Concio et Cantio: Proclamation and Praise in Song and Music

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I begin by thanking Pastor Bryan Gerlach for his invitation to participate in this conference; I'm very happy to be here with you. I also thank Bryan for proposing such an interesting topic for me to address. He offered me the opportunity to alter the title and description of this session, but I thought both to be so well conceived that I didn't change a word. Thus, the title of my talk here today is "*Concio et Cantio*: Proclamation and Praise in Song and Music," my assignment being to address the ideas suggested in the description of this session:

> There is significant disagreement between Lutherans and some other Christians about the purpose of music in worship. Some view music as "just praise"; Lutherans view music as both praise and proclamation. The Latin terms [*concio* and *cantio*] mean sermon and song. This presentation will review historical and contemporary perspectives on the purpose of music in worship and offer suggestions for a vigorous Lutheran practice of proclamation and praise.

So that's my assignment, and I propose to address these ideas within a framework of four sections to my talk here today:

> 1. The seventeenth-century Lutheran composer Michael Praetorius (1571–1621) joined the words *concio* and *cantio* in the preface to a 1619 collection of his German chorale settings. But the concept of a close connection between sermon and song, between theology and music, goes back to Martin Luther, so I want to explore Luther's thought concerning the purpose of music in worship, focusing particularly on how he conceptualizes the relationship between praise and proclamation.
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> 2. I want to examine the close connection of "sermon and song" (more specifically, Gospel text and music) some one hundred years after Praetorius by looking briefly at the purpose of Johann Sebastian Bach's cantatas in Leipzig during the 1720s.
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> 3. Moving from historical considerations to our current practice as twenty-first-century Lutheran church musicians, I will discuss the centrality of church year and lectionary as defining elements for the purposeful proclamation of theological

substance through music. I will illustrate this proposition by taking a specific Sunday in the church year—I've chosen Lent 1—as a case study in exploring the unified service, where scripture lessons, sermon, congregational hymns, organ and vocal music all relate closely to one another—an example of the close connection between *concio* and *cantio*, sermon and song. And, in fact, we shall see that it is more than just a matter of a "close connection"; it is an understanding that sermon and song both aim to do exactly the same thing, which is nothing less than *proclaiming the Gospel, the good news that in Christ we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life*.

4. For a second look at music in our current practice, I will examine the *purpose* of music in so-called "contemporary" worship.

I. *Concio et Cantio*: Praetorius and Luther

If I were to quiz you by asking you to select from our Lutheran musical heritage a well-known cantor (which I define as: composer for and leader of music within the Divine Service), I suspect that many of you would name Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), certainly an accurate and appropriate answer. Some one hundred years earlier than Bach there was another prominent composer who worked as a Lutheran cantor; his name was Michael Praetorius (1571–1621), the most important German composer of his generation, and certainly the most prolific, with more than a thousand vocal settings of German and Latin sacred texts. He was particularly dedicated to composing settings of chorales, the German-language hymn repertory that got its start with Martin Luther in the early 1520s.

In his 1619 collection of chorale settings [the *Polyhymnia caduceatrix*] Praetorius included a preface in which he incorporated a clever little play on words, juxtaposing the similar-sounding Latin words *concio* and *cantio*. A *concio* is literally a speech made in the context of a public assembly; Praetorius used the word to refer to the pastor's sermon. A *cantio* is a song; Praetorius used the word to refer to the sacred church music sung within the Divine Service. Praetorius's point in this 1619 preface was not merely to be clever or to demonstrate his

knowledge of the Latin language. His point was to assert a fundamental premise of Lutheran church music, established well before the time of Praetorius and still a bedrock principle of Lutheran music-making, namely that *preaching and music operate on the same plane and strive for the same goal*; *both are a means of proclaiming the Gospel*. Here in English translation is what Praetorius wrote in 1619:

> . . . for the completeness of worship, it is not only appropriate to have a *Concio*, a good sermon, but also in addition the necessary *Cantio*, good music and song.[1]

Note what Praetorius asserts: worship would be *incomplete* without "good music and song"—*cantio*, which he labels as "necessary." The twentieth-century historian of Lutheran church music, Walter Blankenburg, refers to the *concio/cantio* paradigm as "virtually [Praetorius's] manifesto."[2] It was, in fact, the underlying premise that informed Praetorius's entire career as a church composer and Lutheran cantor.

While the play on words *concio/cantio* comes from Praetorius, the underlying concepts that link music with theology, and comprehend music as Gospel proclamation, may be traced back directly to Luther. Praetorius's father, who was also named Michael, worked with Johann Walter at the Latin school in Torgau. And Johann Walter worked with Luther in Wittenberg during the early 1520s, when Luther was shaping the early repertory of chorales as well as the *Deutsche Messe*, Luther's 1526 German-language Mass. It is to Luther that we must look for the conceptual underpinnings that would permit Praetorius to assert that preaching and music were both required within the Divine Service. Praetorius would have grasped this high view of music from his father, who would have gotten it from Johann Walter, Luther's principal musical advisor and one of the earliest Lutheran composers and cantors.

As a man who loved music and was knowledgeable about music, Martin Luther shaped musical and liturgical practices of his time in ways that proved to be absolutely foundational for

Lutheran music-making in subsequent centuries. We who live in a time when there is significant disagreement among Lutherans about matters of music and worship ignore Luther's writings at our peril—and to the detriment of the people of God whom we serve in our congregations. Luther the theological reformer took a quite conservative approach to the liturgical and musical heritage of his own day:

1. retaining the Western liturgical tradition of the Mass (or Divine Service);

2. retaining the monophonic Latin chant associated with the Mass; and

3. allowing for the use of the rich tradition of sacred polyphonic Latin music of his day.

