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Criteria for Hymn Selection

PROLOGUE

“The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation”
Exodus 15:2; Psalm 118:14; Isaiah 12:2

Where there is salvation, there is singing. Singing springs forth from the lips of people who have been delivered from sin, death, the devil, the world and their own flesh. As Luther wrote in his preface to the Babst hymnal in 1545, “For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it so that others also may come and hear it. And whoever does not want to sing and speak of it shows that he does not believe and that he does not belong under the new and joyful testament, but under the old, lazy, and tedious testament” (AE 53:332-33).

Similarly, Robin Leaver writes, “Music is the accompanying counterpoint to the Divine message and in all the mighty acts of God, music is never very far away. From eternity to eternity, from creation to judgment, from Genesis to Revelation, the sound of music is to be heard.” Even the heavens, the sea, mountain and forest break into singing (1 Chr. 16:32-33; Is. 44:23).

For Lutherans, hymn singing is the corporate confession of God’s work in Christ. It is not primarily an attempt to elicit certain emotions from people nor essentially a human-centered effort to be obedient to a sovereign God who demands utmost praise according to the Law. The hymns, psalms and spiritual songs of God’s people are rather sung confessions of the works and gifts of Him who has obtained such deliverance as declared by the Holy Scriptures. The Word of God begets the song of the Church.

Hymns recall and recount the promises and works of Jesus Christ among people who know their sin and their need before a righteous God. In this way, people learn to love hymns not for the sake of their melody, rhythm, childhood memories or sentimental phrases, but rather because they cling to the saving work of God in Christ which is expressed in hymns.

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THEOLOGY

“Theology must sing.”
Martin Franzmann

The first Lutheran cantor, Johann Walter, maintained in the 16th century that music is “wrapped up and locked up in theology, so that he who desires, pursues, and studies theology at the same time lays hold of the art of music, even though he may fail to see, feel, or understand this.” The Lutheran Confessions even use the text of a well-known hymn to emphasize a doctrinal point (*Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article I:23*).

Centuries later, the first president of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, C.F.W. Walther, wrote concerning the hymn selection process for the 1847 *Kirchengesangbuch*:

“In the selection of the adopted hymns the chief consideration was that they be pure in doctrine; that they have found almost universal acceptance within the orthodox German Lutheran Church and have thus received the almost unanimous testimony that they had come forth from the true spirit (of Lutheranism); that they express not so much the changing circumstances of individual persons but rather contain the language of the whole church.” Hymns selected for this new hymnal follow in this tradition.

In our own day, Robin Leaver has expressed it this way: “For the people of our churches, theology is largely formed by the hymns they sing,” (“Renewal in Hymnody,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, no. 6 [Winter 1992], 367).

The hymnody of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod is part and parcel with its theology. That which we believe, teach, and confess finds concrete expression through the hymns which we sing.

Christocentric

“The righteous live alone by God’s grace, work, Word and might revealed in Christ which is their preaching, hymn, praise and song.” writes Martin Luther in his *The Good Confession of Psalm 118* (1530; Erl. 41:57-58).

The life and saving work of Jesus Christ are the heart and center of Lutheran hymns. Hymns which reflect the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed have the predominance because only through Christ can sinners properly understand and receive the creating work of the Father (First Article) and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (Third Article). As Jesus said (John 14:6), “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Lutherans prefer to extol the beauty of life and salvation in Christ over the beauties of nature — and this is reflected in the hymns we sing. Natural revelation exhibits the handiwork of God in magnificent mountains and beautiful gardens, but nature also is an inadequate reference to the heart of God in light of many natural disasters. The Grand Canyon, for example, is a wonder to observe as long as one has water and shade and food, but apart from these things it is a dangerous place.

The special revelation of God in Christ is something that no mind has conceived (1 Cor. 2:9). We live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

In Thee Alone, O Christ, My Lord

TLH 319

In Thee alone, O Christ, my Lord,
My hope on earth remaineth;
I know Thou wilt Thine aid afford,
Naught else my soul sustaineth.
No strength of man, no earthly stay
Can help me in the evil day;
Thou, only Thou, canst aid supply.
To Thee I cry; On Thee I bid my hear rely.

Biblical Grounding

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him,” Colossians 3:16-17.

