

"Meditate  
upon these things;  
give thyself  
wholly to them;  
that thy profiting  
may appear unto all"

I Timothy 4:15

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**Church of the Lutheran Confession**

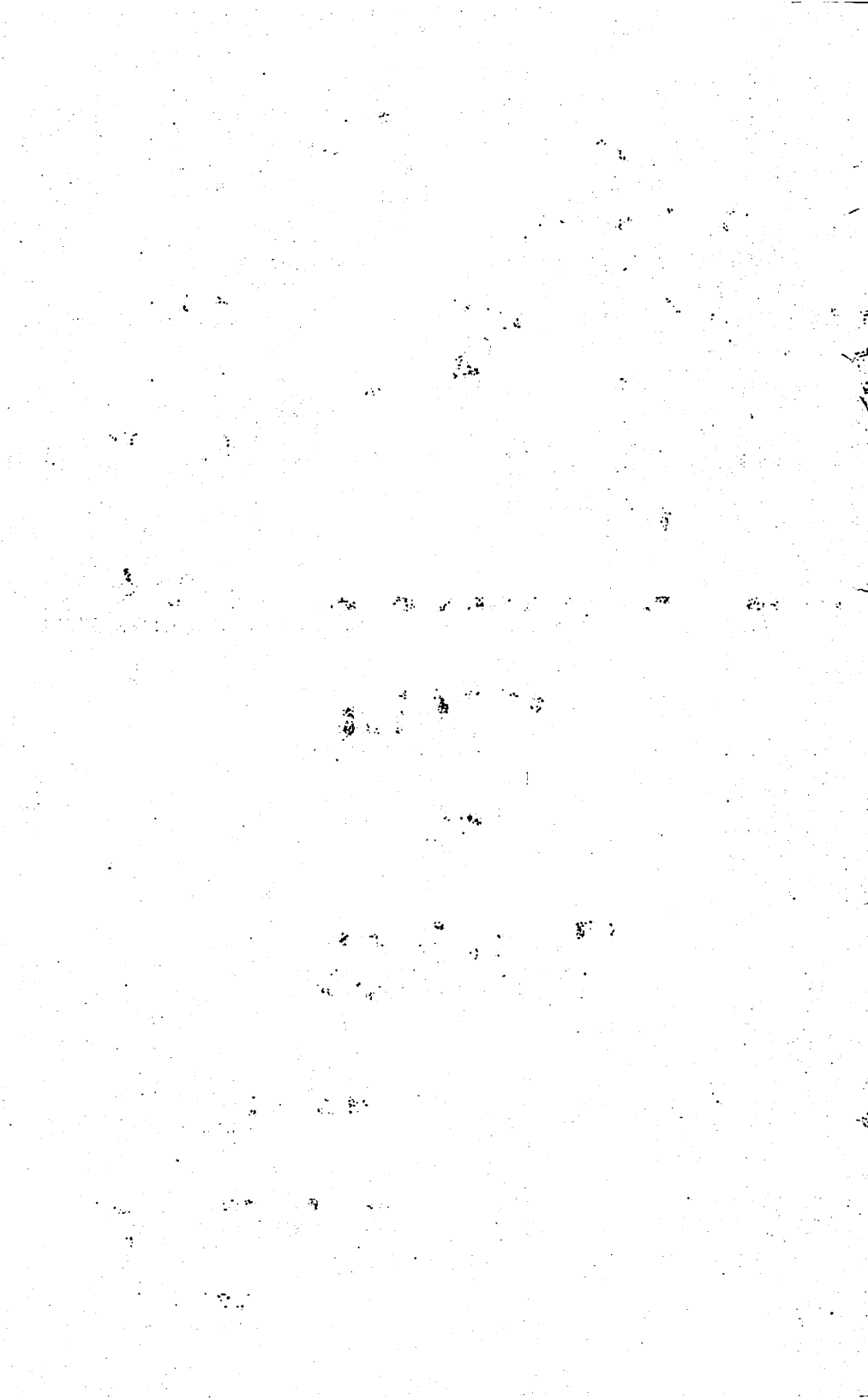
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CONTENTS

WHAT MAKES A GOOD HYMN? ..... 2  
 Robert Dommer

A NOTE TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS ..... 16  
 John Lau

HOW CAN WE HELP A RECENTLY BEREAVED  
 MEMBER OF OUR CONGREGATION? ..... 17  
 Lester Schierenbeck

APOLOGETICS, AND LAW AND GOSPEL ..... 22  
 R. E. Wehrwein

THE UNREST IN SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISM ..... 28  
 Paul G. Fleischer

BOOK REVIEWS: *Formula of Concord: A Study Guide* ..... 41  
 C. Kuehne

*The Church Musician's Enchiridion* ..... 43  
 Robert Dommer

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## WHAT MAKES A GOOD HYMN?\*

Hymn singing is enjoined in the Scriptures (Mt. 26: 30; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Acts 16:25; Heb. 2:12; the Psalms), but because hymns are human creations, not all are of equal merit. Erik Routley, a noted British hymnologist, once wrote, "Very few congregations can speak well in unison, but sing very well together." [See the Bibliography at the end of this article for references.] Hymns help a congregation speak its mind corporately. And once a hymn has entered the corpus of the church's life, it becomes a strong influence. Therefore great care must be taken in the choice of the hymns we use. Again Routley: "It would be too much to say that a congregation remembers its hymns, but nonetheless a congregation's general temper, its disposition toward right belief or away from it is subtly influenced by the habitual use of hymns. Therefore it is right to call for caution in their use and choice, because there is no single influence in public worship that can so surely condition a congregation to self-deception, to fugitive follies, to religious perversities, as thoughtlessly chosen hymns. The singing congregation is uncritical; to argue that because it is uncritical what it sings matters not is a disastrous fallacy."

**CALVIN AND LUTHER**      It was John Calvin (1509-1564), fearful of the danger of false doctrine introduced through hymns (not denying the Pauline allowance of "hymns and Psalms and spiritual songs," and not denying the Church's right to compose its own songs), who restricted hymn-singing to monody taken from the Word itself. The result was the precedent of Psalmody, that was to rule Calvin-influenced worship for 200 years — something Benson calls the "Reformed cultus." Contrast Martin Luther, who loved to sing and was fond of the German folk songs and of singing in social groups and around

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\* This essay was delivered by Prof. Robert Dommer at the CLC Teachers' Conference held at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, on October 15, 1980.

his own table. Add to this his affectionate regard for the ritual of the old church and its office hymns,\* and you can understand why he not only did not object but actually fostered the free use of hymnody as human composition to express the message of the new church. He put into the hands of a singing people suitable tunes and Lutheran song, metrically measured, indiscriminately based on Scripture, and reflecting the thoughts and feelings of the writer. Luther was keenly aware at the same time of the dangers of heresy, and it is not unlikely that he wrote hymns himself to supply a need that many pastors could not fulfill. He said about sermons: "It is best to appoint the sermon for the day to be read wholly or in part out of the book — not alone for the benefit of those preachers who can do nothing better, but also for the purpose of preventing the rise of enthusiasts and sects. For unless it is a spiritual understanding and the Holy Ghost himself that speaks through the preachers ... we shall ultimately get where everyone will preach his own ideas, and instead of the Gospel and its exposition we again shall have sermons on castles in Spain."

**TEACH DOCTRINE**      Dr. Luther wrote hymns principally to indoctrinate a superstitious and nominally Catholic populace. Thus No. 387 in the Lutheran Hymnal (Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice) is a complete Catechism teaching original sin, election, virgin birth, and mystic union. In Luther's day indoctrination was necessary so that people could take the decisive and often fearful step of forming a new congregation that would stand against the papacy. Luther's hymns, because they were so thoroughly Scriptural, not only instructed the people, but the song along with words — that vehicle that enables a congregation to speak its mind corporately — bound the people together in a common cause with a common faith and lifted their spirits to endure opposition.

**WITNESS OF FAITH**      A doctrinal position, sung boldly

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\* Hymns sung at the devotions held in the monastery (e.g., Vespers, Compline.)

by a congregation, not only serves as a united mutual expression and an encouragement to each person singing; it also serves as a powerful testimony to the world which hears the song. Routley comments in *Hymns and Human Life*: "Hymnsinging is the articulation of Christian worship ... the most insistent and clamorous of all the ways in which Christian faith and worship makes impact on the world around it." In our age of materialism, indifference, and social gospel, singing together words that count, words that really portray what we believe and the joy that lies behind our faith, is an inestimable witness to and influence on those about us. Is it not clear, then, that our witness in song can be no better than the religious values of the text we sing? There really is no legitimate room among us for hymns of dubious worth.

**CORPORATE DEVOTION** To insist that a hymn be doctrinally sound does not mean that every hymn must necessarily teach doctrine. Actually, what a hymn teaches is what a congregation wants to express in its hymnody. A hymn must express those thoughts and experiences which are meaningful to the corporate body. Sickly subjectivism or poetic emotionalism should be avoided simply because such expression tends to point us inward to ourselves and our problems rather than upward to the praise and glory of God. Augustine wrote: "A hymn is sung praise to God. If you praise God and do not sing, you utter no hymn. If you sing and praise not God, you utter no hymn. If you praise anything which does not pertain to the praise of God, though in singing you praise, you utter no hymn."

