commendable. It is a hopeful sign that the task is being undertaken with utmost reverence.

LECTIONARIES

Ever since the adoption of the ILCW’s Three-Year Series, the LCMS has been divided on lectionaries, even aside from the novelties implemented by individual pastors. Three proposals are offered in the essays of *Through the Church the Song Goes On*. Lee Maxwell argues strongly in favor of a return to a slightly modified form of the Historic Lectionary. A very important pastoral and evangelistic argument in favor of the Historic Lectionary is the catechetical value repetition, an element expounded lucidly by Maxwell. Dean Pittelko defends the use of a Three-Year Series. D. Richard Stuckwisch offers a third proposal of “doing our own thing” in the form of a synthesis between the Historic Lectionary and the Three-Year format.

The mantra of those who argue in favor of keeping the Three-Year lectionary is “more is better.” While broader exposure to Scripture can certainly be good, it is not the only consideration. Overall, however, the argument for a form of the historic One Year Series merits the most attention. It is the lectionary Luther preached on and the one mentioned in the Lutheran Confessions. The goal of a lectionary is not simply to make one a master of various facts, but to teach the faith soundly so that it is rooted strongly within individual Christians and congregations. Besides the novel origins of the Three Year Series, the historical critical methodology used in pericope selection is evident and has been indicated by several scholars. Yet, however much one argues in favor of one lectionary over another, the merit of the LCMS being entirely served by the same lectionary is an important element for consideration. Furthermore whatever lectionaries are provided should be supported fully by CPH with companion publications.

Missing, however, in the discussion of lectionaries, is mention of what translation of the Scriptures we will use (not only in the lectionary book, but also in catechetical and devotional materials, new editions of the “Self-Study” Bible, bulletin inserts, and so forth). This is a weighty question indeed since so many LCMS and LCC congregations use the propers published by CPH. Now even though “faith comes by hearing” we are not likely to see too many congregations curtail the habit of using printed inserts of the pericopes. Will we persist in the strongly Reformed New International Version or something else? Many are proposing the adoption of the New King James Version as the best of the existing versions, a version based on the *textus receptus*. At the present time, this seems to be the best choice of popularly used versions in the vernacular. However, rumor has it that a conservative revision of the old RSV is in the works. One hopes that there will be sufficient time to review it before making a final decision. The New King James Version may, by default, be the preferred and most logical choice.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYERS AND THE VERBA TESTAMENTI

Once again, eucharistic prayers and their relationship to the Lord’s words of institution is

confronted as the Divine Service orders are revised. There is still much division on this subject. A good deal of this centers around the question, "What would Luther do?" The three essayists take varying positions on this issue. William E. Thompson takes the view that any prayers of thanksgiving should be distinct from the Words of Institution, whereas Bruce Keseman and William Weedon take the view that the dominical words may be blended into such prayers. Notable, however, is the fact that as pro-eucharistic prayer (incorporating the Verba) as Keseman is, he still suggests that now is not the time for such a move, whereas Weedon suggests that now is the time for such a move, implying that the eucharistic prayers of the Swedish Lutheran tradition and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (SELK) provide an apt model for the LCMS project.

As much as Luther's *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe* come into play in the typical Lutheran arguments about eucharistic prayer, they are not normative. However it should be pointed out that perhaps some of our divergence on this matter does in fact come from Luther's orders. As Weedon demonstrates, the *Formula Missae* proceeds directly from the Preface into the institution narrative while the *Deutsche Messe* does distinguish the narrative from any prayer (pp.58-61). Consequently, the answer for what we should do may not necessarily lie in the question of what Luther would do or has done.

