

Marks of the Church Hymn Festival

*Tenth General Retreat, Society of the Holy Trinity
Kramer Chapel, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN
Andrew Martin Senn, Organist
Commentary by the Rev. Dr. Frank C. Senn, STS*

CD recordings of this Festival Pr. David Wendel, STS, for a donation of \$10 per CD to cover costs (postage included). Make checks payable to "Saint Luke's Lutheran Church," and mail to the church, 5265 N. Union Blvd., Colorado Springs, CO 80918. Contact Pr. Wendel by e-mail at pr-wendel@sainthlukes-cs.org or phone (719) 598-4397.

1. "The holy Word of God"

"Thy strong Word": *Lutheran Service Book* 578 (Ebenezer)

Stanza 1 - unison; 2 - unison; 3 - harmony; 4 - men; 5 - women; 6 - unison

It may have been easier for Olivier Messiaen, a devout Roman Catholic, to have a vision of the eternal Church created in the image of a dynamic but changeless God, than for us who stand in a reforming tradition. If popes and councils, church assemblies and conventions, can err, where is God's true church to be found?

Martin Luther writes in his treatise *On the Councils and the Church*:

The Children's Catechism teaches us that a Christian holy people is to be and to remain on earth until the end of the world. This is an article of faith that cannot be terminated until that which it believes comes, as Christ promises, "I am with you always, to the close of the age." But how will or how can a poor confused person tell where such Christian holy people are to be found in this world?

First, the holy Christian people are recognized by their possession of the holy word of God....

We are speaking of the external word, preached orally by men like you and me, for this is what Christ left behind as an external sign, by which his church, or his Christian people in the world, should be recognized....

Now, wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, "a Christian holy people" must be there, even though their number is very small. For God's word "shall not return empty" (Isaiah 55:11).

God's word is creative and accomplishes what it sets out to do. The word which cleaved the darkness and created light can create and sustain the church, God's holy Christian people.

"Thy strong word didst cleave the darkness" was written in 1954 for Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, by Martin Franzmann, whose centenary is being observed this year. Franzmann served as a professor at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin and at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,

where he was chair of the exegetical department. Franzmann did graduate work at the University of Chicago for twenty years. He went as a tutor to Westfield House, Cambridge, England, where he was ordained in 1969. He died in Cambridge in 1976. One-time chair of the Synodical Conference, a member of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Missouri Synod's representative to the Lutheran World Federation in 1962, Franzmann wrote a number of biblical commentaries. But he is best known and loved for the hymns he wrote that show a gift for language that befits one who celebrated the power of God's word in creation, redemption, and sanctification.

The tune "Ebenezer" comes from the Welshman Thomas John Williams and was harmonized for *The Worship Supplement* 1969 by Richard Hillert.

2. "The holy sacrament of Baptism"

"I bind unto myself today": LSB 604 (St. Patrick's Breastplate)

Stanza 1 - all; 2 - all; 3 - women; 4 - men; "Christ be with me" - harmony; 5 - all

Second, God's people or the Christian holy people are recognized by the holy sacrament of baptism, wherever it is taught, believed, and administered according to Christ's ordinance. That too is a public sign and a precious holy possession by which God's people are sanctified. It is the holy bath of regeneration through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), in which we bathe and with which we are washed of sin and death by the Holy Spirit, as in the innocent holy blood of the Lamb of God. The holy Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is sealed in the baptized. In times of difficulty we affirm with St. Patrick, "I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity." Tradition ascribes this *lorica* to the apostle to the Irish. By 690, when Tirechan wrote his *Collections*, it was directed to be sung in all the monasteries and churches throughout Ireland. Our earliest extant sources of the hymn are two eleventh-century manuscripts, one of which says:

Patrick made this hymn; in the time of Loegaire mac Neill, it was made, and the cause of its composition was for the protection of himself and his monks against the deadly enemies that lay in ambush for the clerics. And it is a lorica of faith for the protection of body and soul against demons and men and vices: when any person shall recite it daily with pious meditation on God, demons shall not dare to face him, it shall be a protection to him against all poison and envy, it shall be a guard to him against sudden death, it shall be a lorica for his soul after his decease.