In its *Guidelines and Principles for Translation*, the Translation Committee of the Lutheran Hymnal Project has stated that “All hymns used in Lutheran worship must be in accord with the Word of God, as expounded in the *Book of Concord*. Doctrinal fidelity must be paramount, even when this means emending or excluding particular hymns.”

The strongest hymns will not only be based on the truths of God’s Word, but will contain clear biblical references that help the faithful rehearse again and again those truths. Such hymns put into their mouths what has first been put into their ears. Clear allusions to the Word of God echo from throughout hymnody that is biblically rich.

It is not the fact that it is *possible* to misunderstand or interpret the text in a way which is contrary to Scripture and the Confessions which would cause a hymn to be excluded, but whether it is *likely*. Neither would hymns be included because it is *possible* to read a text with “Lutheran eyes” — a type of corrective vision. In matters of the church’s practice, clarity of doctrine is of paramount importance so as to not mislead. In this light, we may choose to reject hymns which have become closely associated with practices and traditions which are antithetical to the Gospel, such as altar calls. If the singing of certain hymns has the effect of blurring distinctions between the orthodox confession of the faith and heterodox beliefs, we are obliged to abstain.

God’s Word is Our Great Heritage

LW 333

God’s Word is our great heritage And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way, in death it is our stay.
Lord, grant while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations.

Law and Gospel Distinguished

The Lutheran difference is further evident in a proper distinction, balance, and application of Law and Gospel. The Gospel predominates when hymns relate what God has done for us in Christ. God is given the greater glory in our hymns when His works are emphasized over our own. Hymns obscure the Gospel when they draw attention to our works for God, our feelings for Him, or our attraction to the beautiful aspects of His creation.

The Law does not merely tell us what we are to do according to the will of God. Rather, it shows us how we have failed before God that we might realize our dire need for the Gospel. The purpose of the Law is not to command us how to live but rather to show us what sins to confess. Hymns which emphasize human works — commending such works to God as something which is owed to Him or as works by which we are made pleasing in His sight — are Law hymns which tend either toward encouraging hypocrisy or terrifying consciences.

The Gospel stands as the work of God in Christ as promised by the prophets and proclaimed by the apostles. The Gospel is not just any good news humanly speaking, but is rather that news which bestows life and salvation through the forgiveness of sins won for us by Christ's death on the cross. Gospel hymns provide texts wherein the Lord is the principle subject of the verbs and especially so when they direct us to the means of grace: holy baptism, holy absolution, holy communion rather than to human works such as love or prayer.

The Law of God is Good and Wise LW 329

The Law of God is good and wise
And sets his will before our eyes,
Shows us the way of righteousness
And dooms to death when we transgress.

The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace LW 330

The Gospel shows the Father's grace
Who sent his Son to save our race,
Proclaims how Jesus lived and died
That man might thus be justified.

Theology of the Cross

Lutheran hymns point to the Lord whose highest glory is hidden in His suffering and death on a cross. Hymn texts of this sort manifest the Lord of all as the servant of all in Christ's obedience and humiliation.

Such texts take up the cross and follow him in a spirit of self-denial rather than self-aggrandizement. Glory hymns hide those things which are unpleasant to face and the genre known as "praise songs" give a jaded view of reality. The Lord Jesus Christ is not a beautiful savior to be compared with the natural splendor of the earth. Rather, he "had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Is. 53:2). Theology of the Cross hymns sing of the suffering designed and given to the ones He loves to build up under crosses which are not of their own choosing.

The cross of Christ is the Christian's glory, even as it is mirrored through the Christian's own suffering rather than in some kind of earthly triumphalism (1 Peter 4:13; Acts 5:41; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5-7; Philippians 1:26; Philippians 3:10; 2 Timothy 1:8).

In God, My Faithful God

TLH 526

In God, my faithful God,
I trust when dark my road;
Tho' many woes o'ertake me,
Yet He will not forsake me.
His love it is doth send them
And, when 'tis best, will end them.

My sins assail me sore,
But I despair no more.
I build on Christ, who loves me;
From this Rock nothing moves me.
To Him I all surrender,
To Him, my soul's Defender.

LANGUAGE

“What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend?”
Bernard of Clairvaux / Paul Gerhardt

“Love language as you love the Lord.”
Martin Luther

Lutheran hymnody is at its best when it expresses doctrinal fidelity in an artistic and eloquent manner. Martin Brecht records that Luther’s competence “came not only from his familiarity with the liturgy and its rubrics, but even more from his ability as a poet,” (*Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, p. 253).