What guidance do the Confessions, the rule of faith, give us on this matter? It is from the example of the Eastern Church (or at least Eastern patristic heritage) where the understanding of the Mass or Liturgy as "a public ministry" is cited. The liturgy as "Divine Service" is something which Lutherans hold in common with the Christians of the East (Apology XXIV), although there is not total parity. It is not surprising that the considerable (but not total) measure of commonality between the two churches should exist. In the Formula of Concord, a quotation of St. John Chrysostom is summoned as a patristic witness in the Lutheran understanding of the consecration. Chrysostom says, as quoted in the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:

Christ Himself prepares this table and blesses it; for no man makes the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ, but Christ Himself who was crucified

for us. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God's power and grace, by the word, where He speaks: "This is My body," the elements present are consecrated in the Supper. And just as the declaration, Gen. 1,28: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," was spoken only once, but is ever efficacious in nature, so that it is fruitful and multiplies, so also this declaration was spoken once, but even to this day and to His advent it is efficacious, and works so that in the Supper of the Church His true body and blood are present."

Hence it is said in FC-SD, VII.79, that the words of institution are to be spoken or sung before the congregation "distinctly and clearly." The Confessions state that the dominical words are by no means to be omitted. No *verba*, no sacrament. But what of the outward form of thanksgiving and the Lord's words? As much as the Confessions cite the Eastern liturgies against Rome to substantiate a canon which does not use propitiatory sacrifice language, they do not adopt nor suggest an Eastern order for Lutheran use. Even though St. John Chrysostom is cited concerning dominical words and their power, the Eastern Orthodox still teach, contrary to Scriptural and Confessional teaching, the *epiklesis*, our calling down of the Holy Spirit in a prayer, is the effective means of the corporeal presence. Lutheranism, along with the Western Catholic tradition, has never approved such a view, but has always confessed the words of institution as the Lord's means of giving His body and blood to us. However, we do not fall into precisionism concerning the moment of the presence's beginning, but neither do we deny that the words are the means through which the Lord blesses the bread and wine. The body and blood of Christ are there consecrated, distributed, and received, as the Confessions state.

The institution narrative indicates that the thanksgiving prayer of Jesus had been completed by the time the Lord spoke concerning the bread and wine to the twelve. The words "This is My body/this is My blood" are spoken by the Lord in connection to His giving of His very body and blood to the twelve. They are from Him to the twelve. The Lord's words happen after He had given thanks (i.e., being a completed action). In the narrative, the dominical words are spoken concerning the bread and wine to the twelve in the presence of the Father. In the

Divine Service the words are from Christ to us with respect to (over) the bread and wine. In typical eucharistic prayers, the words are spoken concerning the bread and wine, to the Father, in the presence of the congregation. Note here the directional and emphatic change from the narrative's direction and emphasis. Does not the "mainstream" (Saxon) Lutheran tradition (as well as Loehe's *Agenda*) reflect the form and direction of the institution narrative more faithfully? This is not the case with the Great Thanksgiving of *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978), to name but one example.

The testamentary promise of the Gospel is distributed to us in the divine words of the Supper which are fulfilled in the in the body of Jesus given and the blood of Christ shed for the forgiveness of sins. This last will and testament of Christ is the chief Divine Service. In the celebration of this sacrament adoration of the corporeally present Christ is due (cf. FC-SD VII.126). But within the context of the Communion there remains the fundamental distinction between what God is doing for us men and for our salvation, and our response of thanksgiving to the generosity of such a God. As much as prayer can be a confession and realization of the dependency of mankind upon God, it still remains a response instilled by Spirit-wrought faith, something attributable to the work of sanctification. However much, at times, the distinction between prayer and proclamation may be blurred (such as in the Psalms, Introits, the invocation, etc), there must remain a distinction between what God does and what we do, lest we be consumed in a monism, rather than a union. For a true communion or union there must be in origination two different parties. And so in the Holy Communion, the body and blood of Christ unites us with our Savior and God, but our distinctiveness is not dissolved. There is a dialogue of prayer, of liturgical conversation, not a talking-over one another. It happens in the way of versicle and response. When the Lord speaks we are in the posture of listening. Therefore when the Lord speaks, "Let all mortal flesh keep silent." Chemnitz wrote in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*:

And surely this blessing or consecration is not to be divided between the Word of God and words handed down by men. For it is not just any word, but the Word of God which is necessary for a sacrament. And to the Word of God, seeing it has been tried with fire, nothing is to be added (Prov. 30:6). And especially, nothing is to be added

to the testament of the Son of God (Gal. 3:15-27). In short, Christ has commanded us to do in the action of the sacrament what He Himself did. He did not, however, perform a mute action, but spoke. And what He said is reported to us in Scripture, as much as the Holy Spirit judged to be necessary for us [*Examination of the Council of Trent: Volume II*, p.226].

