

The Wealth of Lutheran Hymnody

An Inquiry Into the Greatness of Our Heritage

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I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength open my lips to show forth the praises of the Lord. The Holy Spirit must call me by the gospel. He must reveal to me that I would be a lost and condemned creature, if Jesus my Lord had not redeemed me, purchased and won me from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. Consequently the Holy Spirit reveals to me that God is my dear Father, who loves me, who gives me everything I need for my bodily and spiritual welfare, and who wants me to believe that he is my dear Father in heaven. My Lord Jesus Christ has promised me the gift of the Holy Spirit, who will keep me in this faith until I breathe my last. Great is our God, full of grace and mercy, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. He has never forsaken us; he never will. Although we may desert him, he will not desert us. Though we may deny him, he will not deny us. Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is, to him be honor and glory forever. Amen. Such good news indeed changes my rebellious heart, my sulking spirit, my introverted ego, to thank and to praise God, yes, to sing for joy to God our Strength, to shout aloud to the God of Jacob!

The eighty-first psalm offers us a good insight into the matter of greatness or richness or quality in the hymnody of the Christian church.

- 1 Sing for joy to God our strength;
shout aloud to the God of Jacob!
- 2 Begin the music, strike the tambourine,
play the melodious harp and lyre.
- 3 Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon,
and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast;
- 4 this is a decree for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
- 5 He established it as a statute for Joseph
when he went out against Egypt,
where we heard a language we did not understand.
- 6 He says, "I removed the burden from their shoulders;
their hands were set free from the basket.
- 7 In your distress you called and I rescued you,
I answered you out of a thundercloud;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.
- 8 "Hear, O my people, and I will warn you—
if you would but listen to me, O Israel!
- 9 You should have no foreign god among you;
you shall not bow down to an alien god.
- 10 I am the Lord your God,
who brought you up out of Egypt.

Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

- 11 “But my people would not listen to me;
Israel would not submit to me.
12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
to follow their own devices.

13 “If my people would but listen to me,
if Israel would follow my ways,
14 how quickly would I subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes!
15 Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him,
and their punishment would last forever.
16 But you would be fed with the finest of wheat;
with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

The psalter, the book of psalms, is a very special book in the Bible. It is the only book that consists mainly of prayers, of addresses to God. God put this book into the Bible to teach us how to speak with him. Even as a child learns to speak by imitating and repeating the speech patterns of his parents, so God has given us this precious collection of prayers so that we his children might learn how to speak with him. How narrow is our point of view if we think of praying only as asking! How ego-oriented is the person who thinks that it is best simply to “pour out one’s heart to God.” How impoverished our hearts are! Let each one of us look at one day of his life to see how many strange gods he has lusted after. Even the disciples of our Lord, who were with him all the time, said: “Lord, teach us to pray.” Whereupon our Lord gave them a summary of the psalter; we know it today as the Lord’s Prayer. Let us then turn to this psalter, and today to Psalm 81 in particular, to find out what makes for wealth and greatness in our speech with God, in the hymns and prayers we sing to God.

1. A great hymn addresses God, or it calls worshipers to address him. In the address or the call to address, Asaph honors God by applying names to him: “our strength,” “the God of Jacob,” “the Lord your God.” These names point to the Savior-God, to his promises and to his redemptive acts. Furthermore, in addressing God or in calling fellow worshipers to address God, the singer is confessing that he fears, loves and trusts in God above all things. When one needs something, one knows whom to ask. When one receives a treasure, one praises the donor. When one is full of confidence, one joyfully reveals the source of this confidence. Since the psalmist’s life is hidden with Christ in God, his thanks and praise, his petitions, his expressions of trust, his confessions, his lament, his every utterance,—all are directed toward God, the Source of every grace and blessing. Therefore, when we take this psalm upon our lips, we are expressing our fear, our love and our trust in God above all things. When a hymnwriter follows suit, he is also saying: God is my highest Good; he made me; he preserves me; he has redeemed me; and he will keep me in this faith until the day of Jesus Christ. I shall address him in every circumstance of life.

2. A great hymn has doctrinal content. Asaph is instructing his people regarding the first commandment. He tells them what it means to obey it and to honor God, and he shows them how they have disobeyed it and have dishonored God (8–12).

“Hear, O my people, and I will warn you—
if you would but listen to me, O Israel!
You shall have no foreign god among you;
you shall not bow down to an alien god.
I am the Lord your God,
who brought you up out of Egypt.

Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

“But my people would not listen to me;
Israel would not submit to me.
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
to follow their own devices.