**UNSCRIPTURAL IMAGES** A good hymn must not insert ideas contrary to Scripture or use allusions that are not Scriptural. Particular offenders in this area are hymns based on Christian experience not soundly in line with Scripture. (Cf. *It Came upon a Midnight Clear*: peace = earthly peace; age of gold will come with ever-circling years.) Think of Christmas hymns and carols that speak of snow or world brotherhood, describing the season as one of hospitality, child adoration, good will, i.e., getting, spending, eating, drinking. Contrast those excellent hymns that might best supplant many popular carols, study hymns that imply or

speaking of the Christ-child removing a curse, of judgment as well as of mercy. The earliest Christian hymns were preoccupied with the incarnation and the Trinity. We might mention hymns also that are addressed only to the new man. Certainly it is a joy to know our blessed estate as new creatures — it is comforting and encouraging. And finally as a test-stone of the worth of our Lutheran hymnody one must ask, "Is it truly Lutheran?" Is it a hymn that clearly espouses and in no way vitiates the unconditional Gospel? While a hymn first and foremost dare contain no obvious false doctrine, its spirit or emphasis may easily be more Reformed than Lutheran (and it is well to be cautious of Lutheran hymns translated by Reformed poets). When it is noted that only a handful of our English language hymns were penned by Lutherans of any kind, one can see the need for carefully studying the text to see that it reflects the true spirit of the Gospel.

**EXPRESS EXPERIENCE**      What a hymn expresses is what a people of a particular time want to say. Whereas in Luther's day there was a desperate need for indoctrination, in the early church the need was perhaps more for the expression of their experience. It was a hazardous thing to be a Christian in the time of the persecutions. When you bid your fellow Christian "Good night," at the end of a prayer-meeting in the catacombs, you had little assurance that you would be alive to see the light of the next day. These people used song to bid the Lord to be present with them in their very precarious situation, and with their worship hymns their vision was directed outside of themselves to the glorious Lord who cared for them. Their hymns served to unite their Christian community in a common faith with a common confession. Exactly because their vision was not introspective but constantly focused on their Savior as their Light and Life, their hymnody possessed an objectivity that has never been equalled, and has proved a real source of strength and courage, not only to those huddled in the catacombs but to believers of all ages.

**PRAISE**      Of course, we must not neglect that corpus of hymnody in which a congregation neither specifically wishes to sing of its doctrine or of its personal

experience, but simply of the joy of its faith — those hymns which are pure paeans of joy to the Lord. These hymns are expressions of simple praise and thanks, the chief witness of which is the joy of being a true child of God. This is not a giddy or superficial joy which can rejoice only in selfish prosperity, but a deep and enduring joy inspired by the faith of thankful hearts, one that can rejoice in every situation of life. This inner joy of Christian life expressed in song is a powerful witness to the world about us, which often imagines Christianity as a drab and restrictive experience governed by Puritanical regulation.

**PERSONAL DEVOTION**      There are many hymns in our hymnal that do not fall into any of the categories above. These hymns (which include many of our so-called "cross and comfort" hymns) are properly called personal devotion hymns. These are hymns that were never intended to be sung in a corporate service, but were penned as a comfort and encouragement to the individual Christian to be used in his personal moments of meditation, perhaps at his bed-side or at the table. These hymns are very subjective in character, expressing the deep inner feelings of a child of God in a variety of life situations. The need for such hymns is obvious, but they ought to be used with great discretion. Many times it might be best to restrict such use to the Christian personal altar, lest a congregation be asked to sing what it is not prepared to say at a given moment. A hymn must meet the spirit and needs of a particular congregation. What it does for one generation it may not do for another. Routley correctly summarized the quality of good hymnody when he wrote: "... the strength of our hymns is in its power for converting unbelief, strengthening the faith and binding together the Christian community."

**SIMPLICITY**      We know, however, that not every set of words, Scripturally correct and set to music, will accomplish what a good hymn does. There is that magic, that gift to combine depth of understanding, choice of words, form, and tune in such a way that the resultant creation says just what the congregation feels, that it goes directly to the heart and elicits an "Amen."



And once a hymn "catches on," it becomes as much a part of the congregation's speech and worship as the liturgy, and may rank next to the Bible itself. When we analyze hymns of really great writers, we note that the chief quality of their hymns is clear thinking, straight speaking, and simplicity of form. A good hymn requires that the thought be expressed in such a way that the obvious meaning can be grasped in the length of time it takes to sing the verse (line). Hymnody has this unique limitation: its thought not only must be grasped as quickly as it is sung, but it must be simple enough for the whole group to appreciate, and not only those who have some skill in literature. It would be folly to make a degree in English or the ability to scan and appreciate poetry or music a prerequisite for participation in a congregation's worship service. The congregation must know at once what is being sung, to take it to heart, to make it its own. Because hymnody must be simple does not mean that it must be dull or trite. Although the meaning of the words of a good hymn should be clear enough to be grasped at once, that same meaning should be deep enough to merit many moments of meditation. (Consider the verse: A Mighty Fortress is Our God — clear, direct, Scriptural, easily grasped, and yet deep enough to write a sermon about it.)

**CONVENTIONALITIES** Certain conventionalities are essential in order to facilitate immediate apprehension of the thoughts of a hymn. It has been found that a hymn is remembered more easily if it rhymes than if it does not; if it has a definite pulse or meter than if it has complex metrical exchanges; if it has short verses rather than long and drawn-out lines; if it uses direct, simple language rather than ornate and beautifully polished phrases. Psychologically, a congregation can grasp thoughts more easily if they are not carried over the end of a line, if each line or pair of lines (Cf. Heroic Couplet) treats a single idea. Breaking one thought in the middle of a line and starting another (enjambment) makes comprehension more difficult. An analysis of the great hymns of every age reveals a deliberate, if not conscious, straight-forwardness in the language itself — few adjectives, mostly verbs and nouns, the use of basic monosyllabic words rather than foreign or poly-

syllabic abstractions, and the frequent use of alliteration to drive a thought home.

**UNITY** Finally, great hymns are not haphazard in their expression of thought, but express a unity in each stanza and an apparent symmetry in the structure of the whole hymn. The most popular hymnist represented in the hymnal, Isaac Watts, is notable for the organic unity of his stanzas. He favored a strong opening line and displayed remarkable progression of thought toward a climax, and all of this in short verses and stanzas. A good share of his hymns are written in the Old English Ballad Meter, the "Iambic Fourteener" (Common Meter — 4 lines of 8686).

**TRANSLATIONS** A matter well worth our consideration in judging the hymns of our hymnal is the matter of translation. It is a fact that over half of our hymns are translations from German and Norwegian sources. This poses a problem! The very qualities of a hymn that make for its unique straight-forwardness and power, the use of alliteration, the preference of verbs and nouns over adjectives, the use of monosyllabic root-words of a language, these very things are often lost in translation. One hymnologist put it very well when he stated: "Experience has shown translations make for less impact on the singer's imagination than do original hymns." Catherine Winkworth, the most popular translator of hymns in the hymnal, is responsible for over 70 translations. Although her translations are excellent, they make Luther and others whom she translated sound as though they emanated from 19th Century Victorian England. A translation is, after all, a work of art in itself, perhaps more the expression of the translator than of the original writer. Even when the theology of the original writer hopefully remains unchanged, the literary force and power is often lost, good or bad as that may be. (Cf. the opening couplet of *Ein feste Burg* with its powerful alliteration that is nowhere reproduced in English translation.) Or consider the strong and rugged German of Luther that has been cast into the polished English of the mid-19th Century.

**POOR HYMNODY** As an example of a hymn that breaks every

rule except sincerity, Routley quotes from the 1920 National Temperance Hymnal the following:

What gives the breath an awful smell  
And hinders one from feeling well?  
A single word the tale will tell —  
TOBACCO.

Refrain:

Tobacco's a curse in the land  
I pledge you, my friend,  
I'll never defend  
That villainous weed, TOBACCO.

What keeps one spitting all the day  
On fence and wall, till people say  
"I guess he'll spit his life away — TOBACCO.

I often ask the doctor why  
So much of suffering have I;  
In one short word he makes reply — TOBACCO.

No more will I my health abuse  
Nor chew this weed, nor spit its juice,  
I'll give my pledge to never use — TOBACCO.

I tell you, friends, I will be free,  
No more a slave to habit be  
And in my mouth no one shall see — TOBACCO.

EXCELLENT HYMNODY      As examples of magnificent hymnody  
we have chosen impressive stanzas  
from selected hymns of the hymnal.

Time like an ever rolling stream      WATTS  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly forgotten as a dream  
Dies at the opening day.