Recent liturgical discoveries have brought forth ancient eucharistic prayers that do not include the institution narrative within the prayer but which assume its place distinct from the prayer. Addai and Mari is but one such possibility. With regard to the antiquity and historicity of the typical Lutheran form, Roman Catholic liturgical scholar, David N. Power opines:

Some have offered historical reconstructions which allow for the existence of prayers that do not include the narrative. While the argument used to be largely over Addai and Mari, it has broadened to include the presence in the Egyptian and Antiochene traditions of much shorter thanksgiving prayers, which do not have this component.[...] It is also possible that this type of prayer could give validity to the Lutheran practice of separating the narrative from the prayer, as Martin Luther did. This allows for a mode of joining proclamation with memorial thanksgiving in the celebration of the Lord's Supper different to that which occurs when the attempt is to include the proclamation in the prayer ["The Eucharistic Prayer: Another Look" in *New Eucharistic Prayers: An Ecumenical Study of Their Development and Structure*. Edited by Frank C. Senn. (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp.241,242].

Not only this, but St. Gregory the Great writes in Epistle XII to John, Bishop of Syracuse, a passage also cited by Chemnitz in his *Examen* and by Friedrich Lochner in *Der Hauptgottesdienst*:

[I]t was the custom of the apostles to consecrate the host oblation to that same prayer only. And it seemed to me very unsuitable that we should say over the oblation a prayer which a scholastic had composed, and should not say the very prayer which our Redeemer composed over His body and blood [*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Volume XIII*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); p.9].

Citing Gregory the Great, Chemnitz asserts more than once that the Apostles celebrated the Lord's Supper with the Lord's Prayer and the Words of Institution alone. This practice is not surprising especially considering the analysis of Josef Jungmann, in his book, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, that the purpose and function of the Our Father in the Mass is eucharistic [*The Mass of the Roman Rite: Volume II*; p278f]. Hence, it can be demonstrated that in the history of the liturgy, a form like what is used in *Lutheran Worship* (1982) or *Hymnal Supplement 98* has ancient testimony and is not novel or deficient by any means. I suggest, with regard to eucharistic prayers, that the high ground for Lutherans is in what we already have, in principle and form, in *Lutheran Worship* and *Hymnal Supplement 98*.

In his *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship*, Philip Pfatteicher admits that the mainstream Lutheran form is more readily recognizable as being in agreement with the theology of the Formula of Concord, Article VII, he himself being a proponent of eucharistic prayers blending in the institution narrative [*Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis:Augsburg Publishing House, 1990); p.169]. Given the above, the forms found in the Divine Service orders of *Lutheran Worship* as well as *Hymnal Supplement 98* clearly exhibit evangelical catholicity. Despite the assertion of some that eucharistic prayers not blending in the *verba* may not adequately guard us from omitting mandatory thanksgiving, the fact of the matter is that those who choose to write their own "worship experiences" will do so regardless of the form given in a hymnal. Those who do their own thing already will not be changed much by what is in the next hymnal.

In addition to the three essays on eucharistic prayer, a reprinted document of the Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church of Australia does provide amply convincing arguments that the celebration of the Lord's Supper does require that thanksgiving be given according to the command, "This do." Many "conservative" Lutherans are apt to omit any pre-consecratory thanksgiving when assembling a "worship service" based, purportedly, on the German Chorale Mass or Divine Service III. The tendency in this case is to proceed directly to the dominical words, stumbling into the New Testament Holy of Holies. This omission of thanksgiving clearly needs to end.

HYMNAL OR NO HYMNAL?