3. A great hymn rehearses the stories, the pictures and the very words of the Scriptures. Martin Luther said it this way: a good hymn should keep the word of God in circulation. Asaph does this when he uses the name “God of Jacob.” This God is the God of the promise. Every worshiper would be reminded of the many oracles of God that began: “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” This name alone recalled many stories to fellow worshipers, and it especially reminded them of the promise of a coming Savior. Then, in well-written verses, Asaph recounts to his hearers the miraculous deliverance from the slavery of Egypt to the glorious liberty of following God (5–7).

He established it as a statute for Joseph
when he went out against Egypt,
where we heard a language we did not understand.

He says, “I removed the burden from their shoulders;
their hands were set free from the basket.
In your distress you called and I rescued you,
I answered you out of a thundercloud;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

4. A great hymn applies the message. In a skillful application Asaph continues the story of the Exodus. He reminds his fellow worshipers of what they already had learned. Their forefathers had spurned the grace of God. Asaph’s contemporaries have done the same. Past and present unite in powerful fusion (13–16).

“If my people would but listen to me,
if Israel would follow my ways,
how quickly would I subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes!
Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him,
and their punishment would last forever.
But you would be fed with the finest of wheat;
with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

5. A great hymn uses language that is simple, direct and dignified. When Asaph refers to God as “our strength,” no one could miss the point. When Asaph recounts the Exodus, he is referring to the most important story in the memory of the believer of that day. The expressions he uses to recall the story are forceful: “a language we did not understand,” “the burden from their shoulders,” “the basket,” “thundercloud,” “waters of Meribah.” When he makes application, he strikes at the single, most grievous sin of the church since the beginning of time: choosing someone or something else as “god,” the supposed highest good. Asaph allows no flights of fancy. Not a word is wasted. Of course, we would not expect anything less, since he was moved by the power of the Holy Spirit.

6. A great hymn has a message that calls forth the emotion of the worshiper. HARNEENU! HAWREE-U! These commands call the worshiping singers to action. Emit a tremulous and strident sound! Cry out with a loud voice! Let the orchestra accompany the singing! The forthcoming message calls forth the

emotion. There is no attempt here to paste fake emotions upon a message. On the contrary, we are going to hear the good news of God's deliverance, and the good news stirs Asaph to the point that he has to call out to all the musicians, singers and instrumentalists alike: they should do no less than use all the skills at their disposal to thank and to praise the God of their salvation. Luther captured the relationship of message and emotion when he sang (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 387:1):

- 1 Dear Christians, one and all rejoice,
With exultation springing,
And, with united heart and voice
And holy rapture singing,
Proclaim the wonders God hath done,
How His right arm the victory won;
Right dearly it hath cost Him.

An investigation into the psalm from which you drew your convention theme has proved to be fruitful. We have discovered most of the qualities that are characteristic of a great hymn. They are repeated now without comment.

1. A great hymn addresses God, or it calls worshipers to address him.
2. A great hymn has doctrinal content.
3. A great hymn rehearses the stories, the pictures and the words of the Scriptures.
4. A great hymn applies the message.
5. A great hymn uses language that is simple, direct, and dignified.
6. A great hymn has a message that calls forth the emotion of the worshiper.

An inquiry into Christian hymnody will offer us two more qualities of greatness. They are mentioned here without comment. Explanation will follow later.

7. A great hymn has roots.
8. A great hymn has melody that is on the one hand lofty and on the other hand personal.

Let us now take the lessons of the prayerbook of the Bible and apply them to Christian hymnody, specifically to Lutheran hymnody. If we are to investigate Lutheran hymnody, there is no better place to begin than the hymnody of Martin Luther himself. His training as a monk was no hindrance to him. On the contrary, it turned out to be a blessing not only to him but to the holy Christian church. For in the monastery Luther's discipline included praying the psalter once a week, all 150 psalms once a week. This was a practice that by his time was already 1200 years old. We know that one of the tests for the priesthood in the fifth century was the ability to recite the entire "David" (the psalter). There is no doubt in my mind that Luther knew the psalter from memory. The speech patterns that God laid down in this prayerbook through his Holy Spirit were deeply imbedded in Martin Luther's consciousness. He spoke and wrote out of the fulness of the psalter and of the rest of the Holy Scriptures too. We shall want to give our attention to one of the best, if not the best hymn he penned: *Christ lag in Todesbanden* ("Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," TLH 195). The entire text is presented in English and German.

- 1 Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands,
For our offenses given;
But now at God's right hand He stands
And brings us life from heaven;
Therefore let us joyful be

And sing to God right thankfully
Loud songs of hallelujah. Hallelujah!