Frail children of dust      GRANT  
And feeble as frail  
In Thee do we trust  
Nor find Thee to fail.  
Thy mercies, how tender,  
How firm to the end,

Our Maker, Defender,  
Redeemer and Friend.

The cross he bore is life and health      KELLY  
    Though shame and death to him;  
His people's hope, his people's wealth  
    Their everlasting theme!

Thou sacred Love, grace on us bestow;      LUTHER  
Set our hearts with heavenly fire aglow  
That with hearts united, we love each other,  
Of one mind, in peace with every brother.  
    KYRIELEIS!

CHILDREN'S HYMNS      The most strategic place to teach the love of hymns and hymn-singing is in our Christian Day Schools and Sunday schools. The moments we spend in preparing our young people for participation in our worship services are indeed rewarding both to the children as participants as well as to the congregation with whom they participate. One hymnologist comments: "Worship, in spite of what it may have become in some times and places, is not and never can be a spectator sport. All have tongues to sing and actions to perform ..." If children are to learn to participate, they need to share the adult experience as soon as they are old enough to understand the church's hymns. We must be careful, of course, that we do not expect children to sing what they do not know from experience. Children sing from understanding and not from experience. How could we expect a child to lustily join in singing, "Lord Jesus, think on me with many a care oppressed" or "Lord Jesus, think on me amid the battle strife; in all my pain and misery be Thou my Health and Life"? If we put words into the mouths of our children that are beyond their experience, should we be surprised that their singing is less than whole-hearted? There is as little justification for subjective, personal-devotion type hymns in adults' corporate worship as in children's. The qualifications for good children's hymns are much the same as for adults - simple, easily understood, and clearly expressed poetry that is Scriptural. This is not to say there is no room for such songs as "Jesus loves me" in the early primary department, but from the primary de-

partment on, hymns of good quality can be introduced. It is a fallacy that children should be taught jingles, when these are the same children that Sunday after Sunday sit through the worship service and already are familiar with many of the tunes sung by their elders. Too often children's intelligence is underestimated. Of course, words and phrases must be explained, the imagery must be discussed, the theology made clear — that is what a hymnology class is all about. "There is no reason," says Haeussler, "why children's hymnals should be trivial and devoid of literary merit. As far as the tunes are concerned, they can be vigorous for some texts, but should have none of the 'um-pahs' of the German waltzes." As our children grow older, the regular hymnal ought to be the principal, if not the only, source of carefully chosen hymns for their edification and study.

**MEMORIZING**      Should children memorize hymns? Much has been written and said about the relative worthlessness of thoughtless memorizing. Memorizing is hard work and requires time and energy and cannot always be made fun and games. Nevertheless, the careful and thoughtful memorizing of the great Lutheran hymns will provide our young people with a heritage that will go with them throughout their lives, and will make their participation in the worship service more spontaneous and meaningful. One noted elementary educator suggested that children do not really like a song until they have sung it at least 40 times. This is certainly an encouragement to us not to weary of teaching well a small repertory of good hymns.

**PARTICIPATION**      In an effort to show our young people that we care about them and want them to be a part of our worship, we invite them to serve as a choir in our services. But heaven forbid that we think of them as being on exhibit in church or consider their participation in the realm of entertainment. More important than a beautiful tone or blend of tone is a whole-hearted and willing spirit. More often than not, a unisonal hymn sung well is more impressive than a 2 or 3 part anthem that has become a show piece.

**LUTHER AND CHILDREN**      One of the greatest writers of

children's hymns was Dr. Martin Luther. It was his philosophy that if we are going to teach children, we must become as children. His greatest children's hymns, however, are so objectively reassuring and so well written that they have become favorites for adults as well. Consider that great hymn, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come." This was first written by Dr. Luther for use by his own family on Christmas Eve and was wedded to a common playground tune that he later changed when congregations appropriated the hymn for use in the service. Or consider another hymn, prefaced: "A Children's Song Against the Two Archenemies of Christ and His Church," now known to us as "Lord, Keep us Steadfast in Thy Word." The sentiment of neither of these hymns could be considered sickly, trite, or sentimental. What Luther wrote for children has all the marks of good hymnody and is applicable to people of all ages. This is also true of Isaac Watts. Consider this famous children's hymn of his:

I sing the almighty power of God  
That made the mountains rise,  
That spread the flowing seas abroad  
And built the lofty skies.

His hand is my perpetual guard;  
He keeps me with his eye;  
Why should I then forget the Lord  
Who is forever nigh?

**MUSIC OF OUR HYMNS** Early in the 20th Century church musicians like Davison and Ethrington pontificated with absolute certainty the type of melody, rhythm and harmony that was appropriate for our hymns. Yet, strangely enough, many of our finest hymn tunes broke many of the "rules," and many of those that did not were intolerably dull! From the outset we ought to note that music intrinsically is morally neither bad nor good. A B $\flat$  is no less moral than a B $\sharp$ . Moreover, music is so interwoven with culture and style that what we might find disturbing in our worship an African native might find edifying in his. Yet there are certain basic principles that are as valid for tunes as they are for words, regardless of culture.

**RANGE AND IDIOM** A hymn must be sung and therefore it must be singable. It must be in the range and idiom of the people. If the melody goes so high and so low that the whole congregation cannot sing it, then it has failed. If the interval relationship is such that only a trained musician could sing it, then it is not fit for worship. A degree in music is no more a requirement for worship participation than a degree in English. Some of our hymns are written in scales or modes that were in vogue among the people 450 years ago, but which few people can identify with today. Such tunes, worthy and substantial as they may be, often discourage the singing of the otherwise worthy words because they are no longer in the idiom of the people. Dr. Luther (who is the father of the chorale and who was instrumental in taking singing from the choir and the clergy and restoring it to the congregation) recognized that hymnody must be in the people's vocal range and idiom and so he made much use of folk tunes, borrowing melodies that people had been singing at home, at work, and at the office-services of the church. (These were tunes that the people themselves had originated. Of course, every tune has a composer, but these are tunes that "caught on," that people took for their own. As a result the composer was not only forgotten, but the people, through frequent use, often made changes in the tune that made the original more to their liking.) It is this kind of folk material that Luther considered a fine vehicle for his words, and it is one factor that accounts for the popularity of early Lutheran hymnody.

**IDIOM CHANGED** While the matter of an easy range is still an important factor for hymn tunes today, the idiom of the people has changed. The minor-sounding church modes of the 16th Century or the operatic tunes of the late 19th Century have become foreign sounds to many church goers today. Care must be exercised in avoiding tunes with which a congregation is hopelessly out of touch. This may mean substituting tunes or even reading a worthy text in place of singing it. In some cases it is possible to educate a congregation to appreciate a tune that is worthy but unfamiliar. We surely do not want to discount the magnificent tunes of every age that by their freshness and sturdiness and intrinsic

rightness have become part of our great heritage.

**SCRIPTURAL TUNES** A requirement just as important as the singableness of a tune is the fact that it must be Scriptural. Yes, a tune must be Scriptural in the sense that it allows the Scripture, the Word, to speak. If the text of the hymn is doctrinally sound and if it speaks the mind and heart of the congregation, but yet is obscured by the music, then the hymn is better not sung. Augustine, who gave us our definition of a hymn, "sung praise to God," has this to add: "Nevertheless, when it happens that I am more moved by the song than the thing which is sung, I confess that I sin in a manner deserving of punishment." A hymn tune can err as much by being dull and commonplace as it can by being too passionate or sentimental, by drawing attention to itself rather than the Word that is being sung. This is true not only of hymn tunes, but of the total role of music in a divine service. It is not uncommon that we choose a hymn for its tune rather than its text, or find that because of a strong tune, we actually may not know the words we have sung. We ought to ask ourselves, "Does the tune fit the text?" If the text says, "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice," does the tune say that? If the text says, "Abide, O Dearest Jesus," does the tune say that? If the text says, "Wake, awake, for Night is Flying," does the tune say that? Few of our hymn writers were able to write both words and tune. Isaac Watts, who was no musician, borrowed the shortest and commonest tunes that people were singing as vehicles for his hymns. Paul Gerhardt had virtually his own tune-writer in Johann Crueger. There is that handful of giants, who were poets and musicians alike, men like Martin Luther, Philip Nicolai, and Nikolaus Herrmann, men who have given us a treasury of hymns that were deliberately designed to incorporate a meaningful blend of words and music.

**ASSOCIATION** Some types of music are not fitting in our services. This is not so much because of the tune or its instrumentation as because of association. In the early Christian church it happened that many of the same tunes were being used in the worship service as had been used at the Christian-burning-exercises in the



amphitheater. Christians objected to these tunes because of their secular connotation. As a result, all instruments were removed from the worship, and eventually singing was taken from the people and given to the clergy and choirs. It was not until Luther's day that congregational singing was once more introduced into the regular worship. While it is true that Luther made use of folk tunes for his hymns, it is also true that there was not the dramatic difference at that time between secular and sacred song. The principal difference was in the written text. In our day there is a striking difference between popular song and church hymns. Some have sought to introduce folk or rock or polka tunes into the worship in an effort to identify with the young people and the music that is heard constantly on the radio and TV. It is the opinion of this writer, however, that such attempts may do more to drive the faithful away than to keep the young with the church. If it is only the type of music that repels or attracts, our service is resting on shaky ground indeed.

