

# reflections

## A Thank-You and a Welcome.

The Editorial Committee thanks Dr. Rebecca Fisher for her excellent work as Book Reviews editor.



We welcome the Rev. Dr. Paul Holtorf as the editor of Book Reviews.



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TYPEFACES USED IN THIS PERIODICAL  
Titles set in 22 point Mrs. Eaves Roman (Emigre of Sacramento). Tracking normal.

Subheads set in 13/13 point Mrs. Eaves bold.

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Now I understand what Mother was doing!

A favorite activity in the Friedrich home was gathering around the piano in the parsonage dining room and singing hymns Mother played. She loved to play. We loved to sing. Many a night of singing ended with *Onward Christian Soldiers* as we marched up the stairs to bed.

"The Church's Song" becomes our song of faith in numerous ways, at various times and in many ways through a myriad of texts and tunes. Mother was helping to develop within her children "both forms of language to [make us] fully human" (Sylwester) and engaging our mirror neurons so we might know *and* feel the love of God in Christ Jesus.

But that's not all Mother was doing!

She was sharing the Spirit-created faith dwelling deep within her. By playing hymns and songs, she was proclaiming to us "a song from the heart of the church to the heart of God, from the heart of the church to the heart of each believer, and from the heart of the church to the world" (Schalk). Her children were the significant part of "the world" God had given her to nurture and nourish. The hymns we sang helped etch in our minds and hearts "the story of how God had acted to save His people" (Schalk). Night after night as we headed to bed, we knew with confidence that if we died before we woke, the Lord, our precious Savior, would our souls take.

But that's not all Mother was doing!

She was engaging her children and preparing them to worship, to consider God's call through Christian vocation and to apply text and tune to "better understand the people and culture around them so that they might effectively convey the Gospel of Jesus" (Jordening). Mother had no crystal ball. She did not know the changes in culture, the obstacles to faith, the challenges in living a life with Christ "faithful unto death" her children would face. But she did know that "without meaningful utility our music becomes just another cultural consumer gimmick. It may attract and hold the worshiper's attention, but ask if it really connects them to something bigger, more meaningful like ... God" (Jordening).

Through music, through hymns and songs old and new, Mother was helping to connect us to someone bigger: to God, the heavenly Father, to Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the world, to the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.

That's what Mother was doing and still is.

Brian L. Friedrich, President

### Spectators or Participants?

A few months ago I walked into a venue draped with lamps and mirrors and mic cords. Expecting acoustic music, I settled into a mellow mood. Then I caught sight of sheet music on the stands—I'm talking pure, genuine, readable sheet music with notes on staves—and my heart jumped. Sure enough, in a few minutes horn players sidled up to the stage and a bass player bounced his major chords off the ska beats. I left the venue energized and inspired.

While living in London, England, for the year, my husband and I have indulged our passion for live music. We've listened to jazz, classical, acoustic rock and punk, and I made a discovery that, although seemingly obvious, has influenced my church music principles: the interaction that occurs between the musicians and the audience is what sparks the concert's energy. It's what gives meaning to the two or three hours that you spend in front of a stage. In other words, without communication between the musician and audience, there wouldn't be a show.

Recently we attended a band's final concert with their drummer. We expected an emotional night of best hits and bittersweet goodbyes, but our anticipation gradually deflated into confusion. The lead singer forgot the words to a ten-year-old song; technical difficulties arose and were never completely resolved; familiar melodies drowned in the shrill electric guitars. It seemed that the band had thrown an exclusive party on stage.

Contrast that experience with a live show in an old Victorian toilet facility under a park. With five acts and the setup time for each one, I expected a mildly good performance. I expected to be distracted. I was wrong. Although each performer played only about five songs, they had arranged their sets so that the audience could go on the journey with them. They took time to introduce themselves, and there was a logical order to their songs. The musicians' careful planning and authenticity demonstrated

their reliance on our participation. Because they entrusted their music to us, we could engage with it and respond to it.

I'm sure we've all attended worship services similar to both of the above concerts. An organist might get carried away in the interlude preceding verse four and confuse the congregation, or we may get stranded ten bars behind a chorus in a cloud of complicated guitar riffs. In these instances, we feel like spectators rather than participants, and most likely we're being led by church musicians who forget to look beyond their organ bench or choir loft. But our worship music should break the barrier between the platform and congregation. Music leaders shouldn't take center stage; the congregation's worship of the Triune God should be center stage. And musicians need to help congregations get there.

We can encourage communication by choosing music that takes the congregation on a journey that symbolizes the celebratory life cycle of our faith: meeting with other believers, asking God's forgiveness, resurrecting the freedom of absolution, and being equipped with God's Word. As Lutherans, we know the service order as we know our own hand. But I think we could do better to celebrate *life* in our services. As much as we profess grace, our worship only mildly represents the freedom of resurrection. The upbeat is missing. The fun is missing. Old Testament worship is full of joy. David danced in his underwear. The psalms tell us to *shout* and lift our hands—to worship all day long and proclaim God's love. When we sing and play energetic music, we liberate our hearts, minds and bodies to sacrifice our own immediate concerns and focus on Him. We relay the message to the congregation that we have a reason to live. Parties demand a congregation's attention.