- 1 *Christ lag in Todesbanden
fuer unsre Suend' gegeben,
der ist wieder erstanden*

*und hat uns bracht das Leben:
des wir sollen froehlich sein,*

- 2 No son of man could conquer Death,
Such mischief sin had wrought us,
For innocence dwelt not on earth,
And therefore Death had brought us
Into slav'ry from of old
And ever grew more strong and bold
And kept us in His bondage. Hallelujah!
- 3 But Jesus Christ, God's only Son
To our low state descended.
The cause of Death He has undone
His pow'r forever ended.
Ruined all His right and claim
And left Him nothing but the name,
His sting is lost forever. Hallelujah!
- 4 It was a strange and dreadful strife
When Life and Death contended;
The victory remained with Life,
The reign of Death was ended;
Holy Scripture plainly saith
That Death is swallowed up by Death,
His sting is lost forever. Hallelujah!
- 5 Here the true Paschal Lamb we see,
Whom God so freely gave us;
He died on the accursed tree—
So strong His love!—to save us.
See, His blood doth mark our door;
Faith points to it, Death passes o'er,
And Satan cannot harm us. Hallelujah!
- 6 So let us keep the festival
Whereto the Lord invites us;
Christ is Himself the Joy of all,
The Sun that warms and lights us.
By His grace He doth impart
Eternal sunshine to the heart;
The night of sin is ended. Hallelujah!
- 7 Then let us feast this Easter Day
On Christ, the Bread of heaven;
The Word of Grace hath purged away
The old and evil leaven.
Christ alone our souls will feed,
He is our meat and drink indeed;
Faith lives upon no other. Hallelujah!

*Gott loben und ihm dankbar sein
und singen Hallelujah, Hallelujah!*

- 2 *Den Tod Niemand zwingen konnt
bei allen Menschenkindern:
das macht alles unser Suend',
kein Unschuld war zu finden.
Davon kam der Tod sobald
und nahm ueber uns Gewalt,
hielt uns in sein'm Reich gefangen. Hallelujah!*
- 3 *Jesus Christus, Gottessohn,
an unser Statt ist kommen
und hat die Suende abgethan,
damit dem Tod genommen
all sein Recht und sein Gewalt;
da bleibt nichts denn Tods Gestalt,
den Stachel hat er verloren. Hallelujah!*
- 4 *Es war ein wunderlich Krieg,
da Tod und Leben rungen:
das Leben behielt den Sieg,
es hat den Tod verschlungen.
Die Schrift hat verkuendet das,
wie ein Tod den andern frasz:
ein Sport aus dem Tod ist worden. Hallelujah!*
- 5 *Hier ist das rechte Osterlamm,
davon Gott hat geboten,
das ist hoch an des Kreuzes Stamm
in heiszer Lieb' gebraten:
des Blut zeichnet unser Tuer,
das haelt der Glaub' dem Tod fuer,
der Wuerger kann uns nicht ruehren. Hallelujah!*
- 6 *So feiern wir das Hochfest
mit Herzen, Freud', und Wonne,
das uns der Herr scheinen laesst.
Er ist selber die Sonne,
der durch seiner Gnaden Glanz
erleucht't unsre Herzen ganz:
der Suenden Nacht ist vergangen. Hallelujah!*
- 7 *Wir essen und leben wohl
in rechten Osterfladen;
der alte Sauerteig nicht soll
sein bei dem Wort der Gnaden.
Christus will die Koste sein
und speisen die Seel' allein:*

der Glaub' will keins andern leben. Hallelujah!

1. This hymn addresses God when it ends each stanza with “Hallelujah!” We sing the Hebrew expression for “Praise the Lord!” eight times in this hymn. Furthermore, the first stanza calls the worshipers to be joyful “And sing to God right thankfully/Loud songs of hallelujah.” Luther says: HARNEENU and HA WREE-U! We also have every right to designate the last two stanzas as calls to worship. They are not encouragement to sing or speak praise to God. Rather, they call the believer to worship in spirit and in truth, that is, to worship with a proper attitude and to offer his life as a living sacrifice, which is his spiritual worship.

2. No sooner has Luther issued the call to worship than he launches into teaching his worshipers the basics of sin and grace. Stanzas two and three do this in a masterful way. Incidentally, this kind of format can serve the beginning hymnwriter in good stead: call to worship, then follow with the message of sin and grace.

3. In stanzas four and five, Luther draws the Holy Scriptures into the hymn. In stanza four he quotes 1 Corinthians 15 to confirm that the reign of death is over:

Holy Scripture plainly saith
That death is swallowed up by death,
His sting is lost forever. Hallelujah!