What is the future of hymnals? Robert Zagore and Larry Peters confront the issues involved with simply producing any hymnal for a Lutheran Church body at this point in history. With word processors and an abundance of all kinds of materials for pastors and so-called “ministers of music” to display their creativity and personality these days, one might question the wisdom of anyone even mentioning publishing another hymnal.

But there have always been three foundational books for Lutheran piety: the Bible, catechism (or *Book of Concord*), and the hymnal. In our age of virtual-reality (being docetically corporeal), the use of these real books grounds us in the incarnational realities of the divine Word. For the Lutheran Church, these three books can never be taken for granted. Hymnals are, as Zagore observes, “a church body’s most public summary and application of theology” [p.76]. And yet the liturgy is not primarily a written object, but a spoken and heard event (Romans 10:17). The church, according to Luther, is a mouth-house, not a quill-house.

The hymnal (including the liturgy) serves the purpose of speaking and hearing, and the internalization of what is spoken and heard. As it goes with catechesis, it should go, at least to a certain extent, with the liturgy and hymns of the church — pick one form and stick to it. Symmetry between the various rites and the commonly used versicles and their responses ought to be highly encouraged. These things should be familiar and easily memorized as to what is the proper response of the faithful (e.g., the Pax Domini; the salutation).

In tension with the conservative nature of the church, the church exists within a living and breathing liturgical tradition. Zagore notes that when we speak of the “historic” liturgy we are not speaking of an order that is locked in the past or is completely static. The historic liturgy is not merely the order of Holy Communion found on page fifteen of *The Lutheran Hymnal* published by Concordia Publishing House in 1941. (It certainly is not the order on page five of *TLH*, which will hopefully be abolished.) The historic Western liturgy is both traditional and contemporary. It is evangelical (purely Gospel centered) and catholic (confessing the faith according to the whole). Therefore it is meaningful, relevant, mission-focused, and creative

through the divine mysteries. Yes, the traditional liturgy is even an asset to missions and evangelism. If this were not the case, how would we come to have an historic, traditional liturgy in the first place? Given the corporate nature of the Church, when the liturgy is modified, it is done with the consent of the church in a particular jurisdiction or territory, not every congregation for itself.

Zagore makes an important point that, "While the historic liturgy is orthodox, meaningful, and inviting, hymnals often are not" [p.81]. The format of a hymnal is of very practical importance. As said before, the written is to serve the spoken and heard, when it comes to the Divine Service. Despite the many good points of *Lutheran Worship*, one of its primary failures was in its format. As much as one may want to downplay the negative aspects of pragmatism in our culture, if an orthodox hymnal is not used it is as good as no hymnal at all.

Hymnals may have a future in Lutheranism if we are wise in the way we print and assemble them. With this said, hopefully there is still some room for quality liturgical art in our hymnals and companion volumes.

Liturgy, music, and culture are also confronted in this volume. Daniel Zager's essay is entitled, "Holy Ground and Counter-cultural Music." Music is indeed a critical issue. Much of the Church Growth Movement's methodology focuses on faddish styles of music being used to attract certain groups of people. The rapid growth of the multi-million dollar Contemporary Christian Music industry has also added much to the debate. But does what is called broadly "Christian music" or even "contemporary Christian music" qualify as "liturgical music," that is, music suited for the unique vocation of the Divine Service?

The view of the liturgy which posits that it is the "work of the people" might suggest that whatever the people enjoy and find uplifting is suitable for a "worship service." But, on the other hand, does such music reflect the nature of worship, or rather of Divine Service, which is *coram Deo*. Does it reflect in Spirit and Truth, the *theanthropic* (incarnational or "Boolean") character of the Holy Liturgy? Zager points out that in many congregations a virtual buffet (my words) of worship styles are offered: traditional, contemporary, and blended (at least). In

many ways, music style is simply offered as a “bait and switch” tactic for the sake of getting bodies into the doors, bodies of those who do not understand the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:6-16). But does this tactic get them into the kingdom of heaven? The assumption, said or not, is that there is somehow an improvement on the means of the Spirit.

