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The Spirit of the Lutheran Chorale

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Wir sind des Verhandels müde. Aber die Verhandlungen dürfen durchaus nicht so geführt werden, wie ein amerikanisches Glied des Kopenhagener Exekutivkomitees sie geführt haben will: "The world will not listen to our message as long as we Lutherans will stand bickering with one another over differences which we with the most meticulous study cannot convince ourselves of." Er setzt hinzu: "It should be a matter of concern for each Lutheran synod to remove that which stands as a stumbling-block for closer affiliation." Gewiß! Aber was soll denn der erste Satz? Wenn Lutheraner zusammenkommen, um das Werk der Einigung zu betreiben, so haben sie sich nach § 95 des XI. Artikels der Konfordinformel zu richten: „Wir sind nicht bedacht, um zeitlichen Friedens, Ruhe und Einigkeit willen etwas der ewigen, unwardelbaren Wahrheit Gottes zu begeben, . . . sondern zu solcher Einigkeit herzlichste Lust und Liebe tragen und dieselbe unsers Teils nach unserm äußersten Vermögen zu befördern von Herzen geneigt und begierig sind, durch welche Gott seine Ehre unberührt bleibt, der göttlichen Wahrheit des heiligen Evangelii nichts begeben, dem wenigsten Irrtum nichts eingeräumt“ wird. (Trigl., 1094.)

Es ist schwer, eine solche Stellung einzunehmen und festzuhalten. Die es tun, „gelten für ein schändliches Volk“. (D. Walthar, 1. Ver. d. Iowa-Distr., 42.) Was soll da aus unserer armen lutherischen Kirche werden? Befehlen wir Gott die Sache! Folgen wir dem Vorbild Luthers! „Unbeirrt geht er [zu Marburg] den Weg, den sein Gewissen ihm zeigt, sein Glaube ihm erhellt. So blickt er furchtlos in die Zukunft. Er weiß nichts von der Not dieser Zeit. Gott lebt und regiert. Der wird seine Sache führen.“ E.

The Spirit of the Lutheran Chorale.*

It is sometimes hard for a Lutheran to keep the boastful note out of his voice when he speaks of the various treasures of our Lutheran heritage. We have, by the blessing of God, the finest text-book of doctrinal instruction, the Small Catechism of Martin Luther; we have, in addition to the Ecumenical Creeds, the clearest exposition of Scripture truth in our book of confessions, the Concordia of

* The address offered herewith was delivered at the Spring Festival of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in connection with the celebration of National Music Week. The following books may be recommended for more detailed information: Alt, *Christlicher Kultus*; Anton, *Luther und die Musik*; Barlow, *The Bach Chorale Book*; Benson, *Hymnody of the Christian Church*; Dorsch, *Das deutsche evangelische Kirchenlied*; Heiler, *The Spirit of Worship*; Koch, *Geschichte des Kirchenlieds und Kirchengesangs*; Koenig, *Doktor Martin Luthers geistliche Lieder*; Kretzmann, *Christian Art*; Lambert, *Luther's Hymns*; Nelle, *Geschichte des Kirchenliedes*; Pilcher, *Icelandic Meditations on the Passion*; Van der Heydt, *Geschichte der evangelischen Kirchenmusik*. — THE EDITORIAL BOARD.

1580, in which the Augsburg Confession of 1530, whose four-hundredth anniversary we are celebrating this year, deservedly occupies a position of honor; and we have a heritage of church art in general and of hymnody and Lutheran music in particular that may well arouse the envy and the emulation of others. It is of this Lutheran hymnody and music that I wish to speak to you in this short address, in particular of its expression in the spirit of the Lutheran *chorale*. And this is not to be done in a spirit of boastfulness, but in keeping with the great motto of the Lutheran Church: *Soli Deo gloria!* To God alone all glory!