Stanza five presents another use of the Scriptures. Luther refers to the events of the Exodus, specifically the slaughter of the firstborn in Egypt and asserts that Jesus himself is the fulfillment of that story. We can see the Holy Spirit at work especially in the last three verses of stanza five where Luther draws the Exodus, the crucifixion of Jesus and the contemporary worshiper together into a tight relationship when he writes:

See, His blood doth mark our door;
Faith points to it, Death passes o'er,
And Satan cannot harm us. Hallelujah!

The New Testament worshiper realizes that the deepest truth of the events of the Exodus lies in the redemption accomplished by Jesus. The Exodus points to our salvation; Jesus is our salvation; we believe it and are saved. Hallelujah!

4. We need to put ourselves into the mind and heart of the worshiper of that day, if we are to experience the punch of Luther’s application. Remember, going to church was a duty through which the worshiper acquired merit. There was no joy in the worship, since the worshiper understood nothing of what was going on. Jesus was described as the stern judge who would mete out justice on the last day according to works alone. Such a Christ struck fear into the heart of the worshiper. Luther counters and says: let us celebrate this high festival with a heart full of joy and delight that the Lord Jesus himself gives us. Then Luther continues: Jesus himself is sunshine and the light of his grace brings light to our hearts and puts an end to the night of sin. To those who were deathly afraid of the Lord’s Supper, Luther says in the last stanza: Jesus wants to be our nourishment. He wants to be our food. It has to be so, because faith can exist on no one and nothing else.

5. It is a hallmark of Luther’s poetry that he never allowed himself the luxury of expressions that may have been very beautiful but would fly right over the heads of the people. His language was simple, direct and dignified. The best stanzas in which to observe this are the second and third. Here he preaches sin and grace with a choice of words that no one could miss.

6. Stanzas four and five demonstrate the emotional punch that Luther can introduce into his poetry without losing any of the meaning. In these stanzas the emotional punch of the words reinforces the meaning. Your attention is called to the following expressions:

1. *ein wunderbarlich Krieg*
2. *da Tod und Leben **rungen***

3. *es hat den Tod **verschlungen***
4. *wie ein Tod den andern **frasz***
5. *ein **Spott** aus dem Tod ist worden.*
6. *Hie is das rechte Osterlamm,
davon Gott hat geboten,
das ist hoch an des Kreuzes Stamm
in heiszer Lieb gebraten:*

In the last example Luther pushes simplicity, directness and dignity to the outermost limits. A closer translation might read:

Here we see the true Lamb of Easter,
That God commanded us (to eat).
With the intense heat of God's love
It was roasted high upon the cross.

Someone may want to call this gross. Let us, however, take a second look at what Luther is doing. As was previously stated, he is pulling into the tightest possible relationship 1) the love of God, 2) the deliverance from Egypt with the roasting of the lamb, 3) the crucifixion of Jesus and 4) the message that all of this is for us. If we understand Luther as a Bible interpreter and pastor writing a hymn, then these lines are not gross but are rather a rich, powerful and compressed proclamation of the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ.

7. Part of the strength of the hymn before us is the depth of its tradition in the history of the church. Luther separated himself from almost all the other reformers in a special way. He did not cut himself off from the church that preceded him in history, the Roman Catholic Church. He recognized the false doctrines of Antichrist and preached vehemently against them. But he also recognized that, within the church of the Antichrist, the gospel was being proclaimed in different ways: through the reading of Gospel and Epistle in the vernacular, through the songs of the liturgy that we still enjoy today ("Glory Be to God on High," for example), through the regular use of the psalms and through vernacular hymns that were increasing in number as centuries passed. Therefore he reached into this rich treasury of excellent hymns, translated, adapted and adopted them to fit his needs. The "Roots" chart on the following page is an attempt to show the generations of Hymn 195. Without going into great detail at this time, I should like to demonstrate how Luther drew from all three preceding generations as he wrote his hymn:

Stanza 1	Gen. 3	Arisen—from grave's prison. ascended—from the grave. Hallelujah!
Stanza 2–3	Gen. 2	A Lamb the sheep redeemeth: Christ who only is sinless, Reconcileth sinners to the Father.
Stanza 4	Gen. 2	Death and life have contended In that combat stupendous: The Prince of life who died reigns immortal.
Stanza 5	Gen. 2	Here the true Paschal Lamb we see.
Stanza 7	Gen. 1	Then let us feast this Easter Day On Christ, the Bread of heaven;