The English verse paraphrase was made by Cecil Frances Alexander for use on St. Patrick's Day, 1889. The Irish air to which it was set was edited by Charles Villiers Stanford and it was included in *The English Hymnal* 1906 to a harmonization by Ralph Vaughan Williams. It has been sung in Lutheran worship books since the *Worship Supplement* 1969 to a harmonization by Carl Schalk.

3. "The sacrament of the Altar"

"Now, my tongue the mystery telling": LSB 630 (Grafton)

Stanza 1 - all; 2 - women; 3 - men; 4 - all; 5 - all

Luther writes:

Third, God's people, or holy Christian people, are recognized by the sacrament of the altar, wherever it is rightly administered, believed, and received, according to Christ's

institution. This too is a public sign and a precious, holy possession left behind by Christ, by which his people are sanctified so that they also exercise themselves in faith and openly confess that they are Christian, just as they do with the word and with baptism. The Eucharist has served as the glue that binds together in one fellowship the body of Christ on earth. At a time when that glue was loosening in the high middle ages, the feast of Corpus Christi became a celebration that bound society together around the sacrament of the altar. In 1263 Pope Urban IV commissioned Thomas Aquinas, the greatest theologian of his age, to compose material for the special Mass and Offices for the Feast of Corpus Christ (which is the delayed octave of Maundy Thursday celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday). The hymn "Pange lingua corporis" became the proper hymn for the day; it was a spin-off from Verantius Fortunatus' sixth century hymn "Pange lingua gloriosi proelium" ("Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle"). The original plainsong exists in several variations, including the LBW arrangement by Carl Schalk. We sing it tonight to the lovely French tune by which it became popular in Roman Catholic eucharistic devotion. I note that LSB omits the "Tantum ergo" stanza commonly sung at Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, "Therefore we, before him bending,/ This great sacrament revere;/ Types and shadows have their ending,/ For the newer rite is here;/ Faith, our outward sense befriending,/ Makes the inward vision clear."

4. "The office of the keys exercised publicly"

"Forgive our sins as we forgive": LSB 843 (Detroit)

Stanza 1 - all; 2 - men; 3 - women; 4 - all

Luther writes:

Fourth, God's people or holy Christians are recognized by the office of the keys exercised publicly. That is, as Christ decrees in Matthew 18:15-20, if a Christian sins, he should be removed; and if he does not mend his ways, he should be bound in his sin and cast out. If he does mend his ways, he should be absolved. That is the office of the keys. Now the use of the keys is two-fold, public and private.... Now where you see sins forgiven or reproved in some persons, be it publicly or privately, you may know that God's people are there.

Rosamond E. Herklots was born of British parents in North India. Educated at Leeds University in England, she worked for many years as secretary to an eminent neurologist, and later in the head office of the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus in London. She began writing hymns late in life, and some achieved an immediate success. Of this hymn published in 1969, Ms. Herklots wrote:

The idea of writing the "Forgiveness" hymn came to me some years ago when I was digging up docks in a long-neglected garden. Realizing how these deeply-rooted weeds were choking the life out of the flowers in the garden, I came to feel that deeply-rooted resentments in our lives could destroy every Christian virtue and all joy and peace unless, by God's grace, we learn to forgive.

The text of this hymn was married to a *Kentucky Harmony* tune; it is a marriage of text and tune that has been accepted in many recent hymnals and seems destined to last.

5. The office of the holy Ministry

"God of the Prophets": LSB 682 (Old 124th)

Stanza 1 - harmony; 2 - women; 3 - men; 4 - harmony; 5 - unison

Luther writes:

Fifth, the church is recognized externally by the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers, or has offices that it is to administer. There must be bishops, pastors, or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer, and use the aforementioned four things or holy possessions in behalf of and in the name of the church, or rather by reason of their institution by Christ, as St. Paul states: "He gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8).