**SUMMARY**      What makes a good tune? It is a tune that fits the words, but does not obscure them, a tune with an easy range and a singable melody and a rhythm that matches what is being said, all in the idiom of the people singing. And what is a good hymn? It is a text wedded to a good tune, Scriptural in content, having a meaning simple enough to be grasped at first singing and profound enough to merit repeated study and all of this skillfully combined into a single organic unity.

*Robert Dommer*

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#### A NOTE TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

Beginning with the next issue (March, 1981), there will be an improvement, we trust, in the circulation of the JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY. We will be using computerized records of our subscribers' names, addresses, and dates of expiration. Names and addresses used in mailing the quarterly issues will be computer prepared. A new service that this will provide for the subscriber is that the date of expiration will always appear on each issue together with the name and address.

Mr. Benno Sydow has agreed to serve as our Circulation Manager. In the future, therefore, you are asked to correspond with him concerning subscription matters, such as address changes. His address, to be shown on the masthead from now on, is: 2750 Oxford Street North, Roseville, MN 55113.

The JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY will continue to be prepared, edited, published, and mailed at Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

*John Lau, Managing Editor*

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## HOW CAN WE HELP A RECENTLY BEREAVED MEMBER OF OUR CONGREGATION?\*

The Christian faith makes a festal triumph out of the world's greatest tragedy — death. To the Lord's own belongs the victory cry: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," (I Cor. 15: 54-57). This victory we celebrate at the death of a confessing believer, who with Paul is given the grace to confess to God and before men, "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing," (II Tim. 4:6-8). In the fellowship of our faith we share the privilege of awaiting death with the expectation of the certain hope of triumph in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, our Savior.

But this shared victory over death in Jesus does not mean that there is no hurt or pain connected with the death of a child of God. Like Jesus, who wept at the tomb of Lazarus, every death is a reminder of man's sinfulness, which exacts its toll upon the bodies of all the sons of Adam. But this conviction of sin and judgment is quickly stilled by Jesus, whom we know and praise as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. But there is another factor that cannot be overlooked. The Old Adam, our inherited sinful nature, is still attached to the newborn, converted child of God. This instrument of Satan robs the child of God of the perfect trust and

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confidence in God and in His Word, and thus from a perfect enjoyment of the triumph of the Christian death. In times of trial and testing, especially in the death of a loved one, every weakness of faith may be magnified. Finally, the strongest faith will not completely dispel the depression brought on by natural human feelings, evidenced by the emptiness of loss and the ache of loneliness.

The merciful God knows and cares about the bereaved believer and has provided for his help and comfort. For this reason also, among others, he has set the solitary in the family of believers. Among such He reveals himself as "the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ," (II Cor. 1:3-5).

As those who are called by God as servants to the Flock of God, we ought to count it among our most pleasant duties to comfort with the Word those who experience the pain and loss of bereavement. Keeping in mind the privilege and responsibility of our calling, let us apply ourselves to the assigned topic: "How can we help a recently bereaved member of our congregation?"

How can we help a recently bereaved member of our congregation who has lost a loved one who shared with us the faith and confession of Christ as the world's Redeemer? Here the ministry of comfort should be most pleasant indeed. The foundation for the comfort of the moment has already been laid in the preaching and teaching of the Word of grace and power. Yet that fact should not lead us to presume that our comfort to the bereaved is not needed. It is an advantage if a pastor can be present at the moment of death. In the presence of death itself it is most helpful to have at hand in your memory a number of verses of comfort from the Bible (e.g., Job 19:25; John 11:25; Rev. 14:13; etc.), to be ready with a brief prayer, and to speak friendly words of reassurance. But this important phase of comforting should be kept as brief as possible, and the pastor ought to assist the family in leaving the presence of the dead body as quickly as possible. Where it is not possible to be present

at the moment of death, it is surely reasonable to expect that a pastor will come to the bereaved as soon as it is possible for him to do so, basically following the same method of comforting as is given when present at the moment of death.

How long one remains with the bereaved at the first contact after death has taken place will be determined by the needs and circumstances. A pastor can stay too long or not long enough. Experience ought to help us develop the art of avoiding both extremes. But there are circumstances that will direct us in making the proper decision. Some guiding factors will be the nature of the death (sudden or lingering), the measure of faith and understanding (mature or immature), the measure of support from family and friends (strong and present or weak or nonexistent), to list but a few. In the days between the death and the funeral some cases may require particular attention as the bereaved seek to cope with their pain and loss; others may require no more than contacts that develop as details of the funeral are being attended to.

The high point of our opportunity to serve comes in connection with the funeral service. The sermon ought to merit careful work and attention as we bring the Word of comfort to bear in relation to the individual circumstances and needs of the bereaved. Thank God, a change in funeral customs within the past 50 years has improved the climate for presenting the healing Word of grace and life instead of an atmosphere that encouraged grief and made the dust of the body the primary focus of attention. Perhaps within the lifetime of the younger pastors the day may come when they will celebrate further improvements, such as beginning with the committal service and then coming to God's house to hear His Words of comfort and life to all who mourn.

But even within the structure of our present funeral customs there are things a pastor can do to make our funeral service more effective. Whenever possible, hymns should be used rather than a choir or soloist. The bereaved should be encouraged in advance of the service to join in the singing of the hymns. There is a definite therapeutic antidote for grief in congregational singing.

But that benefit can be canceled out with a poor selection of hymns (e.g., "Nearer, My God, to Thee," "Be Still, my Soul," and even a solid hymn such as "What God Ordains is Always Good," if played at a sole and mournful pace). The choice of hymns should always reflect the joy and triumph of the death of the righteous, to soothe and to heal instead of stirring up the emotion of grief.

But even if we have been faithful to our calling up to this point, our shepherding is not finished with the committal service and the funeral meal. Often the full realization of a loved one's loss does not impact itself with full force until several weeks after the death. Up to this time the bereaved has experienced the comforting attention of family and friends. Also, there have been duties and responsibilities that have demanded attention and occupied time. All this may come to an end abruptly. It is most important that as pastors we recognize that the funeral service does not constitute the end of our concerns for the bereaved. A call of comfort several weeks after the funeral ought to be a routine part of our work. That call will also give us an insight as to the extent that further help may be needed.

But the need for comfort in the loss of a loved one will include not only help when both the deceased and the bereaved are members of our confessional fellowship. These are surely the easiest situations in which we serve. Two other possibilities come to mind, similar, but not alike. The deceased may be a member of a heterodox Christian congregation, or not even a professing Christian. In both cases we ought to be alert to the need for help, even though in the time before the funeral our contacts will be limited by the fact that we are not conducting the funeral service.

When we comfort a bereaved member whose deceased loved one was a member of a heterodox Christian church, a mixture of Christian tact and firmness is required of us. This is especially true when death is unexpected or violent. At such a time grief clouds and impairs good judgment. The bereaved may seek from us that absolute assurance that the loved one is with Jesus in heaven. At such a time we are in danger of saying too much or too

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little. While we cannot speak with the same assurance as we speak in the death of one within our fellowship of faith, there is nothing wrong in expressing the wish that the departed did die in the true and saving faith. On the other hand, we must guard against leaving the impression, spoken or unspoken, that such a prospect is nonexistent. We ought to pray always that in all our pastoral services we be led by the Holy Spirit to develop that art of the Spirit of not saying more than can be truthfully said, nor saying less than ought to be charitably said.

In the situation when the deceased dies in open rejection of Christ and His Word, we again face a different situation — the most difficult of all. There can be no comfort that can be expressed, not even a pious desire that the deceased was delivered from sin and death. In a case like this our only help will be to remind the bereaved that their God is a kind, loving Father, who "like as a father pitieth his children, so ... pitieth them that fear him," (Ps. 103:13). As children of such a heavenly Father, "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," (Rom. 8:28). We are also afforded an opportunity in which God reminds us to ask Him to "so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," (Ps. 90:12).

For us who are privileged to serve as the minister of God to our members in their grief and loss it is necessary that we are filled with the knowledge of the love of God and with a deep concern and love for our fellow believer. Where these two ingredients are present, God will grant us the grace to help the bereaved members of our congregations to the glory of our God and to the loving service of those entrusted to our spiritual care.