These references may be oversimplifications. But they give you a hint at the complex process which took place in the mind, heart and spirit of Luther as he composed this famous hymn. This part concludes with the assertion that the creative process always works this way. We read articles written among us today asserting

that it is time to forget the past (in reference to hymnody) and move on now to the future. Such thoughts are written without knowledge of the creative process. Our culture has never moved ahead by ignoring its past. This is true in all its facets. It is especially true in the area of liturgy and music. Luther's liturgical, hymnological and church musical endeavors were strongest because he said yes to the liturgies, to the hymns and to the church music that had been written before his time, unless they clearly contradicted the Word of God. He wanted to use as much as possible from the past in contemporary worship life. In doing so, he learned from it. Then, when the time came for him to move ahead, he could do so with security. Patterns were ingrained in his mind and heart, patterns which he could use, modify or drop. This is always the way the creative process works. In the history of music, for example, Beethoven was known as a radical composer, as an innovator. But he could not move forward until he had thoroughly mastered the art of his predecessor, Franz Josef Haydn. Only after he had learned the art of the past and felt secure in it, did he dare to venture into the future. The very same progression applies to the contemporary composer, now deceased, Igor Stravinsky. After he had mastered the art of his teachers, he dared to venture into paths heretofore unknown. Thus, it is not only desirable but necessary to seat ourselves firmly in the best of our hymnological tradition. It is necessary to sing it into our bloodstream. Only then shall we be able to launch forward into areas which are yet unknown to us. There is no other way.

8. Since the subject is singing, the question will naturally arise: who will want to sing this ancient tune? The melody certainly is lofty, but there is nothing personal about it. Let us consider the matter. Getting to know a really good and lasting melody is like getting to know a person. You do not get to know a person with one short conversation. Everyone of us knows that it takes a long time to get to know someone well. That is what courtship is all about. The same applies to a good melody. We must court it. At the end of the courtship we shall have come to cherish the melody. We in our synod are blessed with the agencies through which this courtship can take place. The first duty of congregational choirs is to learn the hymns for the coming Sunday. When mixed choir and children's choir and the children of the elementary school and Sunday school know the melody and text well, the hymn will "go" in church. But once is not enough. A new or difficult hymn should be repeated many times within the church year. Our Lutheran elementary school is the very finest place to court a melody. The courtship can go on every day. Perhaps the confirmation instruction course could include just one of the Lutheran heritage hymns. The Sunday school can incorporate such instruction. This work can be carried on right up to our seminary. There is no reason why the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod should lose the heritage of Lutheran hymns, no reason at all. The educational agencies are present on every level. May the Lutheran heritage be a living heritage on every level. After all, hymn singing is an integral part of the preaching of the gospel. Sad to say, one single generation can destroy what it took the Lord of the church two thousand years to develop. Is it happening am

Let us hear quotations from other Lutheran hymnwriters as they sing the praises of God. Nikolaus Herman was a contemporary of Luther. One of his most famous hymns is "Praise God the Lord, Ye Sons of Men" (TLH 105). Listen to the call to worship in the first stanza. Notice how both text and music are filled with feeling.

- 1 Praise God the Lord, ye sons of men,
Before His highest throne;
Today He opens heaven again
And gives us His own Son.

His Christmas hymn is not tinsel and ornaments; it contains the important truths to be repeated and celebrated at Christmas: Jesus our Savior is both true God and true man. Stanza three:

- 3 He veils in flesh His power divine
A servant's form to take;
In want and lowliness must pine
Who heaven and earth did make.

Writing of the two natures of Christ in this way is a tradition that dates back to the fifth century (TLH 104):

- 1 Now praise we Christ, the Holy one,
The blessed virgin Mary's Son,
Far as the glorious sun doth shine
E'en to the world's remote confine.

It is continued through the twelfth century (TLH 80):

- 1 All praise to Thee, eternal God,
Who, clothed in garb of flesh and blood,
Dost take a manger for Thy throne,
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone.
Hallelujah!

Martin Luther uses it in his famous Christmas hymn (TLH 85):

- 3 "This is the Christ, our God and Lord,
Who in all need shall aid afford;
He will Himself your Savior be
From all your sins to set you free.

and so did Paul Gerhardt (TLH 81):

- 1 O Jesus Christ, Thy manger is
My paradise at which my soul reclineth.
For there, O Lord, Doth lie the Word
Made flesh for us;
herein Thy grace forth shineth.

Here we see a contemporary of Luther use it. Nikolaus Herman also has a fine way of drawing Bible stories into his poem. We would not expect the story of the fall of man to enter this beautiful hymn, but he draws it into the final stanza when he sings:

- 8 He opens us again the door
Of Paradise today;
The angel guards the gate no more.
To God our thanks we pay.