Denis Wortman had just been elected as Pastor of the First Reformed Dutch Church in Schenectady, New York, when he was called upon to preach a sermon at a memorial service commemorating Abraham Lincoln just 36 hours after the president was assassinated. It attracted attention and was published nationally. The young pastor noted that Lincoln had been killed on Good Friday, but he applied the image of death and resurrection not to the fallen president but to the distraught nation whose hopes had also been killed by the assassin's bullet.

Wortman viewed the ordained ministry in Old Testament images of prophets, priests, and kings—witnesses to God's word, intercessors for sinners, champions of God's kingdom— but also as apostles who herald the cross of Christ. His hymn is appropriately set to a tune from the Geneva Psalter of 1551 which was used for Psalm 124, "If the Lord had not been on our side when enemies rose up against us, they would have swallowed us up alive."

6. "Prayer, public praise, and thanksgiving to God"

"Our Father, who from heaven above": LSB 766 (Vater unser)

Stanza 1 - unison; 2 - harmony; 3 - harmony; 4 - organ; 5 - women; 6 - men; 7 - organ; 8 - unison; 9 - unison

Luther writes:

Sixth, the holy Christian people are externally recognized by prayers, public praise, and thanksgiving to God. Wherever you see and hear the Lord's Prayer prayed and taught; or psalms or other spiritual songs sung, in accordance with the word of God and the true faith; also the creed, the Ten Commandments, and the catechism used in public, you may rest assured that a holy Christian people of God are present. For prayer, too, is one of the precious holy possessions whereby everything is sanctified, as St. Paul says (1 Tim. 4:5).

Luther put a lot of stock in the Catechism. He not only wrote a little catechism that is memorable because memorizable, but he also set parts of it to verse—to his own tunes.

7. "The holy possession of the sacred Cross"

"Let us ever walk with Jesus": LSB 685 (Lasset uns mit)

Stanza 1 - unison; 2 - harmony; 3 - harmony; 4 - unison

Luther writes:

Seventh, the holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord's Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God's word, enduring this for the sake of Christ:

"Blessed are you when men persecute you on my account" (Matt. 5:11).

Sigismund von Birken was a pastor's son who gave up the study of theology to write poetry. His gifts were recognized by his membership in several honorary societies and his ennobling by the Emperor Ferdinand III in 1657. "Let us ever walk with Jesus" was intended for Passiontide and was published, along with his "Jesus I will ponder now on thy holy passion," in *Heilige Karwochen* (Nürnberg, 1653). The text of this hymn was based on Luke 18:31-43, the story of the rich ruler who could not sell all that he had in order to follow Jesus. Little is known of the composer of this tune other than that he was a cantor and school teacher in Potsdam.

8. "The holy Christian people of God"

"Built on the Rock": LSB 645 (Kirken den er gammelt hus)

Stanza 1 - unison; 2 - women; 3 - men; 4 - harmony; 5 - unison

Finally, Luther writes:

Now we know for certain what, where, and who the holy Christian Church is, that is, the holy Christian people of God; and we are quite certain that it cannot fail us.

Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig lived during the time of rationalism in Denmark and transcended it, although not without suffering the consequences of his efforts. He was reprimanded for his trial sermon in which he preached against rationalism and his ordination was delayed. When he was finally ordained, he was a pastor for ten years without a parish. He finally became chaplain for an old-folks home and was made an honorary bishop only late in life. But that's because he had become famous as a founder of folk schools, a collector of folk stories, and a prolific hymn writer, whose verse required a type of music other than the old chorales. Like Messiaen, with whom we began this program, Grundtvig had a vision of the eternal Church which stands even when steeples are failing. For Grundtvig, as for Luther, we know the church by the faithful preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments.

Society of the Holy Trinity

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