*Lester Schierenbeck*

## APOLOGETICS, AND LAW AND GOSPEL

Can the Lutheran church of orthodox confession properly engage in the practice of Christian apologetics? Were someone to take up the subject merely for the sake of the intellectual stimulation of exploring a remarkably rich and wide-reaching field of study, or with the desire to exercise himself in an interesting point relating to theology, he would already be self-condemned in even mentioning the subject. Leaving aside for the moment consideration of the Roman Catholic Church, it is noteworthy that apologetics has engaged primarily scholars of the Reformed persuasion. This is enough to suggest a question: does preoccupation with apologetics possibly go hand-in-hand with too great a reliance upon human reason? Special care needs to be exercised in approaching this subject, lest we be unwittingly drawn away from the spirit and resolve expressed by Paul in I Cor. 2:2: "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

One need not range far at all in his theological reading today to become exposed to apologetical issues. Cornelius van Til, professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary until his recent retirement, is very much in the center of current discussions, particularly on the theoretical level. His work, proceeding in directions indicated by Abraham Kuyper, marks a distinct departure from traditional principles and methodology in this field, and may, without fear of contradiction, be termed revolutionary. On a somewhat more popular level, there is the work of Francis Schaeffer, whose many books have received such widespread distribution. He has a well-deserved reputation as a skilled apologist for the Christian faith. The abundance of material in *Christianity Today* is further illustration of how much attention the subject has been receiving of late. Gordon Clark and E. J. Carnell are but two of the more prominent names.

Nor is it difficult to document a rising interest also in Lutheran circles. Here the influence of John Warwick Montgomery has been quite remarkable. This pro-



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lific Lutheran scholar and vigorous historian and apologist has had lengthy articles published in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* and *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. Even *Christian News* has had many items, both long and short, dealing with apologetics. A book review of *The Justification of Knowledge*, by Robert L. Reymond, concluded with the following statements: "Courses in apologetics should be offered at our seminaries. This is a good book for seminarians to wrestle with."\* Lengthy articles by Raymond F. Surburg entitled, "Need We Apologize for Apologetics and Polemics?", appeared in the March 26 and April 9, 1979, issues of the same periodical. There the two-fold emphasis is on history and on the current situation in the Missouri Synod. But James D. Bales narrows the field in his "Preaching on Christian Evidences," which appeared in the Dec. 4, 1978, issue of *Christian News* (p. 6). There he makes a plea for which it would be hard to find parallels in Lutheran literature outside the writings of Montgomery. The plea is urgent:

We need more brethren who make themselves thoroughly at home in various fields of Christian Evidences. We also need more who survey the entire field. These brethren need to write books, monographs, and articles which present to us the fruit of their research, meditation, and reasoning. I have been interested in the subject from my teens, as there were those who tried to overthrow my faith at an early age. While in college I wrote a number of prominent preachers urging them to write more on the subject. During my graduate studies in three different universities I spent more time on Christian Evidences than I did on many of my courses. I feel that I have at least touched the hem of the

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\* *Christian News*, Dec. 19, 1977, p. 18. The reviewer quotes the author's definition of apologetics: "Christian apologetics is the discipline wherein an intelligent effort is made to defend before an unbelieving world the truth claim of the Christian faith, specifically its claim of exclusive true knowledge of the living and true God, in a manner consistent with the teaching of Scripture."

garment, but there are so many things that invite and urge me to do more studying in this field.

That may well be an overstatement. But there is certainly no harm in asking: Does the Bible have anything to say about apologetics? Does it approve or disapprove of the use of evidence and arguments from human reason to support the faith? Does it approve of certain arguments and disapprove of others? What general directions does it indicate in this whole area?

We obtain an interesting result when we collect the Scriptural data that comes most readily to mind. On the one hand, we have the following items:

God said to Israel: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians . . .," (Ex. 19:4).

God granted Gideon signs when he asked for them (Judges 6:36-40).

God entered into an actual contest with the prophets of Baal, where the outcome, by intention, was certainly empirically verifiable (I Kings 18).

God specifically challenged the heathen idols to prove themselves through their works if they could, asserting that they were nothing, and pointed to a prediction of His own to demonstrate His right to expect reverence and worship (Isaiah 41:20-29). The whole area of fulfilled prophecy is before us.

Jesus points to various proofs of His divinity (John 5).

Jesus heals a sick man in order to prove that He has the power to forgive sins (Mt. 9:1-8). "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."

The angel pointed to the sense evidence in the tomb: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay," (Mt. 28:6).

When Thomas insisted on seeing the empirical evidence, Jesus assented. "Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing," (John 20:27).

Jesus made numerous appearances after His resurrection. "To whom also he showed himself alive after his

passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," (Acts 1:3).

The apostles called themselves witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. "And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses," (Acts 3:15).

Paul solemnly lists the impressive proofs of the resurrection (I Cor. 15:5-8).

Paul adopted an approach to meet the situation facing him in Athens (Acts 17:22ff.).

The public accessibility and verifiability of the events lying at the basis of Christianity were stressed by Paul to King Agrippa when he said: "For this thing was not done in a corner," (Acts 26:26).

To conclude this list, which could well be lengthened, we quote Hebrews 2:4: "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will."

On the other hand, we have the following items:

Jesus rebukes the generation of Jews for seeking after a sign. On more than one occasion He refuses to give any sign except the sign of the prophet Jonah (Mt. 12:38ff., 16:1-4).

In the very powerful parable of Lazarus and the rich man, even the dramatic sign of having someone come back from the dead is rejected, and all power for producing spiritual results is ascribed only to the Word (Luke 16:19-31).

Other passages similarly teach that it is the Word which converts. "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls," (James 1:21). "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever," (I Peter 1:23).

Many passages also teach that man's entire spiritual and intellectual being is engulfed in darkness, and that it persistently resists the things of the Spirit of God. "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart," (Eph. 4:18). Cf. also I Cor. 2:14; Rom. 1:18ff.; Rom. 8:7; Mt.

13:14-15; etc.

Jesus Himself said: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," (John 20:29).

Paul wrote: "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," (I Cor. 2:4-5).

One's first impression is that the items in these two lists are quite out of harmony with each other. In passing, we might note that the presuppositionalists, such as van Til, stress particularly the items in the second list in formulating their approach in apologetics, whereas the items in the first list are stressed by men such as Montgomery, who are more in line with traditional apologetics as we know it.

We submit that the apparently conflicting data can be properly understood by viewing them in the light of the division of Holy Scripture into its two chief, all-embracing doctrines: Law and Gospel.

The Law unrelentingly teaches us our total helplessness and unworthiness in every area and sphere of thought and action. That man's mind and heart are totally darkened, completely unreceptive to, yea, actively hostile against the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the things of the Spirit of God; that his entire spiritual nature can only hate and reject the truths of God; that his reasoning powers have also been adversely affected by sin; that because of the sinful attitudes at the root of his thinking, no evidence, however clear, is sufficient to bring him to the truth; that, further, we deserve no evidence whatsoever to substantiate the Word of God, any more than we deserve any of His blessings; that we have no right to demand or even request any particular kind or amount of evidence; that even when evidence is given, man misuses it to feed his pride and to set himself up as a judge — are not these all truths of the Law, which thoroughly condemns us?

On the other hand, the many-faceted diamond of the Gospel presents to us these remarkable aspects, that it

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is completely rooted in the firmest and most unassailable of evidence; that it is open to the most critical scrutiny and will come out with flying colors; that whenever any signs or evidence are needed, they can be supplied in abundance; that it may be subjected to the most hostile assaults and shall not so much as suffer a stain; that it is a proclamation of the loving condescension of God in accommodating Himself to our human senses; that everything which is true ultimately supports it; and that, therefore, even in the realm of humbly seeking some sort of apologetical support in one area or another, those who fit the scriptural description of a "bruised reed" or "smoking flax" need not be brutally turned away and left helpless (Cf. Mt. 11:1-6).

Depending upon the situation, a Law truth or a Gospel truth is applied. Peremptory demands for evidence proceed from pride; hence Law, not Gospel, is the proper medicine. Who are we to demand anything of God? Shall we put our implied stamp of approval, through a favorable answer, upon man's rebellious pride, when that is precisely what keeps him from the Gospel and eternal salvation? But shall we withhold anything in ministering to the one who is "poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word"? Must we feel obliged to shy away from the evidence, when the evidence is there, as part of the Gospel's overwhelming truthfulness? Thus: the one makes demands of God and walks away empty. He does not pursue the substance, and is deprived also of the lesser goods. The other gratefully receives what he is given, and is always amazed to find much more than he could dare to expect or hope for. He also gets the frosting on the cake. Observe the combination of Law and Gospel in Jesus' dealing with Thomas.

There is nothing in itself right or wrong with the use of evidences. True, man's rejection is there. But that does not exclude the use of evidences, any more than it excludes the use of the Gospel. As little as they are to be carelessly cast as pearls to the swine, so little are they to be arbitrarily withheld from the one searching out the far corners of grace. Our activity in the use of them is governed by Law-Gospel principles. Withholding of evidences can be a form of Law preaching.

But, for that matter, so can a presentation of evidences, when the thought is: this is what you are rejecting and despising. They can also be presented, not as the support which the Word needs to stand, but as confirmation and illustration of its perfect truthfulness, an added seal of its ability to bless unreservedly. They certainly are not the Gospel itself. For that matter, they are even dispensable. But they are not, for that reason, *per se* harmful or even useless. Perhaps these thoughts can stimulate further study and assist toward clarity in a subject much discussed in our day.