When musical styles are experimented with in contemporary worship circles, most often one begins with a musical style in mind and then proposes to fit the text to the music, rather than setting the music to the needs or character of the text and the nature of the liturgical assembly in the eucharistic context. Music in the Divine Service is put into the service of what is holy and eternal. The danger in all of this is that it leads to a form of Pietism which would have us trust in our wobbly and unpredictable religious feelings and “warm fuzzies” rather than in the authoritative and sturdy promises of the Lord. Here the call is to follow St. Augustine’s wisdom and to cling to the certain and depart from the uncertain (*tene certum, dimitte incertum*). To trust in things which cannot hold the weight of faith, which properly should lean upon Christ Jesus, is building upon sand.

LITURGICAL SONG

Kent Tibben discusses “The Peoples’ Song: What Distinguishes a Hymn from a Liturgical Song?” He distinguishes three kinds of churchly song: hymnody, liturgical song, and liturgical chant. One critical element of liturgical song Tibben discusses is the matter of repetition and learning and how this relates to the form of a liturgical song or hymn. Hymns (and liturgical songs to a certain extent) tend toward the paraphrastic. Liturgical chants are best suited for repeating of texts without much or any modification for being sung. This is significant. Despite the pedigree of a Chorale Mass, it may tend toward paraphrased liturgical texts, which, in turn, are often more shallow. This is not to say that they need be, however.

LITURGY AND CULTURE

Naomichi Masaki deals with the relationship between liturgy and culture. In his words, “liturgy has a culture of its own.” Nothing comes into the liturgy as it is found in the world. Anything that comes into the liturgy is sanctified and transformed through the Word of God.

What all cultures outside the Divine Service have in common is anti-sacramentality or anti-incarnationality. The disposition within all of us, and therefore all culture, is to move toward the abstract, the speculative, and finally enthusiasm, which Luther calls the “source, power, and strength of all heresy.” Naomichi Masaki suggests that a standard translatable text of the liturgy be used universally at home and abroad (not only the Holy Communion, but also lectionary, hymns, and all that goes along with good liturgical practice). The liturgy is catholic and therefore elementary for missions. It is that into which newborn believers are incorporated and through which they live.

THE CALL FOR VARIETY

A typical attack against traditional liturgy is that it lacks variety. This tactic is really setting up a straw man. The historic Divine Service actually has much variety. Kevin J. Hildebrand demonstrates clearly that the catholic liturgical practice of Lutheranism has much in the way of variety. He also argues that a fixation on some kinds of variety is very detrimental to the mission of the church. Much of what is offered as variety for the sake of mission is nothing more than an appeal to the desires of the sinful nature which then short-circuits contrition and faith in absolution.

Very often, as Hildebrand notes, the attempt is to “liven things up”. Admittedly, some pastors do lead the liturgy as they would read a list of names from a telephone directory. But the effectiveness of the Word of God is not improved by how we inflect it or by our intonation while speaking. Even among so-called conservative Lutherans, a wide-ranging group to be sure, there is much latitude evident. If one were to pick completely at random among the various Sunday services of the Missouri Synod it might be much akin to playing a game of liturgical Russian Roulette. Hildebrand points out that much of what passes for appealing to youth in the shallowness of contemporary worship is antithetical to sound catechesis of youth.

Once again, this is evangelism at the expense of the Gospel. We keep forgetting the Church is not a building.

The propers of the church’s calendar, the implementation of the liturgical choir, ceremony to

accent high feasts, proper use of the historic vestments, various musical settings of uniform liturgical texts (including the much-neglected Psalter), and the use of the minor festivals of the calendar are all historic resources already present in the heritage of the Lutheran Church that incorporate variety. However, for most pastors these things need to be deliberately learned or re-learned. As some have suggested, we need to go back to liturgical boot camp. We have been raised in the post-Enlightenment and post-Pietism aftermath. We are on the long road of liturgical and sacramental recovery. As we instruct our members in our liturgical heritage we may be apt to say, "It is new to you now, but not new to Lutherans or historic Christianity."