Luther lamented the fact that “in matters concerning the flesh we have so many fine poems and hymns but that in those concerning the spirit we have such sluggish, cold affairs?” (*W-T 5, No. 5603*).

The language of our hymns serves more to relate His words of Law and Gospel in a forthright, earthy, and realistic manner, rather than to direct flowery or allegorical expressions of praise toward God, attempting to affect an unctuous dignity in order to make a religious impact.

Doctrinal precision and completeness

Doctrine is teaching — the teaching of the Lord through His clear Word rather than human formulations of dogma. Together with the liturgy, hymns have been used throughout the centuries to teach the faith. For this reason, it is essential that hymns be doctrinally orthodox.

Luther's catechetical hymns demonstrate his understanding of this function of hymns. Clarity of Lutheran confession and completeness of the confession is essential. The way people learn the theology is singing the hymns, clarity of Lutheran Confession, completeness to it which leaves one hanging. Catechetical purpose of hymns. Take doctrine to heart and carrying it through by singing the stanzas.

O Jesus, King of Glory

TLH 130

And bid Thy Word within me
Shine as the fairest star;
Keep sin and all false doctrine
Forever from me far.
Help me confess Thee truly
And with Thy Christendom
Here own Thee King and Savior
And in the world to come.

Literary integrity

Hymns are more than heartfelt expressions; they are beautiful and often sublime ways of stating truth. That is why so few have written lasting hymn texts; for it can only be done by an exceptional talent, and even then it is one of the most difficult things to do well. Lasting quality in a poetic way.

Thy Strong Word

LW 328

Thy strong word did cleave the darkness
At thy speaking it was done.
For created light we thank thee,
While thine ordered seasons run.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise to thee who light dost send!
Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia without end!

Lo on those who dwelt in darkness,
Dark as night and deep as death,
Broke the light of thy salvation,
Breathed thine own life-giving breath.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise to thee who light dost send!
Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia without end!

Lasting Value

The Translation Committee of the Lutheran Hymnal Project has stated in its guidelines: “The hymns that have stood the test of time were written by great poets and composers. The process of updating, editing, and translating should take care not to do violence to the artistic integrity of the composition, unless necessary for theological reasons.”

The hymnic confession of the church should be universal and enduring. Worthy hymns are those which show themselves to be appropriate throughout the ages and in all places — they have a worth which will speak in a relevant and contemporary way throughout the passing of time. Such hymns do not merely pass with fads and fashions and colloquialisms. Hymns which carry the enduring truth of Law and Gospel should likewise bear the character of changelessness such as the hymn listed below written by Aurelius Prudentius Clemens who was born in AD 348 and joined to a plainsong melody from the 13th century.

Of the Father's Love Begotten

LW 36

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see.
Evermore and evermore.

Oh, that birth forever blessed,
When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe, the world's redeemer,
First revealed his sacred face
Evermore and evermore.

MUSIC

“Music is the handmaiden of theology.”

Martin Luther

The text must not only be a faithful exposition of the Holy Scriptures expressed in an eloquent manner. It must be set to a kind of music which is appropriate to impress it upon our hearts. Luther wrote:

“We have put this music on the living and holy Word of God in order to sing, praise and honor it. We want the beautiful art of music to be properly used to serve her dear Creator and his Christians. He is thereby praised and honored and we are made better and stronger in faith when his holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music. God the Father with Son and Holy Spirit grant us this. Amen.”
(*Luther’s Preface to the Burial Hymns*, AE 52:328).

And again,

Therefore, we have removed these idolatrous, dead, and nonsensical texts, have divested them of the fine music, and have used this for the living, holy Word of God, to sing, to praise, to glorify therewith, so that this fine ornament of music might be put to proper use and serve its dear Creator and His Christians, that He might be praised and glorified through His holy Word, driven into the heart with sweet song. (*WA* 35, 480)

Music as Servant of the Text

Luther once noted the combination of meaning, emphasis, and rhythm in Vergil: ‘All the notes and melodies of the music, too, must be directed to the text.’ Evangelical church music must serve the text, (*WA* 19:48-50). For Lutherans the text is always the master over the tune.

Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me

HS 857

Jesus, Thy boundless love to me
No thought can reach, no tongue declare;
Unite my thankful heart to Thee,
And reign without a rival there!
Thine wholly, Thine alone, I am;
Be Thou alone my constant flame.

In suff'ring be Thy love my peace,
In weakness be Thy love my pow'r,
And when the storms of life shall cease,
O Jesus, in that final hour,
Be Thou my rod and staff and guide
And draw me safely to Thy side.

Joining Tune to the Text

In his preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae Iucundae*, Luther wrote that “the fathers and prophets wanted nothing else to be associated as closely with the Word of God as music.” When music is joined to text, the resulting union must be fitting and appropriate to the content and weight of the text — and the combined effect is greater than the sum of its parts.

Walter E. Buszin has written,

“If theology and church music are to be in perfect agreement with each other and the one compliment the other, the text-based music of the church must share the objective and obligations of Christian theology. Notes and tunes are added to text not to weaken but to strengthen these texts as bearers and interpreters of their message. The textual and spiritual content of theology and church music must be homogeneous and fitting, not only that each may serve its purpose well but also that their fusion may actually help increase their strength and insure their effectiveness” (“Theology and Church Music as Bearers and Interpreters of the *Verbum Dei*,” *Musical Heritage of the Church*, Vol. 7, [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970] 17-18).

A Mighty Fortress

TLH 262

A mighty Fortress is our God
A trusty Shield and Weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need
That hath us now o'ertaken.
The old evil Foe
Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is,
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.

Congregational

This music should fit group singing in a natural way. That excludes songs originally composed for soloists or music that is so complex that it cannot be comfortably sung after repeated usage.

O Trinity, O Blessed Light

LW 487

O Trinity, O blessed Light
O Unity of princely might:
The fiery sun is going down;
Shed light upon us through your Son.

To you our morning song of praise,
To you our evening prayer we raise;
We praise your light in ev'ry age,
The glory of our pilgrimage.

All glory be to God above
And to the Son, the prince of love,
And to the Spirit, One in Three!
We praise you, blessed Trinity.

Churchly

The music of this sung confession will be appropriate for the sacred or the "holy" (set apart). Martin Franzmann maintained:

"The Holy Spirit speaks with accents of His own, accents characteristic of Him and distinct from the world's. This does not mean that spiritual song does not use the words of men or sing the melodies of men. It does, but with a difference, just as the language of the New Testament speaks the common language of the common man and yet is no common speech. And so the church's song must speak with accents of its own, both in music and in text." (*Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, p.93)

Thee We Adore, O Hidden Savior

HS 849

Thee we adore, O hidden Savior, Thee
Who in Thy Sacrament art pleased to be;
Both flesh and spirit in Thy presence fail,
Yet here Thy presence we devoutly hail.

In this memorial of Thy death, O Lord,
Thy body and Thy blood Thou here afford:
Oh, may our souls forever fee on Thee,
And Thou, O Christ, forever precious be.

Thou, like the pelican to feed her brood,
Pierce Thyself, giving us Thy living food;
Thy blood, O Lord, one drop has pow'r to win
Forgiveness for our world and all its sin.

Musical Integrity and Lasting Value

Hymns are likely to be included that are tried and true, having withstood tests of time. New hymns will be evaluated in light of hymns which have withstood the test of time. This stands in contrast to hymns which may be liked the first time, but with extended use do not wear well.

Christ is Made the Sure Foundation

HS 865

Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ, our head and cornerstone,
Chosen of the Lord and precious,
Binding all the Church in one;
Holy Zion's help forever
And our confidence alone.

Grant, we pray, to all Your faithful
All the gifts they ask to gain;
What they gain from You, forever
With the blessed to retain;
And hereafter in Your glory
Evermore with You to reign.

LITURGY

“Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

Ephesians 5:19

The liturgy is theology incarnate, the formal setting for the proclaiming and receiving of the Word and Sacrament. The Lutheran Confessions clearly state that the Holy Spirit works only through the means of grace. Liturgiologist Arthur Just relates: “The liturgy and hymnody of the church shapes the faith of the people more than anything else. In addition, a church’s beliefs are more accurately determined from her liturgy, hymns, preaching, and catechesis than [from her] official resolutions,” (*Structure, Culture, and Theology in Lutheran Liturgy*, a paper presented at the 1992 Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana).