R. E. Wehrwein

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#### THE UNREST IN SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISM\*

If we want to understand our Seventh Day Adventist neighbors, we must be more than superficially acquainted with the doctrinal struggles going on in their church. In 1980 they have a membership of 3.3 million members worldwide. Of these, 585,050 are in North America in 3,927 congregations. The rest are to be found in almost every country of the world under a diversity of religious, cultural, social, and political systems. They publish profusely and distribute their literature liberally throughout the U.S. and the world. — While this article is not a book review as such, it draws much information from *The Shaking of Adventism*, a 1978 publication of Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, authored by Geoffrey J. Paxton.

#### CENTRALITY OF JUSTIFICATION

As true heirs of the Lutheran Reformation, we believe that the doctrine of justification is central to

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all we preach, teach, confess, and believe. As Dr. Martin Luther suggests in the First Article of the Smalcald Articles of 1537, the doctrine of justification by faith is the article upon which the church stands or falls. That this doctrine is so important does not rest either upon Luther's, or our Confessions', designating it so. Any unbiased study of God's Word will lead the student to the same conclusion regarding the centrality of this doctrine. The *Brief Statement* of 1932, to which we subscribe, says: "Holy Scripture sums up all its teachings [our emphasis] regarding the love of God to the world of sinners, regarding the salvation wrought by Christ, and regarding faith in Christ as the only way to obtain salvation, in the article of justification [original emphasis]."

As central as is the doctrine of justification to our faith, it should not be necessary for us to review it in any detail here. We trust that every sermon heard in our churches on any given Sunday is a review of this doctrine from one angle or another. If this is not the case, our people are not only being deprived of the most comforting message God has for poor sinners, but our pastors are seriously deficient in their calling as ambassadors for Christ.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes we shall simply note the definition of justification given in the *Brief Statement*, paragraph 17: "Scripture teaches that God has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ, Rom. 5:19, II Cor. 5:18-21, Rom. 4:25; that therefore not for the sake of their good works, but without the works of the law, by grace, for Christ's sake, He justifies, that is accounts as righteous, all those who believe in Christ, that is, believe, accept, and rely on, the fact that for Christ's sake their sins are forgiven."

We have suggested that any unbiased study of God's Word in the Bible will lead the conscientious student of Scripture to see the centrality of the doctrine of justification. By "unbiased" we mean letting God the Holy Spirit work through the Word apart from the influence or admixture of human reason and human teachers. We see this happening also within Seventh Day Adventism (hereafter designated "SDA"). Time and again in its history the SDA church has experienced extensive internal unrest.

This has come about as serious students of Scripture among SDA adherents rise up to challenge their church's doctrinal basis and framework, particularly for its obscuring the doctrine of justification by faith. Needless to say, this has not met with the happy approval of SDA traditionalists for whom the teachings of man (in this case a woman, Ellen White) have been considered equal to the Word of God.

#### IS THE SDA CHURCH CHRISTIAN?

As far as the evangelical Christian Church is concerned, the traditional SDA position of holding Mrs. White's voluminous commentaries on, and interpretations of, the Bible as being virtually infallible has marked this church as a non-christian cult or sect. Occasionally this assessment has been challenged, but perhaps never as strongly as in the past few years. In 1978 Baker Book House published a book entitled *The Shaking of Adventism*. Its author is Geoffrey J. Paxton, a Reformed Church scholar from Australia, who has made an extensive study of SDA history and theology. The book is subtitled "A documented account of the crisis among Adventists over the doctrine of justification by faith." It is Paxton's judgment that "The impression that Seventh Day Adventism is little better than a non-christian sect will not stand close examination," (p. 17). And he explains: "Adventists believe in the Holy Trinity, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the sinless life and atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and His bodily resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. This is not the creed of a non-christian sect," (p. 17). Going a bit farther, Paxton writes: "Seventh Day Adventists believe in salvation by grace through faith alone as fervently as do most evangelicals. They believe in sanctification by the indwelling Holy Spirit and in the soon return of Jesus Christ in great power and glory." And he concludes: "Now, whatever we think of this or that Adventist 'distinctive' we have to recognize the movement as being Christian," (p. 17). Perhaps what follows will help the reader draw his own conclusions as to whether or not the SDA movement is Christian.

#### ADVENTIST DISTINCTIVES

The title of the denomination gives the two most obvious clues



as to what is meant by Adventist "distinctives." They are Seventh Day Adventists, for they contend that Saturday must be the Sabbath Day in the New Testament era as it was in the Old (in spite of the denunciation of this position in such passages as Colossians 2:16). To Adventists Sunday worship is the "mark of the beast" (Rev. 14:9). Those who worship on Sunday have this mark on their foreheads (Cf. Rev. 13:16ff.). Secondly, they are Seventh Day Adventists, which refers to their church's teachings about the second coming of Christ. Now, of course, all Christian churches teach Christ's Second Coming. Therefore, it is not that the SDA church teaches the Second Coming of Christ that distinguishes her, but what she teaches about that coming. Anyone desiring to discover all that lies behind the word "Adventist" in the SDA church should be prepared for the customary maze of eschatological (end-time) interpretations which mark those religious groups which emphasize and usually distort the prophetic portions of the Bible (in this case, specifically Daniel chapters 8 and 9, Revelation chapters 14 and 20, and there are others). What we find is that SDA eschatology is colored by the private interpretations (of which Scripture warns in II Peter 1:20) of the founder of Adventism in general, William Miller (1781-1849), and Seventh Day Adventism in particular, Ellen White (1827-1915).<sup>2</sup>

In the opinion of the author of the afore-mentioned book, *The Shaking of Adventism*, anyone who criticizes the SDA church is guilty of a grave injustice if he fails to "come to grips with its concept of the gospel and its biblical and theological support for that concept," (p. 24). Paxton suggests that we "must apologize to Adventists" for criticizing the movement for "majoring in minors," (p. 24). Whereupon there follows a lengthy documentary of how the central doctrine of the Bible, the doctrine of justification by faith, has sought to rise to the surface in different periods of SDA church history. Let us look briefly at these periods.

THE BEGINNINGS:      When Christ did not return in the year  
1844-1888              1844 as William Miller had prophesied  
                                 He would, many so-called Adventists  
rejected Miller and the whole general Adventist movement

which he had begun. For the most part they returned to the churches which they had left in expectation of the fulfillment of Miller's prophecy. The movement was saved, however, by Mrs. Ellen White. She possessed a persuasive personal charisma which contributed toward many people accepting her fanciful reevaluation of Miller's Second Coming ideas.<sup>3</sup> The movement took the name Seventh Day Adventism officially in 1863.

According to Paxton, the years of 1844-1888 were "a lean and hungry period as far as the doctrine of justification in Adventism was concerned," (p. 63). The church held essentially to a Pelagian view of righteousness by faith (that is, that acceptance with God is the result of the cooperation of human and divine effort). Most significant for our study here, "Justification on the grounds of the imputed righteousness of Christ was subordinated to the sanctification of the believer by inner renewal," (p. 54).

**THE NEXT PERIOD 1888-1950** In 1888, however, "Two Adventist ministers (Waggoner and Jones) became obsessed with the doctrine of justification by faith alone and sought to present it with no small degree of fervor to the church," (p. 30). As far as some SDA historians are concerned, this was the beginning of the "latter rain" (Joel 2:23) and the "loud cry" (Rev. 14:7,9; 18:1-2) which SDA adherents are taught to look for prior to the Second Coming of Christ.

Paxton calls the years 1888-1950 the next significant period in SDA history. He labels this period as the time of an "Attempted Breakthrough" of the so-called "great light of 1888." This great light is further explained as stating that the true righteousness before God "is not offered merely for the past, but for the present and the future as well," (p. 65). The author writes: "Here, certainly, was a new note in Adventism," (p. 65). Yet he also explains how SDA theology in this entire period continued to maintain a theological emphasis on sanctification (good works) with the consistent result that justification was relegated to the status of being "mere" or "only." That is, to be saved (as far as SDA theology is concerned, this means to be found acceptable

to Christ as He carries on His "investigative judgment") it is not enough "merely" or "only" to be justified by Christ's work of redemption completed on the cross of Calvary, but one must attain a high degree of holy living also before having the assurance of standing before God in the judgment.

#### THE TRUE REFORMATION POSITION

This writer hopes that the reader can see what all this does to the doctrine of justification by faith alone! The preaching and teaching of sanctification has its necessary place in Christian theology. But the believer's sanctification dare never be considered as the basis for God's justifying him. What Holy Scripture teaches regarding sanctification always follows upon, and dare never precede, what the Bible says about God's justifying the sinner. If this fact is overlooked — as it is in traditional SDA theology — the doctrine of sanctification removes the doctrine of justification from its proper and central place in Christian preaching and teaching.