Hildebrand makes clear that there is need for more deliberate instruction on Lutheran liturgy at all levels. What our seminaries currently require in the number of liturgy classes is very minimal. It is especially meager given the centrality of liturgy in an individual's life, congregational life, and as a resource in pastoral care. Notable in this problem is the lack of musical education and training among clergy, especially given its importance in centuries long past. Perhaps a mandatory year of choir would be helpful for seminarians in the LCMS.

ASSISTING MINISTERS

Mark Waldron and Thomas M. Winger consider the rubrics of "assisting minister" in *LW* and *LBW*. We have seen much change in this area, especially since Rome's Second Vatican Council. This influence of Vatican II is reflected also in such things as changing the standard response to the salutation from "and with your spirit" to "and also with you" and the response to the *Pax Domini* from "Amen" to the new response to the salutation. All these things are symptomatic of the liturgical theology which espouses liturgy as "the work of the people" rather than as "the public ministry" as in the Apology XXIV (or "divine service"). So often in the attempt to avoid clericalism we end up with exactly what we were trying to avoid. Nowadays nearly everything that is done in the church is called "ministry," so that what the pastor (or minister) does becomes the measure of everything. Is this not clericalism? To appreciate a thing as a Gospel gift, we receive it uniquely, for what it is, not in comparison to anything else. Why not simply name the thing that is being done rather than calling everything "ministry"?

Mark Waldron particularly discusses the question of women serving as assistants in the liturgy, particularly in terms reading the Scriptures publicly. On the basis, once again, of the “priesthood of all believers” (properly called “the royal priesthood”), the argument is that the royal priesthood should take a leadership “role” (a term notably borrowed from sociology and the theatre) in the Divine Service. However, the only time I Peter 2:9 is mentioned in the Lutheran Confessions, it is simply there to demonstrate that the royal priesthood has the privilege and responsibility to see to it that the office of the holy ministry is filled it is midst (perhaps demonstrating that women may indeed vote, if a congregation votes). Waldron does concede, however, that this priesthood of the baptized does not imply that everyone is a pastor (cf. Augustana XIV).

The royal priesthood is primarily exercised when the church praises the Lord to the world outside. The members of the royal priesthood of the baptized work primarily between the world and God. The sacrifice of praise is offered to God in earshot of the world. In the liturgy the congregation offers her hearty “Amen” to indicate that the gifts of God are received. And as Winger observes, pastors ought not steal the “Amen” from the people. The sacrifice of responding to the grace of God in our various vocations in life is something that belongs to all believers.

On the other hand, I Timothy 4:13 would seem to indicate that Paul believed that the public reading of Scripture is of the pastoral office. Although one would certainly recognize the unique incarnational characteristics of the four Gospels, which, among Lutherans, are typically reserved to be read by the pastor, clearly Paul would not be speaking of them here. Generally, in the Divine Service, the public reading of Scripture given to those charged with being the stewards of the mysteries. Does not Paul also indicate that the men specifically should pray everywhere lifting up holy hands (I Timothy 2:8)? Even conceding that for the sake of good order and decorum laymen (male) might assist in certain liturgical activities (such as reading the Old Testament and Epistle or in assisting with the blessed cup), does it therefore follow that all laymen may do this or that women may do this? It would seem in the

case of reading the Scriptures and assisting in the sacrament, that these assisting laymen are more extensions of what the pastoral office does (a proverbial “third arm” for the sake of order), rather than exhibiting a duty which would properly be incumbent upon the royal priesthood in a public liturgical context. The royal priesthood is accorded the honor of sitting at table and being at the receiving end of the Lord’s gracious service (Luke 22:27).

Winger demonstrates that the “role” of assisting minister was born in murky ILCW waters at best. The true and highest worship of God is faith, not getting everyone doing something in the chancel. The church consists of those who speak and those who hear: under-shepherds and sheep. The oft-seen, modern language of “presiding minister” may suggest a mere button-pushing tenor. Could this be the liturgical equivalent of CEO/corporation thinking in the church? Still, Winger points out that, “the rationale behind the use of assisting ministers is that we understand that each order (German: *Stand*) in the church has its office (*Amt*) to perform” [p.172]. The assertion, as Winger observes, is that diaconal ministry is being restored in the form of the assisting minister. However, what a deacon is or has been in church history is not always clear, as Winger observes.