But in addition to retaining (conserving) these parts of his heritage, he also believed it essential to provide *new* repertories of German-language song (chorales, or hymns) for the people to sing, both at church and at home. And not the least of his contributions was providing an overall theology of music that understood music as a gift of God and a means of Gospel proclamation. Thus, it was Luther's liturgical and musical practices, and his theology of music, that made it possible for Praetorius to assert that worship required not only *concio* but also *cantio*, both sermon *and* song.

Luther's conceptual foundation for music in worship paved the way for subsequent generations of Lutheran church musicians: in the seventeenth century for Michael Praetorius, who would place music (*cantio*) alongside preaching (*concio*); in the eighteenth century for Johann Sebastian Bach, whose cantatas provide a model of musical Gospel preaching; in the twentieth century for Paul Manz, who wrote:

> It is a high and holy honor to stand in the rich tradition of Lutheran organists—Pachelbel, Buxtehude, Bach and countless other Old Masters. These, along with so many bright names of the present, have made the story of salvation singable. Isn't it a marvel?[3]

Praetorius, Bach, Manz, and many others "have made the story of salvation singable," but it is ultimately Luther's attitudes toward music that made this high view of music and, therefore, our rich musical heritage possible.

Luther recognized and valued Latin sacred music by the best composers of his day, and his comments on their music provide some insight on his theology of music in worship. Luther's love for the music of Josquin des Prez (ca. 1450/55–1521), the finest and most influential composer of the early sixteenth century, is recorded in Luther's "Table Talk":

> God has preached the gospel through music, too, as may be seen in Josquin, all of whose compositions flow freely, gently, and cheerfully, and are not forced or cramped by rules . . . .[4]

Note Luther's assertion that "God has preached the Gospel through music, too"; for Luther, music was not only a means for praising God but also for preaching and proclaiming the Gospel. Luther also admired the polyphonic music of Ludwig Senfl (ca. 1486–ca. 1542/43), the well-known composer and musician at the influential Bavarian ducal court in Munich. Luther corresponded with Senfl and sought a composition from him. Here is a particularly important portion of a letter from Luther to Senfl, dated October 4, 1530:

> Indeed I plainly judge, and do not hesitate to affirm, that except for theology there is no art that could be put on the same level with music. . . . the prophets did not make use of any art except music . . . so that they held theology and music most tightly connected, and proclaimed truth through Psalms and songs. . . . my love for music . . . is abundant and overflowing.[5]

Luther asserts that the prophets "held theology and music most tightly connected." That is the kind of foundational statement on theology and music that would suggest to a Lutheran of a later generation, like Praetorius, that both sermon and song (*concio* and *cantio*) need to be present in the liturgy. Second, Luther notes that with "theology and music most tightly connected," *truth is proclaimed* "through Psalms and songs." That is a bedrock premise of Lutheran music-making,

that in our work as Lutheran church musicians we do not merely add musical beauty to the service, nor do we set a mood, nor do we seek to manipulate emotions through the "heart language" of music, as some in our day would have it. On the contrary, our purpose is much more profound—as Luther would have it, we *proclaim truth through music*; or at least we have the *potential* of proclaiming truth through music—depending on the musical choices we make (and more on that topic in parts three and four of this paper).

Finally, in our consideration of Luther's shaping of worship and music in ways that continue to guide us as twenty-first-century Lutheran church musicians, I want to quote a particularly important insight from Luther that goes to the heart of our Lutheran understanding of the purpose of music in worship. In 1538 Luther wrote a preface to a published collection of Latin motets for the church year. In a particularly remarkable passage Luther wrote:

> . . . the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music. . . .[6]

Thus, for Luther, music and language are gifts of God to be used for the purpose of praising God. Had he stopped there, this statement would not be, as I have characterized it, a *remarkable* statement. But in the same sentence Luther goes on to tell us *how* we praise God with word and music: "by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music." According to Luther, we praise God not by singing "Lord I praise you" (perhaps repeated several times) but rather by *proclaiming* His Word—His message of salvation in Jesus Christ. In a similar way, the historian of early Christian thought Robert Louis Wilken observes:

> The psalmists do not simply praise the majesty and goodness and power of God, they identify God by his actions, "his mighty deeds." To praise God is to narrate what he has done.[7]

Wilken might have had in mind, as just one possible example, Psalm 9:11: "Sing praises to the Lord, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!" Thus, according to the psalmist, singing praises to the Lord is connected with telling his deeds among the peoples. Luther articulated that same premise: we praise God by telling what He has done, by proclaiming God's Word, by preaching the good news of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life won for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—*not only in sermons* (concio) but, yes, *also in our music* (cantio).

Before concluding this section, I want to pose a variant of that fundamental Lutheran question "What does this mean?" To be a bit more precise, the question is: what are some of the *implications* of Luther's views for what we do as twenty-first-century Lutheran church musicians? Here I want to pay particular attention to hymns, by looking at hymns through the lens of Luther's view that we praise God "by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music." Viewed through that lens, hymns are not only for the purpose of "singing praise or thanks to God," as the popular conception might have it. Yes, in some of our hymns we explicitly offer praise and thanks to God, but in the best of circumstances we do so—as Luther suggests—within the context of proclaiming the Gospel. Let me cite just one example from the WELS hymnal *Christian Worship* [see the handout for the text of *CW* 380 "Lord, 'Tis Not that I Did Choose You"]. This early nineteenth-century hymn text proclaims the Gospel in a way that is critically important in our day, when we so often hear words to the effect: "I have accepted Christ," or "I have decided to believe in Jesus." The hymn writer supplies a necessary corrective, stressing that, in fact, Christ chose us. From stanza two: "It was grace in Christ that called me" and ". . . if I love you, You, O Father, loved me first." These first two stanzas proclaim the Gospel message: God comes to us; He has done the choosing, the loving, the forgiving. According to Luther,

when we sing the words of these hymn stanzas we are *praising* God by *proclaiming* the Word of God. If we sang *only* these two stanzas we would be engaged in the act of praising God for His grace and love. Now, as it happens, there is a third stanza, a doxological stanza with phrases like:

> Praise the God of all creation;
> Praise the Father's boundless love.
> Praise the Lamb . . .
> Praise the Spirit . . .