Lutheran hymns are placed within the liturgy to point to what God promises and bestows to His children in the means of grace. As such, the divine service is not so much an opportunity for us to give praise to God as it is the setting in which the Lord bestows his gifts to us.

The historic liturgy retained in the Lutheran Church is comprised almost entirely of Scripture verses. The ordinaries are those portions of the liturgy which stay the same from week to week such as the invocation, the Lord’s Prayer, and the benediction. The propers are the sections which change from week to week and from season to season such as the introit, the gradual, the proper prefaces and the lectionary.

The liturgy provides the ordinary, general setting whereas the hymns, like the other propers of the service, move the congregation to focus on a particular Word of God. Hymns which portray God as working immediately in human hearts through prayer are to be distinguished from the Word purely preached and the Sacrament rightly administered. Hymns direct us to the sure works of His hands when they recount what the Lord has done for us through the living Word of God, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion which bestow peace, confidence, and hope.

The Lectionary

The lectionary is the selection of Scripture readings which weekly draw the congregation through the life and death of Christ and the life of his Church in an annual or triennial cycle, providing a framework both for preaching and for hymn choices.

Hymns which expressly reflect the lectionary fit logically in the Divine Service. They are another means by which the listeners are directed into and focused upon the Word of God appointed for that day.

Jesus Sat with His Disciples

HS 912
Matthew 5:1-12

Jesus sat with His disciples
On a mountainside one day
As the crowds of people gathered,
He began to teach and say:
“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
Heaven’s kingdom they will share.
Blessed are the sad and mourning,
Joy and comfort will be theirs.

Holy Baptism

Holy Baptism works the forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe what the words and promises of God declare. It is no mere rite of initiation no a symbolic gesture, but rather a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit.

Thus, hymns directing God’s people into the blessings and benefits of Holy Baptism are not limited for use only on those occasions when a child or adult is being baptized. They may also have a daily use, helping Christians to recall this gracious gift each day as Luther recommended in the Small Catechism:

Holy Baptism signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord

LW 223

To his disciples spoke the Lord,
“Go out to ev’ry nation,
And bring to them the living Word
And this my invitation:
Let ev’ryone abandon sin
And come in true contrition
To be baptized and thereby win
Full pardon and remission
And heav’nly bliss inherit.”

All that the mortal eye beholds
Is water as we pour it.
Before the eye of faith unfolds
The pow’r of Jesus’ merit.
For here it sees the crimson flood
To all our ills bring healing;
The wonders of his precious blood
The love of God revealing,
Assuring his own pardon.

Holy Absolution

In his Large Catechism, Luther writes, “When I urge you to go to confession, I am simply urging you to be a Christian,” (*Large Catechism*, Brief Exhortation, 32).

Hymns assist Christ’s dear people whether their sins are confessed privately or corporately. When their own words fail, hymns can give voice to their broken hearts and aggrieved consciences. Like the penitential psalms, hymns of confession and absolution empathize with the plight of the sinner in the depths of woe and draw them to the comforting and life-giving words of Christ.

The emphasis of such hymns does not rest primarily on confession, but rather upon absolution. The Lord is not moved to forgive sinners on the basis of how sorrowful and contrite they are. Rather, He is gracious to them for the sake of His Son who died for the guilt of their transgressions.

Hymns dealing with confession and absolution direct sinners to the sure and certain means by which Christ has promised to be present with His life and Spirit so that they may be comforted, know true joy, and be edified and preserved in the one true faith.

As Surely as I Live, God Said

LW 235

The words which absolution give
Are his who died that we might live;
The minister whom Christ has sent
Is but his humble instrument.

When ministers lay on their hands
Absolved by Christ the sinner stands;
He who by grace the Word believes
The purchase of His blood receives.

All praise to you, O Christ, shall be
For absolution full and free,
In which you show your richest grace;
From false indulgence guard our race.

Holy Communion

The church which in its official writings commends the celebration of the Lord's Supper every Sunday (Ap XXIV:1) must have good hymns which extol the blessings and benefits of the Lord's Supper.

These hymns prepare the hearts and minds to receive Christ's holy body and blood in a worthy manner, recalling both their great need and the loving testament and promise of Christ.

Likewise, the Lord's Supper is described not as a figurative icon but as the true sacramental presence of Christ who with the forgiveness of sins also gives life and salvation.