Another contemporary of Luther, Adam Reusner, offers us an excellent example of a hymn that addresses God in petition and also in doxology: "In Thee Lord Have I Put My Trust" (TLH 524). In the finest tradition of the psalter he addresses God again and again. Knowing that God will hear his prayer, the poet closes with a grand Lutheran doxology:

- 1 In Thee Lord have I put my trust;
Leave me not helpless in the dust,
Let me not be confounded.
Let in Thy Word

- My faith, O Lord,
 Be always firmly grounded.
 7 All honor, praise, and majesty
 To Father, Son, and Spirit be,
 Our God forever glorious,
 In whose rich grace
 We'll run our race
 Till we depart victorious.

We have very few hymns today that adequately teach the doctrine of original sin. Two come to mind. One is in our hymnal (TLH 369): “All Mankind Fell in Adam’s Fall”:

- 1 All mankind fell in Adam’s fall,
 One common sin infects us all;
 From sire to son the bane descends,
 And over all the curse impends.
 2 Through all man’s pow’rs corruption creeps
 And him in dreadful bondage keeps;
 In guilt he draws his infant breath
 And reaps its fruits of woe and death.
 4 But Christ, the second Adam, came
 To bear our sin and Woe and shame,
 To be our Life, our Light, our Way,
 Our only Hope, our only Stay.

At the same time the second part of the hymn preaches the gospel in all its beauty.

A parallel to Luther’s great ballad of salvation, “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice,” is the hymn of Paul Speratus: “Salvation Unto Us Has Come” (TLH 377). Although he does not address God at the beginning nor call fellow worshipers to address God, we still catch the glory of the gospel, its joy and loftiness, in the manner of the poetry and in the loftiness of the melody:

- 1 Salvation unto us has come
 By God’s free grace and favor;
 Good works cannot avert our doom,
 They help and save us never.
 Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,
 Who did for all the world atone;
 He is our one Redeemer.

This entire hymn is rich in doctrinal content, especially of sin and grace, of law and gospel. Let stanza six suffice to represent the many treasured stanzas of this hymn:

- 6 Since Christ hath full atonement made
 And brought to us salvation,
 Each Christian therefore may be glad
 And build on this foundation.
 Thy grace alone, dear Lord, I plead,

Thy death is now my life indeed,
For Thou hast paid my ransom.

The history of Christian hymnody has offered us no finer doxology than the one that closes this hymn. It is too bad that in our Lutheran churches, the churches that glory in the gospel of God's love and mercy and patience and kindness in Jesus Christ, we always end up with the Reformed doxology. This doxology ignores the grace of God, and in singing it we ignore the great Lutheran doxology that sings specifically of the God of grace. Let us all resolve to give this stanza an ever increasing role at the close of our Lutheran liturgies:

10 All blessing, honor, thanks, and praise
To Father, Son, and Spirit,
The God that saved us by His grace,—
All glory to His merit!
O Triune God in heaven above,
Who hast revealed Thy saving love,
Thy blessed name be hallowed.

While we are speaking of doxology, let us remind ourselves that Martin Luther encouraged us to a special kind of praise of God. He encouraged his believers to use all the musical resources at their disposal in praise of the God of salvation. His friend, Johann Walther, the first Lutheran church musician, penned the following words (TLH 67:5):

5 In yonder home shall never
Be silent music's voice;
With hearts and lips forever
We shall in God rejoice.
The angels shall adore Him,
All saints shall sing His praise
And bring with joy before Him
Their sweetest heavenly lays.

At the end of the Reformation century Philipp Nicolai spelled out the grand Lutheran doxology in greater detail (343:6):

6 Lift up the voice and strike the string,
Let all glad sounds of music ring
In God's high praises blended.
Christ will be with me all the way,
Today, tomorrow, every day,
Till traveling days be ended.
Sing out, Ring out,
Triumph glorious, O victorious,
Chosen nation;
Praise the God of your salvation.

Our reinforcement of Luther with the hymn writers of German Lutheranism cannot close with anyone else than Paul Gerhardt. We shall use a hymn that is falling into gradual disuse among us: "All My Heart This Night Rejoices" (77). The first stanza breathes the air of doxology:

- 1 All my heart this night rejoices
As I hear Far and near
Sweetest angel voices.
“Christ is born,” their choirs are singing
Till the air Everywhere
Now with joy is ringing.

We are always looking for Christmas hymns that clearly proclaim that Jesus has rescued us from sin, from Satan, from death and hell. Let stanzas two, six and thirteen suffice to exemplify a much needed message in our Christmas hymnody:

- 2 Forth today the Conqueror goeth,
Who the foe, Sin and woe,
Death and hell, o’erthroweth.
God is man, man to deliver;
His own Son Now is one
With our blood forever.
- 6 He becomes the Lamb that taketh
Sin away And for aye
Full atonement maketh.
For our life His own He tenders
And our race, By His grace,
Meet for glory renders.
- 13 Guilt no longer can distress me;
Son of God, Thou my load
Bearest to release me.
Stain in me Thou findest never;
I am clean, All my sin
Is removed forever.