But in Luther's view we would also have praised God in stanzas one and two as we proclaimed the Gospel of God's gifts to us.

Luther's linking of praise with proclamation thus offers us a measuring stick by which we might assess our hymn choices—which hymns to include in a denominational hymnal, or which hymns to place on the lips of God's people assembled for the Divine Service. We have much to gain as we look back to Luther (rather than looking to American evangelicalism, to popular culture, or to the megachurch down the street); looking to Luther assists us to recover our bearings as we navigate the turbulent religious and cultural currents in early twenty-first-century America.

II. Bach the Musical Preacher

One hundred years after Praetorius was writing about the close connection between sermon and song, another Lutheran cantor, Johann Sebastian Bach, was at work writing sacred cantatas that were the musical counterparts of spoken sermons. Bach composed about 300 cantatas, of which about 200 have come down to us. Bach's cantatas date primarily from his years in Weimar and Leipzig, Bach being employed in Weimar from 1708 to 1717, first as court organist and, from 1714, also as *Konzertmeister*. The latter appointment required him to provide a cantata for the court chapel on a monthly basis. About twenty of his surviving cantatas may be

dated to the years 1714–1716 in Weimar. Most of Bach's sacred cantatas were composed (and older ones reworked) during his early years in Leipzig, beginning in May 1723. His appointment there included two broad areas of responsibility: 1) as cantor of the St. Thomas School he was responsible for the musical training of the students at that boarding school, and 2) as director of music for the city of Leipzig he provided for and supervised the music at four of the city churches. Bach needed to provide a cantata every week, and his efforts in that regard were particularly noteworthy in his first two years in Leipzig—1723 and 1724, when he produced two extensive annual cycles of cantatas for the church year.

Bach's cantatas show the continuing close connection in eighteenth-century orthodox Lutheranism between *concio* and *cantio*, between Gospel text and a musical exposition of that text. I want to illustrate that premise by taking a brief look at Bach's cantata for Trinity Sunday, *O heilges Geist- und Wasserbad* ("O Holy Washing of Water and the Spirit"), BWV 165. This cantata was first performed in Weimar on June 16, 1715 and was reused by Bach in Leipzig, possibly on Trinity Sunday of 1724. The text (or libretto) of the cantata is by Salomo Franck, court poet at Weimar, and is based on the appointed Gospel lesson for Trinity Sunday, John 3: 1–15, the title of the cantata relating to verse five: "Unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (see the handout, p. 3, for this Gospel lesson). (Incidentally, if you were to look in your hymnal, you would see on page 166 of *Christian Worship* that this Gospel lesson remains the appointed Gospel for Trinity Sunday in the one-year lectionary, and page 164 shows that this Gospel lesson is also appointed for Trinity Sunday in year B of the three-year lectionary.)

One of the most interesting and helpful prose documents that has come down to us in Bach's own hand is a simple listing of the order of elements in the Divine Service as it was

observed in Leipzig; he entered this list in the autograph score of the cantata BWV 61, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* ("Savior of the Nations, Come").[8] Bach's listing in the manuscript of BWV 61 shows us how the cantata fits into the Sunday morning service (see the handout, p. 4). After the Gospel (8), Bach notes "preluding on" (and, by implication, performance of) the "principal music," i.e., the cantata (9). Bach actually rarely used our term "cantata," using instead the term *Hauptmusik* (principal music) or simply *Musik* (the music). Following the *Hauptmusik* the congregation sang the Nicene Creed in Luther's hymnic version: "Wir glauben all an einen Gott" ("We All Believe in One True God," hymn 271 in *Christian Worship*). Then the pastor preached the sermon (11), and after the sermon the congregation sang a hymn (12). Holy Communion followed; Bach notes the Words of Institution (13), and then (14) preluding on [and performance of] "the music," i.e., a second part of the cantata if there was a part two, or perhaps a distinct second cantata. Thus, the cantata, or *Hauptmusik*, found its place after the reading of the Gospel and before the creed and sermon, secondarily during distribution of the Lord's Supper. It is useful for us to note how closely the cantata was related—by its very placement in the Divine Service—to Word and Sacrament. The sequence of Gospel/cantata/creed/sermon places musical proclamation right after the reading or intoning of the Gospel lesson for the day. The preaching, based on the Gospel, was, therefore, prepared by the *Hauptmusik*. The cantata was the *musical* proclamation of the Gospel; the sermon was the *spoken* proclamation of the Gospel. It is that purposeful sense of music as proclamation, linked to the Gospel, that still ought to serve as a model for us today.

Let's imagine ourselves in Leipzig on Trinity Sunday. We are seated in one of the two principal churches—either St. Thomas or St. Nicholas, the performance of Bach's cantatas alternating between these two churches from one Sunday to the next. The church is quite full for

the three- to four-hour morning service, each church accommodating around 2,500 people, and reports of full churches being common during this period in Leipzig's history. The first hour accommodated those parts of the service up through the sequence of Gospel/cantata/creed. The second hour was devoted to the sermon. Depending on the number of communicants, the distribution of the Lord's Supper would last for one or two additional hours.