Such hymns serve along the same lines of Luther's *Christian Questions with Their Answers* (LW pp. 306-307), admonishing and encouraging Christians to receive the Sacrament frequently:

In respect to God, both the command and the promise of Christ the Lord should move him, and in respect to himself, the trouble that lies heavy on him, on account of which such command, encouragement, and promise are given.

Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior

TLH 311

As His pledge of love undying
He, this precious food supplying,
Gives His body with the bread
And with the wine the blood He shed.

Whoso to this Board repaireth
May take heed who he prepareth;
For if he does not believe,
Then death for life he will receive.

Praise the Father, who from heaven
Unto us such food hath given
And to mend what we have done,
Gave into death His only Son.

Liturgical Function

Some hymns will be chosen because they offer a hymnic version of liturgical elements. Hymns share a seamless and intimate connection with the liturgy — and some hymns bear that connection so closely that they appear to be liturgical in form as they recount the words and works of the Lord.

Our hymns resound with the words of God which are received through the apostles and prophets. Together with apostles, prophets, martyrs, angels, archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify his glorious name, breaking forth in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

Luther commended such liturgical singing as a very practical method of dealing with sadness:

When sadness comes to you and threatens to gain the upper hand, then say: Come, I must play our Lord Christ a song on the organ (be it the Te Deum Laudamus or the Benedictus); for Scripture teaches me that He loves to hear joyful song and stringed instruments. Strike the keys with a will, and sing out until the thoughts disappear, as David and Elisha did. (1 Sam 16:23; 2 Kgs 3:15) If the devil returns and suggests cares or sad thoughts, then defend yourself with a will and say: "Get out, devil! I must now sing and play to my Lord Christ."

We All Believe in One True God

LW 213

We all believe in one true God,
Maker of the earth and heaven.
"Our Father," he would have us say;
Children's place to us has given.
He has pledged always to feed us,
Body, soul, to keep, to nourish.
Through all evil he will lead us,
Guards us well that we may flourish.
He cares for us by day and night
And governs all things by his might.

Daily Devotional Life

The liturgy resounds throughout the week in the readings, prayers, and hymns of Christ's people who, whether they are alone or with a spouse and family, draw their life and strength from God's Word.

Earlier generations kept both a Bible and a hymnal close at hand. These texts went with them to church and to the hospital and wherever else was needed. Hymns need not always be sung audibly to be of benefit, but may also be read as one ponders and reflects upon the Word of God in daily devotions — though they are intended for singing whether a person be alone or in the company of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Luther suggests that:

After singing a hymn (possibly a Hymn on the Ten Commandments) or whatever your devotion may suggest, you should go to your work joyfully. (*Small Catechism, Morning and Evening Prayers*. Tappert, p. 352.)

Christ, Mighty Savior

HS 903

Therefore we come now evening rites to offer,
Joyfully chanting holy hymns to praise You,
With all creation joining hearts and voices,
Singing Your glory.

Give heed, we pray You, to our supplication:
That you may grant us pardon for offenses,
Strength for our weak hearts, rest for aching bodies,
Soothing the weary.

PASTORAL CARE

You will never offer up any incense
or other savor more potent against the devil
than to occupy yourself with God's commandments and words
and to speak, sing, and meditate on them.

Large Catechism, Preface, 10

Pastoral Practice

Pastors need hymns they can take to nursing homes, sick beds and death beds where they meet Christ's people in time of crisis. Throughout a pastoral practice there is a need for having someone say something in a far more eloquent and memorable way than they themselves may be able to do on the spot.

As pastors make their visits, they call to mind the hymns which have been sung weekly and annually in the congregation of Christ's flock and apply a shepherd-like comforting familiarity for individuals and families in the face of uncertain, lonely and chaotic times. The Scriptural poetry of hymns serve in this way whether they are sung or spoken.

Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me

TLH 523

Why should cross and trial grieve me?
Christ is near With His cheer
Never will He leave me.
Who can rob me of the heaven
That God's Son For my own
To my faith hath given?

Though a heavy cross I'm bearing
And my heart Feels the smart,
Shall I be despairing?
God, my Helper who doth send it,
Well doth know All my woe
And how best to end it.

Hopeful, cheerful, and undaunted
Ev'rywhere They appear
Who in Christ are planted.
Death itself cannot appal them,
They rejoice When the voice
Of their Lord doth call them.