When Luther, in 1523, the same year which brought out his first effort in behalf of the reformation of the order for the chief service for Sunday, issued a number of individual sheets with hymns and tunes, containing such gems of Christian hymnody as "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice," "May God Be Gracious unto Us," "All Praise to Jesus' Hallowed Name," by himself, and "Salvation unto Us has Come," written by his friend Paul Speratus, he uncovered a spring of Christian song which, fed by hundreds of similar springs of evangelical poetry, became a stream which has flowed down through the centuries, growing to ever greater proportions, reaching ever greater depths, until hundreds of thousands drew from its healing waters strength, and comfort, and consecration, and inspiration for life and death.— One of the leaflets of 1523 contained a spiritual song the writing of which was suggested to Luther by the death of the first Lutheran martyrs, Henry Voes and John Esch, the closing lines of which are peculiarly appropriate at this time:—

Summer is even at our door,
The winter now hath vanished,
The tender flow'rets spring once more,
And He who winter banished
Will send a happy summer.

The very next year, 1524, Lutheran hymnology was formally established, for it was then that Luther published his first little hymnal, the *Enchiridion*, commonly known as the *Achtliederbuch*, since it contained eight hymns, four by Luther, three by Speratus, and one by an unknown author. The number of small handbooks of this nature, issued in the course of the year, 1524, was four, two in Wittenberg and two in Erfurt, and before Luther's death, a little more than twenty years later, more than a dozen additional hymnals were placed on the market, most of which contained the majority of Luther's thirty-seven hymns and spiritual songs; for the Reformer himself proved a most prolific poet of sacred songs. We have in rapid succession the hymns "Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee," "Had God Not Come, May Israel Say," "Happy the Man who Feareth God"; then, in 1527, the great battle-hymn of the Reformation "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," later: "Come, God Creator, Holy

Ghost"; "Come, Holy Spirit, God and Lord"; "These Things the Seer Isaiah Did Befall"; "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"; "To Shepherds as They Watched by Night," and all the other wonderful hymns which all Lutherans and thousands of others cherish.

Luther did not remain alone in this noble work, for his example served to stimulate others and to inspire them to sing of the great deeds of God. Friends of the Reformer at Wittenberg and elsewhere, such as Justus Jonas, Johann Agricola, Paul Eber, Johann Walther, and Elizabeth, the wife of Caspar Cruciger, himself a hymn-writer, deserve special mention. Then there were circles of hymnists, such as those of Nuremberg, Lazarus Spengler, Hans Sachs, and Nicolaus Selnecker, those of Strassburg, among whom Conrad Huber and Martin Schalling stand in the front ranks. And the time would fail us if we were to speak at length of Nicolaus Decius ("All Glory Be to God on High"), Nicolaus Herman ("Praise God, the Lord, Ye Sons of Men"), Philip Nicolai ("O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright"; "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying"), and Valerius Herberger ("Farewell I Say with Gladness").

It is amazing to find that the wave of hymn-writing which had arisen in 1523 did not recede after the death of Luther and his coworkers. But far from having spent its force, we find it gaining new impetus about the time when sound Lutheranism was established by the publishing of the Formula of Concord. And it was particularly in the period of the Thirty Years' War that hymn-writing once more rose to wonderful heights. Who would want to miss the Lenten hymn by Johann Heermann "Beloved Jesus, What Law hast Thou Broken?" or Rist's "O Darkest Woel Ye Tears, Forth Flow," or Stegmann's "Abide, O Dearest Jesus," or Clausnitzer's "Blessed Jesus, at Thy Word"?

But this short list would not be complete without at least a mention of the Asaph of the Lutheran Church, the great hymnist Paul Gerhardt. So appealing in content and form is almost every one of his 120 hymns that they have captured the hearts of Christians everywhere. If this servant of the Lord and sufferer for His cause had not left us any other hymns than the Christmas hymn "All My Heart This Night Rejoices," the Lenten hymn "O Bleeding Head and Wounded," the Easter hymn "Awake, My Heart, with Gladness," and the song of inexpressible sweetness and comfort "Commit Whatever Grieves Thee," he would have earned a lasting place in the Lutheran hall of fame. But where should we close the list if once we go on? Suffice it to say that the impetus given by Luther and Gerhardt has lost little of its strength. The stream of Lutheran hymnody was turned to the Scandinavian countries, to appear in the hymns of Ingemann, Grundtvig, Brorson, Albinus, and Hegelund in Danish and Norwegian, in the hymns of Wallin and Nyström in

Swedish, and in the lyric verses of Hallgrimur Petursson, the Gerhardt of Iceland.