Imagine that we've reached the point in the service where the Gospel is intoned to a chant formula. Following the Gospel the organist begins his preluding prior to the cantata; this musical interlude essentially provides an opportunity for the instrumentalists discreetly to tune up. Then we hear the beginning of Kantor Bach's cantata *O heilges Geist- und Wasserbad*. The text relates closely to the Gospel lesson, where Jesus instructs Nicodemus, with a particular emphasis on Baptism, the cantata text reflecting especially verse five of the Gospel lesson: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Thus, the first aria text invites us to reflect on the blessings of Baptism (see the handout, pp. 5–6, for the German text and English translation):

> O holy washing of water and the Spirit,
> Which incorporates us to God's kingdom
> And records us in the book of life!
> O flood that drowns all misdeeds
> Through its wondrous power
> And gives us the gift of new life!
> O holy washing of water and the Spirit!

The first recitative follows, with a clear presentation of Law and Gospel:

> The sinful birth of Adam's cursed offspring
> Brings forth the wrath of God, death and ruin.
> For that which is born of the flesh,
> Is nothing but flesh, infected by sin,
> Poisoned and contaminated.
> How blest is a Christian!
> In the washing of water and the Spirit
> He becomes a child of bliss and grace.

> He puts on Christ
> And the white silk of His innocence,
> He puts on the clothing of Christ's blood, the purple robe of glory,
> When baptized.

The second aria is a prayer that the Christian live out his or her Baptism throughout one's earthly life:

> Jesus, who out of great love
> Did assign me in baptism
> Life, salvation and true happiness,
> Grant that I rejoice
> And renew this bond of grace
> In the whole of my lifetime.

In the first three sections of his libretto the poet of the cantata text, Salomo Franck, has proclaimed Law and Gospel and taught about Baptism as the Sacrament that, in the words of the Apostle Peter, "now saves you" (I Pt 3:21a).

Thus far I've spoken only of the text, but with the second recitative I want to focus not only on the text but also on Bach's music, for it is, after all, the relationship between text and music that we want to view within the historical tradition of Luther and Praetorius, especially Luther's view that "God has preached the gospel through music, too." Significantly, the second recitative in this cantata is an *accompanied* recitative, meaning that Bach employs all of the instruments for which this cantata is scored—not just the continuo group, as was customary for simple recitatives. Bach's music *underscores* and *intensifies* certain details of the text, a text that focuses generally on Baptism, but also alludes to the last two verses of the Gospel lesson for Trinity Sunday:

> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (Jn 3:14–15)

Here is the text of the second recitative:

> I have indeed, my soul's Bridegroom,
> Since you have born me anew,
> Sworn ever to be faithful to You,
> Most holy Lamb of God;
> Yet I have, alas, often broken the bond of Baptism
> And not fulfilled, what I promised,
> Be merciful, Jesus
> Out of Your grace, to me!
> Forgive me the sins I have committed,
> You know, my God, how painfully I feel
> The ancient serpent's bite;
> Sin's poison corrupts me body and soul,
> Grant that I by faith choose you,
> O blood-red [fiery] serpent image,
> Which on the cross is lifted up,
> Which soothes all pain
> And revives me, when all strength has vanished.

I've included in your handout a copy of the two-page score for this movement, and before we listen to a recorded performance of this accompanied recitative, I want to point out a few details of Bach's use of music to underscore details of the text—these procedures being the musical equivalent of a preacher using his voice, his cadence, his sense of rhetoric to underline and emphasize certain words or phrases. [Please see the score on pp. 7–8 of your handout.]

> mm. 5–6: Note how Bach uses an extensive vocal melisma to emphasize the word "hochheilges" (*most holy* Lamb of God).

> m. 11: It's subtle, but when Bach gets to the word "Gnaden" (grace) he uses a dotted quarter note—the longest note value thus far in the vocal line to emphasize that key theological word. In fact, no other pitch in the vocal line is longer than this one—the note value emphasizes the word musically, just as the preacher might emphasize the word "grace" by lengthening it and increasing his volume.

> mm. 12–14: Note the dissonant intervals: the c-natural leap down to d-sharp on "Sünde" (sins), and the tritone e-natural up to b-flat on "schmerzlich" (painful).

> m. 15: On the word "Schlangen" (serpent) Bach's melodic line looks (perhaps more than sounds) like the "slither" of a snake ["Augenmusik"].

> m. 21: Again, note the ascending tritone d-natural to g-sharp as the singer approaches the word "Schmerzen" (pain).

> mm.22–end: On the closing text, “when all strength has vanished,” the instruments are eliminated at the final cadence, the bass line sounding the closing tonic pitch by itself—the other instruments metaphorically *not having the strength* to conclude the movement.

[PLAY EXAMPLE]

The point is not, of course, to focus on the individual details that I enumerated, but rather on the totality of the movement—1) the fact that it is an *accompanied* recitative, and 2) the combined impact of the various ways that Bach underscores the text—he is taking on the role of musical preacher, explicating the Gospel text musically in advance of the pastor doing the same thing verbally and rhetorically in his hour-long sermon.

At this point in my paper if you’re asking yourself “Does he really think that we should be doing Bach cantatas in our churches?” that is emphatically *not* my point. As a music historian I find the study of Bach’s cantatas endlessly fascinating, especially when considered in the context of the lectionary of Bach’s time, thus permitting us to examine his cantatas as musical preaching, as Gospel proclamation. And as a church musician I have very occasionally done single movements of a Bach cantata in a service, and found that practice to be effective in proclamation. But the point here is to show that in this cantata, and hundreds of others, we see Bach’s music standing in that tradition of Luther and Praetorius—music preaching the Gospel, *cantio* standing alongside *concio*, both being necessary (in Praetorius’s judgement) for “the completeness of worship.”