Catechetical

Hymns are teachers. They teach the faith to the faithful in a beautiful and powerful way as they bring doctrines to everyday life. Wilhelm Loehe said in his *Three Books about the Faith* that "the true faith is not only expressed in the sermon but is also prayed in the prayers and sung in the hymns of the church. Hymnals are living books of proof and instruction." Hymns teach the faith for a lifetime as Luther himself commended in the *Large Catechism*.

Thus we have, in all, five parts covering the whole of Christian doctrine, which we should constantly teach and require young people to recite word for word. Do not assume that they will learn and retain this teaching from sermons alone. When these parts have been well learned, you may assign them also some Psalms or some hymns based on these subjects to supplement and confirm their knowledge. Thus our youth will be led into Scriptures so that they make progress daily. (*Preface, 25*)

In his preface to the translation of Luther's 1524 hymn, "These are the Holy Ten Commands," the editor relates:

We have become so accustomed to think of poetry as an expression of the personal feelings and emotions of the writer that we cannot conceive of a merely "utilitarian" use of poetry. Hymnody in our own age has been defined as "lyrical religion." We find it difficult to think of a merely didactic hymn without sentimental overtones. But Luther Proceeded from different premises. Very soberly he thought of the hymn as a means of instilling the Word of God in the people. (AE 52:277)

As the Apology to the Augsburg Confession relates: "The children chant the Psalms in order to learn; the people sing, too, in order to learn or to worship." (Tappert 220:40)

Here is the Tenfold Sure Command

LW 331

Here is the tenfold sure command God gave to men of ev'ry land
Through faithful Moses standing high On holy Mount Sinai.
Have mercy, Lord!

I am thy God and Lord alone, No other God beside me own;
Trust me, step boldly to my throne, Sincerely love me alone.
Have mercy, Lord!

HISTORIC UNIVERSALITY

St. Ambrose composed many hymns of the church. They are called church hymns because the church accepted them and sings them just as though the church had written them and as though they were the church's songs. Therefore it is not customary to say, "Thus sings Ambrose, Gregory, Prudentius, Sedulius," but "Thus sings the Christian church." For these are now the songs of the church, which Ambrose, Sedulius, etc., sing with the church and the church with them. When they die, the church survives them and keeps on singing their songs.

Carl Schalk comments on this Luther passage from "Treatise on the Last Words of David," (1543) by writing:

Here was no parochial exclusiveness, no provincial self-sufficiency, but a stand in solidarity and continuity with the church catholic. This attitude was to continue to inform the worship and musical practices of Lutheranism until the later individualistic, privatistic, and personalistic practices of both Pietism and rationalism were to invade Lutheranism and wreak havoc with both its liturgy and its music. (*Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*, p. 49).

Historical

Hymns which have served as a core of our Lutheran heritage need to be preserved, even if at first their melodies and rhythms seem anachronistic. In some respects, the singing of such hymns assist in putting to death the desires of the flesh. More importantly, however, they awaken us to the communion of saints in the way that Luther described:

When these words [the Psalter] please a man and fit his case, he becomes sure that he is in the communion of saints and that it has gone with all the saints as it goes for him, since they all sing with him one little song. (*AE* 35:256)

And again,

When I look at the saints, especially in the New Testament, the story is the same. I can hear voices of rejoicing in their tabernacles, joyous songs and hymns of salvation and victory, of the help of God. And we sing along and join in the praise and thanks, just as we are one in our faith and trust in God and also share in suffering. (*AE* 14:79)

These hymns are not included merely for their historical quality but also because they serve the church well in applying the Word of God to the needs of Christ's people. One such hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus Mentis* comes to us from the 9th century:

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest

TLH 233

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
Vouchsafe within our souls to rest;
Come with Thy grace and heav'nly aid
And fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

Drive far away our wily Foe
And Thine abiding peace bestow;
If Thou be our protecting Guide,
No evil can our steps betide.

Make Thou to us the Father known,
Teach us the eternal Son to own
And Thee, whose name we ever bless,
Of both the Spirit, to confess.

LCMS "tradition"

Certain hymns have made their way into the hearts of people through repeated use in the media, beauty of the tune, ethnic consciousness after having left the homeland transferred from one generation to another.

