



# LITURGICAL CATECHESIS

*[Along with the Holy Scriptures and the hymnal] The Book of Concord should also be in every Lutheran home. ...pastors should see to it that every home has one. ... If a person isn't familiar with this book, he'll think, "That old book is just for pastors. I don't have to preach. After plowing all day, I can't sit down and study in the evening. If I read my morning and evening devotions, that's enough." No, that is not enough! The Lord doesn't want us to remain children, blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine; instead of that, He wants us to grow in knowledge so that we can teach others... (C. F. W. Walther, "Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod" [1879], *Essays for the Church*, Vol. II, p. 51)*

Exodus 14:30-15:1

Revelation 5:9,11-14

Psalms 95:1

Ephesians 5:19

1 Chronicles 6:31-32

Colossians 3:16

Mark 14:26 (Matt. 26:30)

James 5:13

Acts 16:25

Numbers 21:16-18

## **A Singing Church:**

A confessional church is a singing church. As she sings, she makes her good confession, a confession both in word and music. As the sainted Martin Franzmann once said, "Theology is doxology. Theology must sing," (Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets: Sermons by Martin Franzmann [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994], p. 92). Theology cannot remain mute words safely bedded down between the covers of a book; it must leap off the printed page, exit the mouth, and fill the air with holy sound. Theology must be given a voice. The lips, not the pen, are the best instruments of theological expression. Although doctrinal books, commentaries, journals, and essays serve well as mediums of confession, they all play second fiddle to that which is articulated in the liturgy. The dogmatics of Francis Pieper must salute the hymns of Paul Gerhardt.

All of which is to say that the hearth and home of theology is the Divine Service. All true theology is restless until it finds its rest in liturgy, sermons, and hymnody. There the rubber meets the road. In that holy context the Bride of Christ is doing what she does best: hearing from and speaking to her heavenly Groom. And the words she speaks are God-words, nouns and verbs which cradle the divine presence. The words the Spirit first planted in her ears bear fruit through her lips as she confesses, chants, and sings. I have heard seminarians say that they learned as much (or more) theology in the daily chapel services as in the classroom or study. The same could be said by any layman who confesses the creeds, prays the liturgy, sings the hymns, and listens to the sermons in his congregation. As he does so, he is swimming in a lake of theology. So it is and so it should be.

Bird, Chad. *Why Lutherans Sing What They Sing* (p. 1). . Kindle Edition.

## The Criteria for Lutheran Hymns:

1. *A Lutheran hymn aims not to create the right atmosphere or mood for worship, but serves a vehicle for the Spirit Word of God. (John 4:23-24)*
2. *A Lutheran hymn is not entertainment but proclamation.*

Considerations:

- Place & Setting
- Divide between the Sacred & the Secular

3. *A Lutheran hymn is shaped by the theology of the cross.*

“Theology of the Cross” - is a term coined by the theologian Martin Luther to refer to theology that posits the cross as the only source of knowledge concerning who God is and how God saves. (It is contrasted with the Theology of Glory, which places greater emphasis on human abilities and human reason.)

From Luther’s 95 Theses:

94: Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, death and hell.

95: And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace (Acts 14:22).

4. *A Lutheran hymn is not bound merely to paraphrase the biblical text: rather, it interprets the Scriptures in reference to Christ.*
5. *A Lutheran hymn is bound to no culture save the culture of the Church catholic (universal).*

The liturgy as God’s activity for us defines the place of hymnody in the Divine Service. Like the rest of the liturgy, hymns are primarily channels of divine gifts, and only secondarily vocalizations of human gratitude.

As St. Paul says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3: 16). The Word of Christ— not the word of man— richly dwells within the Church in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. And where the Word of Christ is, there Christ Himself is, doling out His blood-bought gifts. So it is vital not just that a congregation sing hymns which are technically error-free; the hymns must proclaim Christ and His benefits— in a word, the Gospel. A hymn may say everything which is true about my thanks, my praise, and my glorifying of Christ, but if such a hymn takes center stage, the law has shoved aside the Gospel, and my doing has overshadowed the doing and my doing has overshadowed the doing of Jesus.

Since it is true that all theology is Christology, it is also true that all hymnology is Christology. That is, all true Christian hymns must proclaim Christ, extol Christ, impart Christ. If His life is absent from the hymn, let us lay it to rest in an unmarked grave. It has no place in the Church of the Resurrection. Here are only orthodox hymns, hymns by which the Spirit leads us through the Son to the Father, around whose throne we laud and magnify His glorious name.