III. Current Practice: Church Year and Lectionary as Defining Elements for Musical Proclamation

I want to turn now from historical considerations to more practical considerations as we continue to think about the two interrelated themes of this presentation: 1) the purpose of music

in worship, and 2) proclamation and praise. I hope that by now I might have persuaded you that the purpose of music in worship is, in fact, to proclaim the Gospel, to proclaim theology in a substantive way. The question now is how best to do so—how best in our own day to have a situation where *concio* and *cantio*, sermon and song, stand in a mutually reinforcing relationship. My answer with respect to *how* is simply this: the church year and especially the lectionary are indispensable and absolutely foundational for music to function as proclamation. It is the lectionary that provides the essential context out of which meaningful musical proclamation takes place within Lutheran worship.

A lectionary specifies the biblical lessons that are to be read aloud in the Sunday worship services throughout the church year.[9] Roman Catholic as well as many Protestant church bodies in North America utilize some variant of the three-year lectionary that had its origin in the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the three-year lectionary having been introduced in Roman Catholic churches at the start of the new church year in November 1969. In the United States, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and other church bodies followed soon after with their own versions of the three-year lectionary. The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, for example, published its version of the three-year lectionary in 1973. The *Revised Common Lectionary*, dating from 1992, is yet another revision of the 1969 Roman Catholic lectionary. Lutheran bodies such as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have also continued to provide the historic one-year lectionary series of Epistle and Gospel readings used by generations of Christians. The one-year series continues to be preferred by some pastors, who emphasize the catechetical value of hearing the same lessons year after year.

Regardless of which lectionary is chosen for use in a particular congregation, the lectionary has the potential to provide an overall sense of unity for all aspects of the worship service on any day of the church year. Just as in Bach's day the lectionary provided a context for the cantata (*cantio*) and the sermon (*concio*), so also in our day it is the lectionary that can provide the basis for the sermon, the hymns, the organ music based on hymns, and the vocal and choral music. I want to explore this premise as a kind of normative, even ideal, methodology—the lectionary being at the center with all other *concio* and *cantio* growing outward from it, like a series of concentric circles (see the handout, p. 9). Thus, God's Word is at the core of worship, with preaching and music (*concio* and *cantio*) seeking to explicate, explore, expound, expand upon God's inspired, inerrant Word—one of His gifts when we gather for His Divine Service to us.

Let us consider the First Sunday in Lent. The appointed Gospel lesson in each of the series of the three-year lectionary, as well as in the historic one-year lectionary, is the account of Jesus being led into the wilderness immediately after His Baptism, there to fast for forty days and forty nights before undergoing a series of temptations by the devil. Each of the synoptic Gospels records this event; thus, the accounts by Matthew, Mark, and Luke provide the Gospel readings for series A, B, and C respectively, as is the usual procedure in the three-year lectionary.

The customary Hymn of the Day for this Sunday is Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," the first and third verses giving us the opportunity to reflect on the devil, his temptations, and the blessings that are ours because Jesus overcame the devil's temptations. From stanza one of Luther's hymn:

> The old evil foe
> Now means deadly woe;

Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

And stanza three:

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
They shall not overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done!
One little word can fell him.

Stanza one acknowledges the devil's power, but stanza three proclaims Satan's defeat by Jesus. Singing Luther's hymn after the Gospel lesson on the First Sunday in Lent provides us an opportunity not only to reflect on that lesson but to *proclaim* the good news that Jesus has done for us what we can never do for ourselves—to resist *all* of the devil's assaults and temptations. In our corporate proclamation we sing:

He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done!

The idea is not that we simply repeat the Gospel lesson; rather, in our *cantio* we do what a preacher does in his *concio*—we expand on the lesson, we apply it to our lives, we proclaim a message of hope and victory through our Savior Jesus Christ.

Another congregational hymn that fits well for Lent 1 is "Triune God, Oh Be Our Stay" (*CW* 192). In this hymn we ask God to "Keep us from the evil one," and we paraphrase Ephesians 6:11:

Let us put God's armor on,
With all true Christians running
Our heav'nly race and shunning
The devil's wiles and cunning.

Thus, the lectionary with its Gospel lesson is at the center of the Divine Service. That lesson will often serve as the basis for the sermon (*concio*) and for the sung proclamation of the congregation (*cantio*). Both *concio* and *cantio* proclaim the truths of the Gospel lesson (and indeed of the related Old Testament and Epistle lessons).

But the interesting thing for Lutheran church musicians is that *cantio*, musical proclamation, is not limited to congregational song. Vocal and choral music, as well as textless instrumental music, all play their part in Gospel proclamation. For the First Sunday in Lent I think particularly of a wonderful Gospel motet by the twentieth-century Lutheran composer Jan Bender (1909–1994). His composition entitled "Begone, Satan"[10] picks up on Matthew 4:10:

> Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

This accessible composition for unison voices sets this Scripture verse very expressively in a recitative-like manner, and follows with the hymn verse cited earlier, "Triune God, Oh Be Our Stay," as a middle section, after which the Scripture-verse recitative is repeated to conclude the motet.

I asserted that textless instrumental music is also part of the *cantio* that proclaims the Gospel. I want to focus here on the organ music that is such an important part of our Lutheran heritage of music, specifically organ music based on hymns. Moreover, my focus here is on a continuum in which organ music is connected to hymns, and hymns are connected to the lectionary readings.