What we have just written is the gist of chapter two of Paxton's book, a chapter devoted to a review of justification in 16th Century Reformation theology. After saying that "Justification is by Christ alone, apart from the believer, and is not to be confused with the renewing work of the Holy Spirit," (p. 43), Paxton quotes approvingly from the Formula of Concord (Tappert's translation), Article III, which says that the sinner's justification is "... without any merit or worthiness on our part, and without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, by sheer grace, solely through the merit of the total obedience, the bitter passion, the death, and the resurrection of Christ our Lord, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness." At the same time, in defense of his statement that "Justification by Christ alone means to be declared just on the grounds of the doing and dying of Jesus Christ alone," (p. 43), Paxton quotes the beautiful words of Luther on the subject (Luther's Works, Vol. 31, p. 297): "Therefore a man can with confidence boast in Christ and say: 'Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as

he did."

SDA THEOLOGY IS PEACE-ROBBING      The Scriptural term "to justify" does not mean to "make righteous," as Roman Catholicism with its "infused grace" would have it. That is also where traditional SDA theology comes out — in line with the theology of Rome which anathematizes the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Emphasis upon the Holy Spirit's work in the believer, rather than upon what Christ has done for sinners, outside of them, marks most, if not all, of the holiness sects including the SDA church. Though, as we are attempting to delineate, there have been and are those within the SDA church who have sought, and are seeking, to elevate the doctrine of justification to its proper place, time and again we find the most avid, ardent followers of Mrs. White's theology falling back on her repeated emphasis on perfectionism or holy living as a necessary prerequisite for the believer's being able to stand in the judgment. The inevitable result is that the adherents of traditional SDA theology are robbed of the peace and comfort the Gospel of Jesus Christ affords. There is more than passing evidence that throughout SDA church history some of its conscientious members have experienced something similar to the despair and desperation which young Luther experienced when he sought scrupulously to abide by the popish idea that he could be justified before the holy God by his own law-works.

"THEOLOGICAL CREATIVITY" IN THE SDA CHURCH      Perhaps the reader has been able by this time to determine that the SDA church tolerates a certain "latitude of theological opinion" in her midst. The reason for this no doubt lies in the fact that "Seventh Day Adventists have no formal statement of belief, for two reasons: First, they hold that the Bible is the only creed the Christian needs; second, they fear that a creed would make their religion static and devitalized."<sup>4</sup> As if to bear out the truth of this remark, a current SDA theological magazine quotes her leaders as saying: "The (SDA) church has a history of being gentle with its creative people."<sup>5</sup>

This "theological creativity" becomes evident when one walks into any SDA bookstore. The bookshelves not only display the profuse works of Ellen White, but one also finds titles from numerous SDA theologians as well, on the widest range of spiritual topics. You will, by the way, also find books by Calvin and Luther.

And yet, significantly, one can't help noticing the limitations imposed by SDA powers-that-be on the theological creativity they claim to espouse. This is nowhere more evident than in the church's handling of those within her midst whose unbiased study of the Bible has led them to elevate the doctrine of justification by faith to its proper place in the teachings of their church.

BRINSMEAD — There are two major cases in point. The 50's & 60's first instance is detailed by Paxton as he continues his review of the different periods in SDA church history. The period beginning in 1950 found an SDA theology student, Robert Brinsmead, an Australian, becoming an outspoken critic of his church's emphasis on eschatological perfectionism. Brinsmead's study of the Bible impressed upon him that because of original sin (a doctrine for all intents and purposes ignored in traditional SDA theology), perfectionism was impossible outside of Christ. Paxton writes: "For Brinsmead no amount of inward grace or 'imparted righteousness' would qualify one to stand in the judgment, and, said Brinsmead, He (Christ) stands in the judgment as the Representative of the believer," (p. 99). Brinsmead included in this so-called "Awakening Message" to his church this polemical remark: "We utterly reject any here-and-now perfectionism."

This was more than the avowed gentleness of traditionalist SDA leaders toward the "creative people" could swallow. Things were made so hot for Brinsmead that he resigned from the denomination.<sup>6</sup>

FORD AND THE 70's As this is being written, there is brought to our attention a second tell-tale case in point regarding the reluctance of traditionalist SDA leaders to accept a breath of fresh theological air in the denomination on the centrality of

justification by faith. Dr. Desmond Ford, another SDA Australian theologian now teaching in California, had his ministerial credentials revoked in the Fall of 1980 for teaching much the same thing that Brinsmead taught. There is an expressed fear that Ford, a theological professor, will "mislead" the many young SDA theology students who have come to revere him. The article which is the source of this information contends that there is currently brewing an "Adventist showdown" which is likely to "trigger a rash of defections" from the SDA church over Ford's seeking to restore the doctrine of justification by faith to its central position in the church's theology.<sup>7</sup> The article referred to gives some additional, and to us disturbing, insight into Ford's position. While Ford openly exposes as unscriptural the SDA teaching on eschatological perfectionism, and its distinctive doctrine on the "investigate judgment" of Christ prior to His Second Coming, we are also told that Ford remains in complete sympathy with SDA theology pertaining to the Sabbath. It is our fervent prayer that the Holy Spirit would work mightily to yet convince Dr. Ford and his sympathizers of the scripturally-unfounded, legalistic affront to the Gospel that is inherent in SDA Sabbatarian theology.

HEIRS OF THE REFORMATION? We have not yet referred to what to us is the most startling piece of information revealed in *The Shaking of Adventism*. This is the claim on the part of the SDA church that it, together with its faithful followers, are the true heirs of the 16th Century Reformation! The author of the book, who has obviously read extensively in their literature, reports: "A frequent theme in Adventist writing and speaking is that of forwarding the Reformation. Mrs. White speaks of this... Indeed the Reformation did not end with Luther. It will end with the Adventist movement, however, at least as far as the Seventh Day Adventist is concerned," (p. 19).

This surprising Adventist perspective originates from the powerful SDA conviction that the Roman papacy is in fact the very Antichrist. With this we have no argument in the least. But why is the Antichrist embodied in the Papacy? On our part we find the reason for this

laid down clearly by Dr. Luther in the Smalcald Articles, Article IV, paragraphs 4, 10 and 11: "Although you believe in Christ and have in Him (alone) everything that is necessary to salvation, yet it is nothing and all in vain unless you regard (have and worship) me as your god, and be subject and obedient to me... This teaching shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ, because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God. This is, properly speaking, to exalt himself above all that is called God, as Paul says, 2 Thess. 2:4 (emphasis ours)." That is the perspective, briefly, of all true heirs of the 16th Century Reformation.

By contrast, consider what traditional SDA theology proffers. The Pope is the Antichrist, partly, they say, because it was the bishop of Rome who supposedly initiated Sunday worship (which, in turn, leads them to what is the logical conclusion, namely, that all other Protestants who worship on Sunday are the "Babylonians" [Cf. Rev. 14:8] who have come to worship the beast of the Papal Antichrist). Furthermore, and incredibly, our reading in SDA literature forces the conclusion that they consider the Papacy to be the Antichrist also because the Pope fails to preach the doctrine of justification by faith! From what we can tell, this is little more than the pot calling the kettle black. With all its talk about justification by faith being the "Third Angel's Message, and with all its talk about being the "heirs of the Reformation" called to proclaim the "everlasting gospel" (Rev. 14:6) to the world in these latter days, the SDA church with its consistent emphasis on the need for perfectionism, for standing in the judgment, succeeds in obscuring the Gospel as efficiently as does Rome with its view of infused grace! With this we are forced to put the same question to SDA adherents that Paxton does in his concluding chapter. He asks: "How can one further the work of the Reformers by taking their gospel and re-fashioning it according to the gospel of Roman Catholicism?" That is a "loud cry" that calls for an honest answer!

As we have tried to show, the SDA church has a long way to come yet before understanding the central doctrine of Holy Scripture, justification by faith. This is enough of a disclaimer to her spurious claim of being rightful end-time heirs of the work begun by God through His humble instrument, Dr. Martin Luther. But, of course, there is more to reveal the illegitimacy of the SDA claim. Not only are the SDA distinctives we have referred to unscriptural and therefore false doctrine (which we stand ready to prove from the Bible and our Lutheran confessions), but it also rejects the Reformation's mode of Baptism and the truly Lutheran (and scriptural!) view of the Lord's Supper. So it is that we say to our SDA neighbors: Dr. Martin Luther would have felt no more at home in the Seventh Day Adventist movement today than he did in the Church of Rome in the 16th Century!

THE PLACE OF  
CONFESSIONALISM

We have just concluded a celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of our Lutheran Confessions' being compiled into the Book of Concord in 1580. We have sought to strengthen ourselves in the importance of being and remaining a truly confessional Christian church body. Contrary to what the leaders of the SDA movement might suggest, we make no apologies for this confessionalism. True heirs of the Reformation are those who stand fast in the Word of God as it is set forth in our Lutheran Confessions.

The author of *The Shaking of Adventism* asks his SDA readers to consider this need for true confessionalism. He chides the SDA church for "brushing aside virtually the whole history of doctrinal development in the Christian Church"; and he adds: "Much needless struggle could have been avoided if the early Adventists could have conceded that the Holy Spirit has been at work well before the 'remnant' community arrived on the scene," (p. 151). Students of church history among the true heirs of the 16th Century Reformation will testify to the important role that our Lutheran Confessions have played in helping to preserve the truth of the Gospel (and the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith!) in the face of the subtle and inevitable attacks of Satan against that Gospel.



SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS      We will not deny that there is reason on our part for rejoicing at the fact that the Gospel of Christ is being heard here and there and now and then within the SDA church. With St. Paul we say: "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice," (Phil. 1:18). There is much about Seventh Day Adventists that deserves commendation and even emulation. Their zeal for mission work, their liberality (\$682 per communicant in 1979), their intensive concern for religious education (they have many church schools on all levels), their vigorous opposition to evolutionism (often evident in their magazine, *Signs of the Times*), their sound position on marriage and divorce — all of this is to their credit. Nevertheless, they must be numbered among those modern cults and sects who through their fantastic misinterpretation of the Scriptures, and their unwarranted deductions from those same Scriptures, have done great harm to the cause of Christ and the Gospel. Therefore, as far as we are concerned, all those passages of Holy Scripture which direct us to mark, beware of, and avoid false teachers apply to the SDA church.

In conclusion, we are saddened by the whole scenario. Here is a church which desires to be called "Christian," which desires to be thought of as true "heirs of the Reformation," but which is being tossed about by every wind of doctrine to the peril not only of her worldwide denomination, but what is heart-rendingly more sad, to the utter confusion of her individual members who need the peace and joy of the pure and unadulterated Gospel of Christ as much as the rest of us. Here is a church which, under the guise of having the "Bible only" as its creed, seems to be intent on quenching every movement of the Spirit of God to call her away from her legalism and back to the Gospel — the Gospel of justification by grace, through faith, without the deeds of the law.

We would conclude by reminding ourselves that the Word of God is clear, and that the same Word makes it plain that even the smallest error (doctrinal leaven) is dangerous for its soul-destroying capability. And we would remind ourselves of the blessings God promises to

those who are "joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," (I Cor. 1:10).

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). Lord, keep us faithful, eager, and honest students of your Word! Through that Word preserve us unto true unity! Make, and keep, us true heirs of the Reformation, that You and Your Son may be glorified in all we say and do, in all we teach and believe!

*Paul G. Fleischer*

#### FOOTNOTES

1. For those who would like an excellent review of the doctrine we refer you to Pastor D. Lau's treatment of the subject under the title, "What is This Thing Called Justification?", *Lutheran Spokesman*, Vol. 18, Nos. 2 & 4. See also the Formula of Concord, Article III, Of the Righteousness of Faith before God, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 917.
2. These interpretations include teachings about such things as a soul-sleep after death, the millennium, the annihilation of the wicked, and Christ's incomplete atonement.
3. A tract of the SDA church on file tells how Mrs. White explained away "The Great Disappointment of 1844" along the following lines: "In 1844 the 'investigative judgment' of Christ began when He entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. He is now in the process of determining who among the dead shall be raised to eternal life, and who among the living shall be translated. When He has finished this task He will return to earth. The righteous dead will then be raised from their tombs, and the wicked living will be killed by the glory of His appearing. The righteous living, together with the resurrected righteous, will then be taken to heaven, where they will, for one thousand years, participate with Christ in the work of judgment. During these thousand years, Satan will be confined to the earth, where he can tempt no one, since there is no one living upon the earth dur-

ing this millennium. At the end of the 1,000 year period the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven. Satan will be loosed, and the wicked dead will be raised from the graves. At this point, Satan will make a final effort to destroy the forces of God, but he and his followers will be utterly destroyed by fire, and then the world will become the abode of the righteous forever."

4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ministry*, May, 1980.
6. Brinsmead continues to defend his views, which culminated in his defending the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith in his cosmopolitan theological journal now known as *Verdict*, formerly *Present Truth*. We also suggest that it is more than coincidence that we find serving with Brinsmead on the magazine's editorial staff a man named Geoffrey Paxton.
7. *Christianity Today*, October 10, 1980.



## BOOK REVIEWS

*Formula of Concord: A Study Guide for Bible Classes*, by James A. Fricke (Northwestern Publishing House, 1979). 96pp. Paper. \$3.25.

The author, who is on the faculty of Northwestern College (WELS), Watertown, Wisconsin, states in the Introduction: "The lessons of this study guide adhere roughly to the following pattern: a historical background highlighting the specific problems that produced each individual article of the Formula of Concord, questions that bring into focus the chief points to be dealt with in the treatment of the article, scriptural truths with appropriate passages from which the truths are derived, summaries of the points treated, and questions and topics for review and discussion." Inasmuch as the les-

sons are based on the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, it is suggested that the reader provide himself with a copy of this Epitome.

As the title indicates, this study guide is designed for use by laymen. In many respects Prof. Fricke has accomplished this purpose well. The format is attractive, technical terms are routinely defined, lucid explanations are provided for the points of controversy in the various articles of the Formula, and many helpful quotations from the Solid Declaration are adduced. Even such "difficult" doctrinal topics as the communication of attributes are clearly expounded. Unfortunately, however, there are a number of hard English words along the way which may cause difficulty for the average reader. On just four pages of the first chapter he will encounter words like these: upshot, pusillanimous, repudiate, gadfly, fiasco, viable, rancor, juncture, and culmination.

The author has designed the study guide to lead the user, not only into the Formula, but into Scripture as the norm of all doctrine in the church. Copious references to the Bible are provided for each doctrinal topic, and the reader is clearly expected to refer to them.

The questions and topics for review and discussion have been carefully prepared. In connection with the article on justification, attention is directed, for example, to Christ's active and passive obedience, the Scriptural concept of justification, the role of faith in justification, quotations from the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, the danger of confusing the doctrine of justification with that of sanctification, and the work-righteous nature of the Masonic religion.

In giving the book a quick reading, this reviewer found nothing which he had to question — except for one apparent misprint in a heading on p. 58: "The Holy Spirit Uses the Law to Enable the Christian to Live Righteously According to the Law." That the author meant: "The Holy Spirit Uses the Gospel ..." is evident from the paragraph which follows: "Though the law tells the believers what to do, only the Holy Spirit through the gospel gives the power to do it."

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Lutheran congregations and pastors should be able to make good use of this booklet in their study of this classic confession, the Formula of Concord.

C. Kuehne

*The Church Musician's Enchiridion*, by A. O. Lehmann, with a Foreword by Martin Albrecht (Northwestern Publishing House, 1979). 51pp. \$2.95.

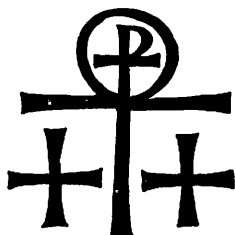
In view of the publication of new service books by almost every major church body and in view of the current liturgical reform (Cf. the increasing emphasis on Lord's Supper in every principal worship service by liberal Lutheran groups), this booklet does little to clarify the role of church music. For the pastor and professional musician it does not say enough. If we are to understand our liturgical service, then we need to know in a much more meaningful way how it is derived from the Catholic mass. For the layman it says too much. The layman is probably less interested in a casual comparison of three post-Reformation liturgies as he is in an evaluation of the one he is using. Would Dr. Lehmann call the Deutsche Messe of 1526 liturgical or non-liturgical? Does he wish to imply a reinstatement of Lord's Supper in every principal service, and if so, on what grounds? Would he suggest that the Lutheran service would best begin with the Introit? The booklet does not say. Statements like: "In many of the Lutheran churches in America a public confession was affixed to the beginning of the order of worship" say too little. It is important that the Confessional Service, traditional or not, is one of the truly unique and meaningful additions to the liturgical service and ought to be preserved at all costs. It is a remarkable confession, truly Lutheran in character, in which the members of the congregation jointly acknowledge not only their sins but their sinfulness and receive absolution through the called servant of the Word. The influence of Pietism can be seen in the use of a confession for the Communion Service different from the one for the Service of the Word.

In regard to the chapter on congregational hymnody one ought to make clear that the so-called sermon hymn is not traditionally Lutheran (Luther felt at one time that the sermon might best come before the Introit), but an 18th Century innovation; it came at a time when the church year and the liturgy no longer determined the character of the hymns.

Dr. Lehmann categorically recommends that the organist accompanies the congregation best if he or she sings along. This really depends on the musicianship of the organist. Far more reliable is that the organist have an awareness of what Zahn calls the "Tactus." Each hymn has a characteristic tempo and beat; the tempo is dictated by the text (organists must be theologians, too), and the beat affords a rhythmic pulse that is sensed by the congregation, a pulse that makes allowances for breathing but that must prevail from start to finish. (Cf. Introduction to Zahn's *Die Melodien der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchenlieder.*)

Dr. Lehmann is to be commended for his basic premise that neither organist nor choir exist for the entertainment of the congregation, but are handmaidens of the congregation in the proclamation of the Word and in the worship of God. To achieve this he wisely suggests that the music of the service be carefully coordinated and planned.

R. Dommer





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