What more tender address to God in all literature do we have than the last stanza?

- 15 Dearest Lord, Thee will I cherish.
Though my breath Fail in death,
Yet I shall not perish,
But with Thee abide forever
There on high, In that joy
Which can vanish never.

At this point we should really compare the hymns of Lutheranism with those of the father of the English hymn, Isaac Watts. Since this would almost double the length of this essay, the point will have to be made by illustration. Thirty-one of his hymns are in TLH. I am quite sure that in our synod we sing more of his hymns than we do those of Luther, Herman and Gerhardt put together. There are some reasons for this. The English is quite readily understandable. We do not have to think too much about what he says. And the tunes, to our taste at least, are more singable than those of Luther and his generation. Nevertheless, your attention should focus on two critical points of content, and you should reflect upon them in the solitude of your study or den. Luther wrote in TLH 329:2&3:

- 2 Thy love and grace alone avail
To blot out my transgression;
The best and holiest deeds must fail
To break sin's dread oppression.
Before Thee none can boasting stand,
But all must fear Thy strict demand
And live alone by mercy.
- 3 Therefore my hope is in the Lord
And not in mine own merit;
It rests upon His faithful Word
To them of contrite spirit
That He is merciful and just;
This is my comfort and my trust.
His help I wait with patience.

The hymns of Watts indeed speak of sin and of necessary redemption. But nowhere, in all the thirty-one found in TLH, do we hear of our utterly helpless condition in the matter of salvation as strongly as Luther describes it here. Watts is a Methodist and under the influence of its Arminian tendencies. Since this is the case, we also miss the glorying and reveling in the grace and mercy and love and kindness of God in Christ Jesus. This becomes especially evident in his treatment of the psalms. Nineteen of the thirty-one hymns in TLH are treatments of psalms. Indeed, he mentions the grace and mercy of God. Indeed, he sometimes goes so far as to refer it to Jesus. But we miss the glorying, the reveling, the Lutheran jubilation in the face of a gracious God, who has revealed his love to us in Jesus Christ. For all of which we HARNEENU and HAWREE-U! Somewhere along the line, in emphasizing the Reformed and Methodist hymns, we are feeding our parishioners too much plabum and not enough meat. Pastors, teachers, laymen! Let us get back to basics.

Our discussion closes by emphasizing the basics once more. This time they come from the pen of twentieth century hymnwriters, poets who received their training in our own Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In fact, they were brothers. The reference is to Werner and Martin Franzmann. The latter departed this life to enjoy his heavenly reward in 1976. Pastor emeritus Werner Franzmann is living in Wisconsin and, as most of us know, is preaching the gospel by means of the printed word. The brothers have written hymns of surpassing quality, and we shall close by choosing one hymn from the pen of each of the brothers. The hymn of Martin Franzmann is "Thy Strong Word Did Cleave the Darkness," Stanzas 1, 2, 3, 6. It might be well to point out the following characteristics:

1. The entire hymn addresses God in doxology;
 2. The hymn proclaims sin and justification;
 3. The hymn is rich in biblical imagery: from Creation to the creation of faith, II Cor. 5;
 4. The hymn applies the message, St. 3 & 5.
- 1 Thy strong word did cleave the darkness;
At Thy speaking it was done;
For created light we thank Thee,
While thine ordered seasons run:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise to Thee, who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia without end!

- 2 Lo, on men who dwelt in darkness,
Dark as night and deep as death,
Broke the light of Thy salvation,
Breathed Thine own life-breathing breath:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia without end!

- 3 Thy strong word bespeaks us righteous;
Bright with Thine own holiness,
Glorious now, we press toward glory,
And our lives our hopes confess:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia without end!

- 6 God the Father, Light-Creator,
To Thee laud and honor be;
To Thee, Light of Light begotten,
Praise be sung eternally;
Holy Spirit, Light-Revealer,
Glory, glory be to Thee;
Men and angels, now and ever
Praise the Holy Trinity.