The hymn, which is both a textual and a musical expression, plays an intermediary role in linking organ hymn preludes (purely musical in nature) to lectionary readings (purely textual in nature) (see the handout, p. 10). As both a musical and a textual expression, the hymn stands between an organ prelude and a lectionary reading, the hymn pulling those two entities toward

each other so that they can stand in a meaningful relationship one to the other, the purely musical expression thus being able to comment on the lectionary reading. In this linked continuum, organ music has the capacity to proclaim specific theological meaning. For example, an organ setting of the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" has the capability of triggering in the mind of the listener a recall of both the text of this particular hymn and, in turn, its associated theological content—perhaps, for example, the references to the devil in stanzas one and three that we noted in the Gospel lesson appointed for Lent 1. What happens very naturally—really without our thinking much about it—is a sophisticated kind of associative communication process.[11] The perception of a well-known hymn melody leads to a recall of the associated hymn text, which leads the listener to a recognition of the theological content proclaimed by the hymn text, which is itself standing in a relationship to the lectionary readings for a specific day in the church year. Thus, there is a continuum linking organ setting—to hymn melody—to hymn text—to lectionary reading, which in turn prompted the selection of that hymn, and consequently the selection of that organ hymn prelude.

It is important to stress that the more clearly perceptible the hymn melody, the greater the potential that this associative communication process will take place. Further, such a communication process assumes and is dependent upon a group of participants who have thoroughly internalized a common heritage of hymn tunes and texts. In fact, this prerequisite is not only possible but likely in the life of the Lutheran parish at worship, particularly in a parish where the program of catechesis has included the study (and singing) of our heritage of Lutheran hymns—a hymn repertory extending from Luther up to and including the living poets and composers of our own day.

What are the *practical* aspects of linking organ music to hymns to lectionary readings? Organists—as much as possible, play music based on the hymns selected for a particular service. Further, as much as possible, those organ settings should feature the hymn melody in a prominent and perceptible way.

Pastors and organists—choose hymns purposefully on the basis of their textual ability to complement the readings appointed in the lectionary for each Sunday. Plan well in advance, preferably by season of the church year, so that the organist has the opportunity to locate and learn organ settings based on the hymns for each Sunday.

Finally, what about the people sitting in the pews? Given the pervasive role of music as mere background in our society, one might ask whether I can realistically expect that members of a congregation will use the times of organ music in the worship service as opportunities to think about the appointed lessons and the theological content of a particular day or season of the church year. Can I realistically expect that members of a congregation will know a repertory of hymns so well that they make the mental connection from a well-known tune to its associated text? The answer depends in part on the catechetical traditions within a given parish, but also on whether organist and pastor take the time to acquaint parishioners with the concept that music in the church plays its part in the proclamation of the Gospel. We can point out to the members of our congregations that even textless organ music can be an expression of specific theological meaning and purpose, rather than mere background music before the service or during the offering. We don't want them to focus on us as musicians, nor on the music itself (as would be the case at a concert or recital). Rather, with hymnals in hand, parishioners should read the hymn text on which the organ setting is based, allowing that text to comment on the lessons for the day. We need to suggest this possibility to our parishioners by making continuing use of educational

forums and other types of congregational meetings as opportunities for demonstrating the purpose and meaning of music in the Divine Service. Take people into your balcony or sanctuary; play a short hymn or chorale prelude with a clearly perceptible hymn melody. Suggest that one might use such a prelude as a time to read the hymn text and think about its meaning. Stress that unlike a recital or concert, where one listens to music for its own sake, organ music in the Divine Service is carefully chosen for the specific purpose of contemplating the hymns and readings for the day. Demonstrate the connections and unity of approach among (in this order) readings, hymns, and organ music. Through this approach, congregational members can become increasingly aware of the proclamatory purpose of music in the Divine Service. The response I have met with most frequently from members of parishes where I have done such work is "I've never thought about it in that way, but it makes sense." One parishioner remarked to me a week after such an educational session in the balcony: "I tried your advice this morning by reading the hymn text while you played the prelude; it made my worship experience so much more meaningful, and when it came time to sing that hymn I did so with greater understanding." As a church musician, I've not forgotten that moment, and I continue to believe that we owe our parishioners nothing less than music-making that is not only done well, but done for the specific purpose of Gospel proclamation. In that way *cantio* stands alongside *concio*, in the role that Luther and Praetorius envisioned for music in worship.

IV. Current Practice: Music in "Contemporary" Worship

As a second way to look at music in our current practice, I want to examine the *purpose* of music in so-called "contemporary" worship. First, a disclaimer: I'm going to be addressing this topic as one who comes from a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod perspective, where the

presence of both “traditional” and “contemporary” worship is fairly common in many parishes. I don’t know the landscape of the Wisconsin Synod in this matter—how invested individual congregations are in contemporary, blended, or convergent worship. Nor would it be appropriate for me, as an outsider, to weigh in on such practices in WELS circles. But I suspect that these practices are hardly unknown to most of you in this session. So I ask your indulgence in allowing me to reflect on this area of current musical practice in the church; I do so because it relates to the larger topic of the *purpose* of music in worship.

If I were asked to describe the music-making that is characteristic of “contemporary” worship in a Lutheran congregation today, I would do so 1) in terms of the instruments used, and 2) in terms of the rhythmic dimensions of the music. In a “contemporary” worship service one would typically find at least these instruments used: guitars (electric, acoustic, or both), keyboard (often electric, but sometimes an acoustic piano), and drum set. Thus, the standard instrumentation for a so-called “praise band” is similar to that of a rock band, though many a “praise team” in a church will include any and all instrumentalists from the congregation who care to participate. The “praise team” is completed by singers, most often amplified through hand-held or lip microphones. The musicians are most often located not in a rear balcony, where one might find the parish choir and organ, but rather in the front of the sanctuary, as on a stage.