MISCELLANEA

The remaining miscellanea of essays cover the translation of liturgical texts, Private Confession and Holy Absolution, confirmation and “Boolean Worship”. Robert A.D. Clancy deals with the use or non-use of ecumenical translations of liturgical texts. Although there may be some benefits to the use of common texts, he concludes, “Accuracy of translation and fidelity to both the original texts and our confession of the faith must remain primary,” while also suggesting we might take ecumenical texts into consideration when rites are revised.

HOLY ABSOLUTION

Brent W. Kuhlman deals with the gift of Holy Absolution. One of the gifts to us in *Lutheran Worship* is the inclusion of a rite of Private Confession and Holy Absolution to which we can actually direct our people and say, “There it is.” And yet in our age of counseling as the sum of pastoral care, what would seem more irrelevant than Private Confession and Holy

Absolution? This, no doubt, may be due to the fact that few pastors actually use it for their own personal benefit. Furthermore, in the midst of ecclesiastical politics, alleged “role conflict” for ecclesiastical supervisors, and confusion over the seal of confession, who will be the pastor’s pastor? The logical choice according to polity might even warn against confessing to him. It would seem that a pastor must seek out a competent brother pastor in a parish for such a thing.

When someone is troubled by his or her sin and has difficulty in believing that one is forgiven, there is the unique opportunity for Private Confession and Holy Absolution. Only that penitent is there with the father confessor. The penitent is the only one speaking and confessing those particular sins, and so the absolution is there applied particularly to that penitent. There is no doubt that the penitent, the only one there who confessed, is now the one to whom absolution is given. The laying on of hands in the pronouncement of absolution helps to indicate that this is “for you.” The office of the ministry is exercised for the benefit for faith and the forgiveness of sins. But that office is also charged to bind the sins of “manifest and impenitent sinners.” As Wilhlem Loehe has pointed out, without the binding key being exercised, absolution becomes superfluous, and vice versa.

The institution of the office of the keys in John 20 (not Matthew 16) might even be taken to suggest individual absolution as the norm. Absolution is the voice of Christ, not merely the pastor’s or the church’s wish or opinion. It is distinguished from the declaration of grace. Christ absolves through the mouth of the pastor, here on earth, where we sinners are with our sin. The Word comes into our ears and goes to our very center to set us free and cleanse us so that we will not die but live, like King David. In a breath, our relationship with God is made favorable again as we receive the benefits of the cross (cf. “In You Is Gladness”). Absolution is there so that we receive, and not merely be assured of, the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, it is not so strange that Luther would produce his strongest comments against enthusiasm under the discussion of Confession in the Smalcald Articles. It is also not strange that the Augustana attacks enthusiasm in the article on the Holy Office. This is significant. Forgiveness comes through the external word of the Gospel, not through the air after a prayer,

a feeling of assurance, or a shiver up the spine. Rather, the external word of the Gospel does, gives, and accomplishes that of which it speaks. In the words of the Missouri Synod's Franzmann, "Thy strong word bespeaks us righteous" [LW:328].

Confession is therefore retained for the sake of the absolution. In fact, the Confessions say, it would be impious for it to fall into disuse. Ironic it is, then, that it was those called "Pietists" who allowed (or caused) it to fall into disuse, as they excommunicated it from Lutheranism. But by the grace of God, not by our efforts, it is being returned to some parts of Lutheranism.

We are now confronted with the opportunity to catechize and be benefitted by this gift and to further examine the rite we may use.