Nor may we omit another factor that is essential for the understanding of the Lutheran *chorale*, namely, that of the classical tunes, which were written by some of the foremost musicians among the men professing the Lutheran faith. Luther himself gave us at least two great melodies, that for "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" and that for "These Things the Seer Isaiah Did Befall," besides adapting other melodies for some of the other hymns written by him and assisting the great musician Johann Walther in preparing the music for the liturgy. Then there is Nicolaus Herman, the cantor of Johann Mathesius of Joachimstal, Michael Praetorius, who invented some excellent tunes, Johann Crueger, who was frequently inspired by the beauty of Gerhardt's hymns, Johann Neumark, whose melody for his own hymn "If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee" has remained a favorite to this day. And what these men and others did for the German hymn, Lindemann and others did for the Scandinavian field.—Need anything be said at this time about Johann Sebastian Bach, who is the great master of Lutheran music, having caught the spirit of the Lutheran *chorale* as no other man before or since, giving us the harmonizations and transcriptions of the great tunes of the Lutheran Church which fairly cause their contents to become alive before our eyes and to unfold to us their understanding?

What, then, is the Lutheran *chorale*? It is the confession of the common faith and of the common aspirations of the Christian congregation, based upon Scripture truth, expressed in stately verse and impressive rhythm, and usually set to a tune that fairly breathes the spirit of the hymn. Does the fact that they are doctrinal in content take away the heart-searching effectiveness of these *chorales*? Would one say that the poetry of the psalms, of the matchless utterances of Isaiah, or of St. Paul's Psalm of Love (1 Cor. 13) has suffered on account of their doctrinal content? Neither has the Lutheran hymn which really merits the designation *chorale*. There is matchless, impressive, inspiring poetry in most of the Lutheran hymns, and the melodies which these verses have inspired have rightly made the Lutheran Church the "singing Church."

Many factors could be named that combine to produce the wonderful spirit of the Lutheran *chorale*, and these may be briefly mentioned. One great feature was already given in the definition above, namely, the fact that the Lutheran *chorale* is predominantly *confessional in character*, that it expresses the common faith of the Christian congregation, based on the truths of Scripture, stating in rhymed and rhythmical form the knowledge of salvation, which is the outstanding heritage of our Church.

This spirit may be further analyzed as a *spirit of humility*, of the knowledge of sin. Who can remain unmoved when the throbbing notes of "Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee" sound forth or of the hymn "O God, Thou Righteous, Faithful Lord, I have Not Kept Thy Holy Word"? To a Lutheran Christian, sin is not an empty sound, but a dreadful reality, and the hymns of our Church express this fact time and again.

But to this we add the spirit which holds to the *objective certainty of salvation*. It is this feature that characterized some of the very first hymns in the field of Lutheran hymnody, such as "Salvation unto Us has Come," by Speratus, and Luther's "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice." Thousands of other Lutheran hymns have since sung of the vicarious redemption through the merits of Christ, but they have hardly risen above the fervor of these first psalms of salvation with which these leaders of the Reformation heralded the Gospel freedom.

Nor is the *meditation on the marvels of God's grace* absent from Lutheran hymnody. On the contrary, one of the earliest meditations of this kind was written by Gramann in 1525, namely, "My Soul, Now Bless Thy Maker." Then we have Schmolck's "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty," with its prayerful application to the blessings of the Gospel, and in particular the many hymns for the great festivals, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity.

No wonder, then, that the spirit of the Lutheran *chorale* is also found in *praise and thanksgiving*. What was said by Luther in his translation of the *Te Deum Laudamus*, what was expressed by Decius in his popular version of the angelic hymn "All Glory Be to God on High" and by another pupil of Luther in his "All Glory Be to God Alone," that is the thought which dominates hundreds of Lutheran *chorales*, thereby affording a preparation for the glories of heaven, when we shall join in the chorus of the ransomed before the throne of the Lamb and bless our Redeemer forever and ever.

P. E. KRETZMANN.

The Christology of the Apocalypse.

More curious notions arise in the minds of many Bible students regarding St. John's Apocalypse than regarding any other book of the Bible. Usually Bible classes are found to be more eager to study this book than any other portion of the Holy Scriptures, and pastors are often asked bewildering and perplexing questions concerning it. Shall we hold ourselves aloof from this writing with an air of "touch not, taste not, handle not," or shall we diligently apply ourselves to laying hold of the divine truths here recorded in their richness and fulness?