The defining characteristic of the music itself is the dominance of rhythm over all other aspects of music, such as melody and harmony. This dominance of rhythm provides not only a strong sense of “beat” but, more precisely, a prominent “backbeat,” a typical trait of pop music in which the weak beats in a 4/4 or 12/8 measure—beats two and four—are consistently emphasized. Thus, the instruments used as well as the dominance of pop music rhythmic patterns combine to provide a musical identity quite separate from that of the Lutheran musical heritage.

Of course, "contemporary" *worship* in Lutheran churches includes more than music. In fact, scripture readings and sermon may well be the same as in a so-called "traditional" service offered at a different time on Sunday morning. Thus, if a Lutheran parish offers both "traditional" and "contemporary" services, it may not be the *concio* that differs between the two types of services, but rather the *cantio*—the music. In fact, it may be *only* the music that differs, and that's what makes this topic so fascinating for me as a church musician and musicologist. Thus, my questions are these: Why is it that *music* is the defining aspect of the new reality—traditional, contemporary, blended, and convergent worship? Why is it that on Sunday mornings in some Lutheran parishes we sort ourselves according to music?

What we call "contemporary" worship, including its musical component, is a series of practices that Lutherans have borrowed from American evangelicalism, and we have pretty much borrowed these practices intact, without, for example, any attempt to reconcile the musical practices of "contemporary" worship with historic Lutheran musical practices. Indeed, some Lutherans—pastors and laity alike—have deemed "historic Lutheran practice" in music to be detrimental to drawing the unchurched into a local Lutheran parish. As advocates of church growth noticed the growth of community churches into megachurches, they seized on the musical practice of such churches as a technique that they believed could be transferred directly into Lutheran parishes. The premise was that churches desiring to grow would use popular musical styles to draw people who might otherwise stay away from church. It wasn't at all difficult to find such music—contemporary Christian music (CCM) had become a booming part of the American music industry (recordings, published music, live concerts) since the late 1970s—well before some Lutheran parishes decided to move in that direction. Thus, with only a few exceptions, Lutherans determined to use CCM got their texts and music from the same

places that American evangelicals had been getting their texts and music. (And never mind, apparently, that many of those texts were full of decision theology.) Thus, the purpose of "contemporary" Christian *music*, as a part of "contemporary" *worship*, was to attract people to come try a particular Lutheran parish. Of course, "contemporary" music as a drawing card had to continue *ad infinitum*; there was no way short of "bait and switch" tactics to attract people with one kind of worship and music but then at some point have them transition to what had been the more standard type of Lutheran worship and music.

This dilemma required some rationalization. In 1988 an LCMS pastor, David Luecke, published a book entitled *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance: Facing America's Mission Challenge* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988). Not surprisingly, perhaps, music fell into the category of style rather than substance. I quote directly from Luecke, in this case from a follow-up book published in 1995:

> Yes, many contemporary praise and worship songs fall short of a full Christological message, or do not present a good reminder of sin and justification. But that is not the intent. There are other parts of the time together, chiefly the sermon, for the full message. . . . Is it OK in authentic Lutheran worship to sing simple praise and worship songs that fall short of teaching the full message of sin and salvation in Christ? A reasonable answer is Yes, assuming other parts of the service present Law and Gospel proclamation.[12]

Thus, Luecke advocated a compartmentalization in which music is simply a time for praise, while the sermon is the time to present the "full message." How vastly different this understanding is from Luther's views on the purpose of music in worship! And this is precisely why Lutherans sometimes disagree on matters of worship and music—because we don't agree on the *purpose* of music in worship. Why do we have music in worship? What should be the characteristics of that music? If you believe that music in Lutheran worship should play its part in Gospel proclamation, that music should, in fact, participate in "teaching the full message,"

then your musical choices will be informed by the views of Martin Luther and the rich heritage of music extending chronologically from Luther up through the latest music publications from Northwestern Publishing House, Concordia Publishing House, MorningStar Music, and others. If, on the other hand, you believe that music in Lutheran worship should mirror the pop music cultures around us so as to draw people into churches, then your musical choices will be informed by a different set of philosophies that favor so-called “contemporary” worship and music.

Of course, one could respond at this point: “Why can’t we use both types of music; why can’t we blend them together, why can’t we allow these two streams of music to converge?” The short answer, of course, is that you can! Questions remain about texts and music of so-called “contemporary” Christian worship, and there is a significant disconnect—let me explain. In all of my reading in the literature of church growth, contemporary worship, and contemporary music, I’ve never come across a Lutheran who said: “We need to focus on ‘contemporary’ music because our Lutheran hymns are inadequate in their exposition of Word and Sacrament, their proclamation of the Gospel and eternal life in Christ.” Lutherans who advocate for contemporary Christian music are after *the sound of the music*, which they sometimes refer to as the “heart language” of today’s worshippers, and they will rationalize second-rate texts and theology in order to have that musical sound. Here’s the disconnect, the irony: They want to use music to reach out to those who are unchurched, who don’t know the good news of the Gospel, forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life. But by preferring the music of contemporary Christian songs to the hymns of our Lutheran heritage, they deprive the unchurched of the corporate sung confession of theologically strong hymn texts that distinguish Law and Gospel and focus on Christ and his gifts. Such hymn texts are filled with doctrine that comforts sinners

and gives hope to those who yearn for life with Christ. Well, the response at this point might be: "Hey, we're talking about the *unchurched* here—perhaps first-time visitors to any church! They've never heard all this doctrinal stuff about Law and Gospel." Precisely—and a powerful way to have an effect on such people is for them to hear a congregation of young and old, women and men singing a Lutheran hymn like Martin Franzmann's "Thy Strong Word," perhaps accompanied by organ and trumpets:

> Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous
> Bright with Thine own holiness,
> Glorious now, we press toward glory,
> And our lives our hopes confess.