Luther admitted that his rite of confession was primarily offered as a model for didactic purposes. However, we may, in *Lutheran Worship's* rite, need to consider the wording for the penitent. One of the benefits of what Luther offered was its simplicity. However, one may, especially with a new user of this rite, need more "support structure" to learn to confess and receive absolution. Perhaps the triune invocation would be appropriate to begin the rite, as it ties so well with Part IV of Baptism in the Small Catechism, and since Private Confession and Holy Absolution is a way of abiding in that one Baptism for the remission of sins. Perhaps also, additional supporting materials and rubrics may be helpful for a deliberate recovery of this gift among us in the usual way Lutherans have practiced it. This gift needs to be clearly distinguished from counseling or pastoral conversations for various reasons (cf. Walter Koehler's discussion of this in *Counseling and Confession*). This also helps a pastor properly understand his vocation in distinction to those properly trained (and certified) to do such counseling for their own livelihood.

CONFIRMATION & CATECHESIS

Kent Bureson discusses the mixed history and theology of Lutherans on the matter of confirmation and its relationship to the life of a Christian. To many, confirmation (the rite, not catechesis) has become a quasi-sacrament overshadowing even the significance of first communion. This confusion is easily demonstrated by asking, "Who is doing the confirming?"

Bureson aptly dubs confirmation among Lutherans as "a rite in search of a meaning"

[p.203]. A.C. Repp's book, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, surveys the reason for much of this. As Burreson observes, the purpose of confirmation is to serve the larger sacramental life of the church.

Baptism is always connected with teaching. The order may vary but the two cannot be separated. Catechesis flows up to Baptism or from it. This is why many pastors are beginning to present newly baptized children with a copy of the Small Catechism to encourage home catechesis from the outset. In the Lutheran Church, the rite of confirmation is catechetically focused. However, we have acquired the bad habit of referring to the intensive instruction period of our children as "confirmation class." The goal of the class is not confirmation. This language fosters the ubiquitous "graduation from church" mentality. Clearly, as Burreson asserts, catechesis is a life-long process.

The baggage we have inherited comes to us from medieval practice as well as from the earlier baptismal practice of chrismation. In recent years all sorts of novelties have developed – like confirmation "stoles" and so forth. Properly, the rite of confirmation cannot be understood as a thing unto itself. It only exists in relation to Baptism, catechesis, the Lord's Supper and the larger scope of Christian life in the church.

But might we consider also having earlier confirmation/first communion (for those who are ready)? Historically, among Lutherans, the answer is "yes." The artificially chosen ages of about 12-14 come to us, again, from the Pietists. Although we do not have infant communion, certainly somewhat younger first communion/confirmation is possible and beneficial. Pragmatically speaking, this would separate confirmation from the common change of schools that happens for many who have "middle schools" in their communities, thus alleviating some of the "graduation" thinking. This adjustment of practice may well bring us to conclude once again that catechesis is primarily conducted in the realm of the spoken and heard, and not primarily in the written and read (cf. Romans 10:17).

CONCLUSION

It would seem that if the present volume is any measure of how things are going in the development of the next LCMS hymnal, the people involved are making a good start. A challenge will be to encourage Concordia Publishing House to incorporate the next LCMS hymnal into its larger scope of publishing, especially with regard to Catechisms, catechetical materials, Sunday School curriculum, study Bibles, music, and devotional materials. We need to realize that Lutherans should not attempt to compete with the generic Protestant publishers.

Our goal should be to offer solidly Lutheran publications. The fad of the Church Growth Movement's methodology will pass away in the increasing hostility of our culture against historic Christianity. It will be blown away like chaff in the wind.

Hopefully as the next LCMS hymnal is prepared other attendant issues will be addressed. Such issues might be the translation of the Scriptures used for the lectionary, catechumenate, rubrics, recovering historic eucharistic vestments, closed communion, liturgical art, funerals, weddings and so forth. The question of why we switched from "Sundays after Trinity" to "Sundays after Pentecost" could also be addressed.

One can only say "encore!" to the efforts of the LCMS Commission on Worship for publishing *Through the Church the Song Goes On*. I would look forward to another volume discussing perhaps some of the suggested items above. With this said, I can only commend the present volume for thorough study and thoughtful response.

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