*Bird, Chad. Why Lutherans Sing What They Sing (p. 6). . Kindle Edition.*

### **Why which hymns are used (or not) is important:**

In a psalm recounting how God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea, we read: “Then they believed His words; they sang His praise” (106: 12 NKJ; emphasis added). They believed, therefore they sang (cf. 2 Corinthians 4: 13). Faith and hymnody, belief and confession, go hand in glove. “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks and sings” (Luke 6:45). This, however, is a double-edged sword, because hymns are both delightful as well as dangerous, as the hymnologist Erik Routley once pointed out. The words uttered by the mouth are windows to the heart, revealing the orthodoxy or heterodoxy which resides therein. So if you wish to know the good, the bad, or the ugly confession of an individual or congregation, you might well begin by asking him or them to sing a dozen of their favorite hymns.

Here it is helpful to remember that the primary meaning of orthodoxy is “right praise,” from the Greek *orthos* (right) and *doxa* (praise or glory). Only by extension does it mean “right doctrine.” The two, however, enjoy a mother-daughter relationship, for from doctrine’s womb the child of praise is born. The ancient church used the following aphorism to say the same thing: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, that is, the rule of prayer [constitutes] the rule of believing. That which the Church speaks and sings in her liturgy is indicative and constitutive of what she confesses to be true— good or bad. Put your ear to a church’s mouth— not your nose in her books— and there she will tell you what she truly believes, not just what she claims to believe. It is no coincidence, therefore, that virtually all communions within Christendom have their own distinctive hymnody. This mirrors their theology.

Bird, Chad. *Why Lutherans Sing What They Sing* (pp. 2-3). . Kindle Edition.

### **Example:**

in the fourth century, when the Alexandrian presbyter Arius began to teach that the Son is not fully and truly divine, he composed hymns such as this one to disseminate his poison.

We praise him as without beginning, because of him who has a beginning.  
And adore him as everlasting, because of him who in time has come to be.  
He that is without beginning made the Son a beginning of things originated;  
and advanced him as a Son to himself by adoption.  
He has nothing proper to God in proper subsistence.  
For he is not equal, no, nor one in essence with him.  
Wise is God, for he is the teacher of wisdom.  
(The Macmillian Book of Earliest Christian Hymns, ed. F. Forrester Church)

The churchly-sounding language spread the Arian lie that the Son is not “true God of true God, begotten not made” (Nicene Creed). Satan may have slithered to our first parents disguised as a serpent, but oftentimes he enters our churches concealed in a hymn.

So, why do Evangelical-Lutherans sing what they sing? The question is of paramount importance due to the ongoing attacks upon the traditional music and hymnody of confessional Lutherans. In many congregations, the pastor is often asked why we no longer sing those “traditional Lutheran hymns” (which aren’t) such as “Amazing Grace,” “Just as I Am,” and “The Old Rugged Cross,” but instead “newfangled ones” (which are the old Lutheran hymns) such as “We All Believe in One True God,” “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord,” and “Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart.” Many an LCMS congregation sings regularly from *The Other Songbook* or from a resource book of contemporary Christian music. The termites of heterodoxy are gnawing away at the foundations of our hymnody and they are not easily exterminated. *It behooves us, therefore, to ask and examine why we sing what we sing.*

Scholars estimate that in America alone there have been more than 1.5 million hymns published in approximately 4,700 hymnals. That means, for instance, that the hymns which made the cut for the Lutheran Service Book (635 in number) comprise a mere .0004 of that total number. The world is flooded with hymns, but as with any flood, lots of trash and raw sewage are floating around in the water. Not all is safe for churchly consumption. To ask what makes a hymn a Lutheran hymn is to ask what theological and musical criteria must be met before one of those 1.5 million hymns is sanctified for use in the Divine Service.

Bird, Chad. Why Lutherans Sing What They Sing (pp. 3-4, 7). . Kindle Edition.

### Scriptures Cited:

#### Exodus 14:30-15:1

**30** Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. **31** Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

**15** Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,  
“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

#### Psalm 95:1

**95** Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

#### 1 Chronicles 6:31-32

**31** These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord after the ark rested there. **32** They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they performed their service according to their order.

#### Mark 14:26

**26** And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

#### Acts 16:25

**25** About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

#### Revelation 5:9,11-14

**9** And they sang a new song, saying... **11** Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, **12** saying with a loud voice,  
“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
and honor and glory and blessing!”

**13** And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

**14** And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

#### **Ephesians 5:19**

**19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

#### **Colossians 3:16**

**16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

#### **James 5:13**

**13** Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

#### **Numbers 21:16-18**

**16** And from there they continued to Beer; that is the well of which the Lord said to Moses, “Gather the people together, so that I may give them water.” **17** Then Israel sang this song: “Spring up, O well!—Sing to it!—

**18** the well that the princes made,  
that the nobles of the people dug,  
with the scepter and with their staffs.”

#### **John 4:23-24**

**23** But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”