The Lutheran congregation singing that hymn *will* make an impact on the unchurched visitor. The singing congregation has given that visitor something to think about, and we pray that the Holy Spirit will move that person to further his or her understanding of that "strong Word" by taking advantage of the catechetical instruction offered by that Lutheran church.

In a wonderful journal article entitled "With Angels and Archangels," Robert Louis Wilken considers the Sanctus in our liturgy, particularly these well-known words that conclude the Preface and immediately precede the singing of the Sanctus: "Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song" (*CW*, p. 22). Wilken reminds us that "In the Liturgy earth joins heaven to glorify God."[13] And he points out that when we sing and pray the liturgy, we do so in a distinctly Christian language, the language of the Bible. (And parenthetically, I might add that in Lutheran congregational song we sing in a distinctly churchly musical idiom, one that is not dominated by the rhythmic sounds of the pop culture around us.) Wilken concludes by reflecting on the visitor to our churches—as he puts it, someone who "wanders in off the street as we pray." Wilken writes:

> Indeed, if [the visitor] does not feel uncomfortable, out of place and out of step, something is terribly wrong. The visitor should experience a little vertigo, because something is going on that is beyond his ken.[14]

Well, that doesn't sound very hospitable does it? But think about it—during the Absolution, during Holy Baptism, during the Lord's Supper—would you expect the outsider who has never been instructed in the faith to understand what is going on, that sins are being forgiven? In the early church the catechumens departed the Sunday morning assembly prior to the Lord's Supper in order to continue their instruction in the faith outside of the worship service.

What, you may ask, does all of this have to do with the purpose of music in worship? The texts and music of our songs and hymns should grow out of the church's own language and culture, not out of the popular culture around us. We do the unchurched no favors when we give them music little different from the musical idioms of adult contemporary radio stations, and texts that bear only the most anemic of theological proclamation. The music of the Western church extends from medieval Latin chant to the twenty-first-century music of living Lutheran composers. This music, growing out of the church's own creative culture, plays its part in Gospel proclamation and thereby benefits the unchurched visitor, even as we teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Col 3:16).

Conclusion

Praetorius called for both *concio* and *cantio*, sermon and song, for the completeness of worship. Tracing this concept back to Luther, we saw him favor a situation in which "theology and music [is held] most tightly connected: and *truth is proclaimed* through Psalms and songs." One hundred years after Praetorius we saw an example from Bach, where both the text and music of a cantata play a role in expounding the Gospel lesson appointed in the lectionary. We

heard Paul Manz speak of the long line of Lutheran organists who "have made the story of salvation singable." All of this—Luther, Praetorius, Bach, Manz—is our Lutheran heritage of church music—congregational song, vocal and choral music, organ music that participates in proclamation, just as does the sermon. As Luther articulated it, music stands *next to* theology—both proclaim the Word of God. Music is not merely a matter of style that can or should change according to the winds of pop culture around us. In Lutheran worship, music is not merely style, music is part of the *substance* of Lutheran worship. Praetorius was right—we need both sermon and song for the liturgy to be complete. We also need music that consciously plays its part in the proclamation of the Gospel. To do anything less is to follow Esau in giving up the extraordinary privilege of the birthright for a one-time meal (Gn 25:29–34). The Lutheran heritage of music is our birthright, and it is our extraordinary privilege as Lutheran church musicians to use this music to proclaim God's saving acts in Christ for the salvation of the world.

Notes

[1] Robin Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications*, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 287.

[2] Walter Blankenburg and Clytus Gottwald, "Praetorius, Michael," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 2001), 20:264.

[3] Scott M. Hyslop, *The Journey Was Chosen: The Life and Work of Paul Manz* (St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2007), 216.

[4] Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Luther's Works, 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 129–30.

[5] Martin Luther, *Letters II*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, Luther's Works, 49 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 428.

[6] Martin Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold, Luther's Works, vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 323.

[7] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 33.

[8] For an English-language presentation of this document, and a photographic reproduction, see *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, rev. and enl. by Christoph Wolff (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 113–14. A facsimile of BWV 61 is available as Johann Sebastian Bach, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland BWV 61: Faksimile der Originalpartitur mit einem Vorwort herausgegeben von Peter Wollny*, Meisterwerke der Musik im Faksimile, Bd. 3 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2000).

[9] For a valuable history of lectionaries in Christian worship, see John Reumann, "A History of Lectionaries: From the Synagogue at Nazareth to Post-Vatican II," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 116–30.

[10] Jan Bender, *Begone, Satan*, Gospel Motets for Equal Voices, 98-1848 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

[11] I explore these concepts in greater detail in Daniel Zager, "On the Value of Organ Music in the Worship Service," *The Diapason* 79 (June 1988): 18–19.

[12] David S. Luecke, *The Other Story of Lutherans at Worship: Reclaiming Our Heritage of Diversity* (Tempe, Ariz.: Fellowship Ministries, 1995), 33, 35.

[13] Robert Louis Wilken, "With Angels and Archangels," *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 10 (Fall 2001): 460.

[14] Ibid., 474.