Children of the Heavenly Father

HS 888

Children of the heav'nly Father
Safely in His bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given.

God His own doth tend and nourish;
In His holy courts they flourish.
From all evil things He spares them;
In His mighty arms He bears them.

Ethnic catholicity/Universal particularity

The sung confession should be able to be sung by any ethnic group at any time and place, for it should rise above ethnicity, time and place. Hymnals are to avoid an ethnic tokenism which attempts to be all-inclusive by including representative texts and tunes from all ethnic groups rather than acknowledging and addressing the all-inclusive aspects of the sinful human nature which all people share such as unbelief, doubt, fear, anger, and grief — the effects of the devil, the world and our flesh from which we are redeemed in Christ.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

The singing of hymns which are held in common across ethnic and temporal lines expresses a community in a sense no less poignant than when the church orally confesses the three chief ecumenical creeds. This quality is desirable. And yet, some hymns common to all people fail to make a clear confession of the distinctive aspects of the Christian faith for fear that it will disturb an outward sense of unity. Hymns are at times a chief culprit in glossing over doctrine, blurring confessional lines.

Hymns are not included merely to satisfy individual preferences or to serve congregations which pursue their own eclectic selections apart from the Church as a whole. Rather, the ecumenical nature of hymns is most notably exemplified in the settings and texts brought together in the chorales of J. S. Bach.

Creator Spirit, Heavenly Dove

LW 156

In you, with graces sevenfold,
We God's almighty hand behold
While you with tongues of fire proclaim
To all the world his holy name.

Your light to ev'ry sense impart,
And shed your love in ev'ry heart;
Your own unfailing might supply
To strengthen our infirmity.

CONCLUSION

Martin Franzmann has written (“Theology Must Sing,” *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, CPH, 1994, pages 96-97):

The song of the church must be an unending song. The church must cherish the best, but its song should not be a mere repetition of the song in the past. Then shall we sing with grace, with all the emphasis on God and a most unsentimental subordination of ourselves. We shall sing to the Lord. With our song we shall guide one another continually to the center and fountain of the Christian’s life and thus really teach and admonish one another. We shall sing in our hearts; the whole man will sing. We shall see then realized the ideal of all Christian song: the whole man with all his powers, with all the skills and gifts that God has bestowed upon him wholly bent on giving utterance to the peace that rules within him, wholly given to the purpose of letting the Word of Christ that dwells in him richly become articulate and audible through him to the upbuilding of the church and the glory of God. Then shall our theology be doxology.”

The unending nature of the church’s song does not come from the sustained efforts of God’s people, but from the Lord Himself. As long as the devil, the world, and our flesh still plague us, we need Christ’s gracious presence and work, accomplished on the cross and bestowed through His means. The texts and melodies of hymns are at their best when they accurately and sympathetically describe our need and then direct us to the Lord’s gracious proclamation of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Where there is salvation, there is singing — and where there is salvation in Christ Jesus, even the Lord breaks out in song:

“The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His
love,

He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Zephaniah 3:17

SUMMARY

Hymns should be more readily included if they:

1. Reflect the Word of God — and in particular the lectionary — with a wise and eloquent piety.
2. Proclaim the Law in its full severity and the Gospel in its pure sweetness.
3. Emphasize the theology of the cross over and against the theology of glory.
4. Direct God's people to the special revelation in Christ as distinct from natural revelation.
5. Serve the broken-hearted and contrite spirits who deny themselves and take up the cross of Christ.
6. Move people toward the salutary use of the means of grace.
7. Treat sanctification as the work of God through His means and the Spirit rather than by the self-affirming efforts of individuals.
8. Fit well with the liturgy and the Church year.
9. Are churchly confessions and expressions in text and music, distinct from the world's.

Hymns should be more readily excluded if they:

1. Confuse Law and Gospel or give the impression of commending a mixed confession.
2. Encourage sentimentalism through maudlin imagery.
3. Emphasize personal efforts to get closer to God.
4. Describe the Christian life more in terms of power than in terms of grace.
5. Allegorize the Scriptures in order to serve a socialistic agenda.
6. Treat prayer as a means of grace.
7. Extol the priesthood of all believers in a way which marginalizes the office of the keys.
8. Treat the human heart as if it were a gift worthy of giving to God and not wholly corrupted (FC, SD, I:23).
9. Are not churchly and lasting.