Pastor Werner Franzmann's hymns are strongly doctrinal. They teach; they teach especially the precious truths of the second article of the Creed. Therefore his hymns are to a large extent tied closely to Advent-Christmas-Epiphany and to Easter. They are born in part of the conviction that the way to Christian sanctification is not by hammering away at sanctification, but by preaching repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the first apostles did in the earliest days of the Christian church. Furthermore, the language of his hymns is simple, direct and dignified. His hymns are the only hymns we have that choose the very same words you choose when you prepare your sermons and your Bible history and catechism lessons. Yet, sometimes one fears that a prophet has no honor in his own town. Our brothers in Sweden have already translated the hymn being cited and are singing it regularly. We have not used it, at least not until now. This hymn is strong in doctrinal content. Pastor Franzmann, in treating the story of the transfiguration of our Lord, knows that he cannot treat it adequately unless he has also drawn into his message the "hill of shame." He does this in a beautiful, fitting and natural way. The last stanza makes the simple but all-important application. It is the finest transfiguration hymn ever written, entitled "Down from the Mount of Glory":

- 1 Down from the mount of glory
Came Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Recall the wondrous story,
Rich gem in Sacred Word.
Again your faith will view Him
In double glory here;
The greater homage due Him

Will in your life appear.

- 2 Transfigured, Christ the Lowly
 Stood radiant in light,
 Light found in Godhead solely,
 For human eyes too bright.
 Then came a voice from heaven,
 Confirmed what here we see;
 The words “My Son” were given
 To seal His deity.

- 3 Yet mark this glory hidden!
 See Him the mount descend,
 And, by the Father bidden,
 His willing footsteps bend
 To seek humiliation
 In deepest depths of woe,
 To suffer degradation
 No mind can probe or know.

- 4 Strange how His journey ended!
 In love that is His fame
 Our Lord again ascended
 A mount—the hill of shame.
 Upon the cross He proffered
 Himself to agony;
 His holy soul He offered
 To set the guilty free.

- 5 Then hail the double glory
 Of Jesus Christ, our Lord,
 And let the wondrous story
 Full peace and joy afford!
 The holy mount acclaims Him
 The Majesty divine;
 Mount Calvary proclaims Him
 Redeemer—yours and mine.

Now, brothers, beloved in the Lord, let us be busy about our work. Let us resist the forces in our midst that want to turn us away from our Lutheran heritage of hymns. Let us rather practice this heritage: sing it in congregational worship, with our choirs, in our elementary and Sunday school classes, in our confirmation instruction, in our high schools and academies, in our colleges and seminaries. It is not enough that there be a request for an essay on these important matters. It is not enough for mere talk about them. The Lutheran heritage must be put into action. The blessings are immeasurable. First, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will be sung into our bloodstream, the gospel as it was revealed to men of God at a critical time in the history of the holy Christian church. Secondly, when the time comes for the writing of new hymns that will spring from American soil, and that time is now, we will have steady guides to lead us in the right paths so that our new hymnody will do nothing less than glorify our good and gracious God and build the faith of Christ’s holy people. Help us for this task, O Lord. Amen.

Appendix I

The Roots of Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands

Generation	Location	Time	Title	Genre	Source
1	Western Mediterranean	4-7 th C	<i>Alleluia. Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus. Alleluia.</i>	Alleluia (Choir)	<i>Liber usualis</i> (LU) 779 TLH p. 68
2	France (Gaul)	9 th C	<i>Victimae paschali laudes immolent Christiani</i>	Sequence (Choir)	LU 780 LW 10
3	Northern Europe	12 th C	<i>Christ Is Arisen</i>	Spiritual Folk Song	TLH 187
4	Germany	16 th C	<i>Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands</i>	Hymn (People)	TLH 195
5	Germany	18 th C	<i>Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands</i>	Cantata (Choir)	J. S. Bach
6	America	20 th C	?????	Hymn (People)	Luth. Hymnal?

* * * *

Texts

1. *Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. Let us keep the feast with the bread of sincerity and truth. Hallelujah!*
2. Christians, to the Paschal victim Offer your thankful praises. A Lamb the sheep redeemeth: Christ who only is sinless, Reconcileth sinners to the Father. *Death and life have contended In what combat stupendous: The Prince of life who died reigns immortal.* Speak Mary declaring What thou sawest wayfaring. "The tomb of Christ, who is living, The glory of Jesus' resurrection; Bright angels attesting, The shroud and napkin resting. Yea, Christ my Hope is arisen: To Galilee he goes before you." Christ indeed from death is risen, Our new life obtaining. Have mercy, Victor King, ever reigning!
3. Christ is arisen From the grave's dark prison. We now rejoice with gladness' Christ will end all sadness. Lord, have mercy. All our hopes were ended Had Jesus not ascended From the grave triumphantly. For this, Lord Christ, we worship Thee. Lord, have mercy. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! We now rejoice with gladness; Christ will end all sadness. Lord, have mercy.

Christians, to the Paschal Victim
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