It's also important that musicians play and sing well so that we don't distract the congregation but rather convey the immediacy of our relationship with Christ

and our worship of Him. C. S. Lewis said, "Let choirs sing well or not at all. Otherwise we merely confirm the majority in their conviction that the world of business, which does with such efficiency so much that never really needed doing, is the real, the adult, and the practical world; and that all this culture and religion (horrid words both) are essentially marginal, amateurish, and rather effeminate activities." In our busy world, we need to convince people that worship is not only essential, but also a privilege.

Regardless whether our worship music is led by organ, choir, orchestra or band, we should lead with servants' hearts. That means communicating to each other. That means being patient with the congregation's needs and preferences and inviting each other to the celebration. Then we can play with our all and return to God the gifts He gives us.

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## Are We Following Luther or Arminius?

I am increasingly of the opinion that American Lutherans are Arminians at heart. According to Jacob Arminius, a Dutch theologian active around 1600, salvation works like this: Way back in the mists of eternity, God looked ahead to see which of His fallen creatures would, if they had free will, turn to Him and be saved. Based on this foreknowledge, God then marked, or predestined, these people for salvation through Christ. The teaching was current in various guises even before Arminius, and some 16<sup>th</sup> century Lutherans thought it sounded pretty good. Philip Melancthon, Luther's closest colleague, came close to asserting it. Luther, on the other hand, wouldn't touch it. He said that if our salvation depended on anything we do or might do, even deciding to believe in Christ, then it is no longer a free gift of God, but rather something we earn. Faith then becomes a good work, something we do to merit God's favor. It is Luther's view and not that of Arminius that became enshrined in the Lutheran Confessions.

But Luther's view has not held up well in today's church. The pitch goes something like this:

EVANGELISM GURU: "Would you give up your life to save your grandson from drowning?"

GRANDPA: "You bet."

EVANGELISM GURU: "Then would you give up your music to save your grandson from going to hell?"

GRANDPA: "Well, I ... uh ..."

The assumption here is that God is not fully responsible for a person's salvation. If He were, then He would find a way to save the grandson regardless of what style of music Grandpa's church employed. If the kind of music really makes a difference in who is ultimately saved, then salvation depends on our actions, and what we do or fail to do can affect not only our own salvation, but someone else's as well. That is flat-out Arminianism, and it is a terrible burden on the Church.

It is not the first time the Missouri Synod has been confronted with this. It happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when revivalists such as Charles Grandison Finney were trying to light a fire under people so they would turn from their sluggish depravity and obey God. Finney believed that if the Church just did things in the right way, in a way calculated to excite people, then the natural and inevitable result would be that people would turn to God in great numbers. For Finney, the mark of the Church's success was how many people came to know Christ. While Finney was best known for his "anxious bench," later revivalists such as Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday would make extensive use of music to draw people in and convince them to accept Christ. In 1890 Missouri Synod president H.C. Schwan took aim squarely at the revivalists when he wrote that the danger in moving to English as the language of worship was the American spirit, "that shallow, slick, indifferent, business-tainted spirit in which also spiritual matters are handled in this country; that sentiment which ... seeks salvation in sweet sensations and in a much busied workery of all kinds."

We see something similar a century earlier in German Lutheranism. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, church music was considered good if it glorified God and carried an appropriate text. But in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, writers began to assign a more significant role to it: "to edify the audience, to arouse them to devotion, in order to awaken in them a quiet and holy fear toward the Divine Essence," in the words of Johann Adolph Scheibe, chapel master to the King of Denmark. Writer after writer presented similar ideas; namely, that the purpose of church music is to manipulate emotions in order to move people closer to God. As with the revivalists, the more people it brings to Christ, then the better the music.

In truth, music does not bring people to Christ. God does. God may use music as His vehicle; but we must not think that music,

by itself, has the power to save souls, nor that individuals moved by music are able to choose to be saved. That is all God's doing, working through His appointed means of grace. I am reminded of the U. S. senator who visited Mother Teresa's clinic and home for the dying in Calcutta. On seeing all the illness and poverty there, the senator asked her how she could possibly cope, how her work could possibly be successful. She replied, "I am not called to be successful; I am called to be faithful."

We too are called to be faithful. Do we select our music in church to be successful in moving people, in reaching them for Christ, in convincing them to become Christians? If so, welcome to Arminianism and the Law. Or do we choose music that glorifies God and conveys as well as possible through its texts and associations the fullness of Christian teaching? If so, welcome to Luther and the Gospel.

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