



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY¹

Why do we stand for the last stanza (verse) of some hymns?

This being the Sunday on which we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, it is most fitting that we ask why we stand for the last stanza of some hymns. Many hymns in our tradition express our faith in the form of a **Trinitarian doxology**. This **doxology** is a form of acknowledgment and praise given to the Holy Trinity. The word, “**doxology**” comes to the English language as a transliteration of two Greek words: “**doxa**” meaning “**praise,**” and “**logia,**” meaning “**words,**” thus “**doxology,**” or “**praise words.**” A **Trinitarian doxology** is therefore simply an ascription of **praise** the **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Ghost)**. Such doxologies can be traced to the earliest days of the Church where the **Gloria Patri** (Glory be to the Father) was amended to the conclusion of the psalms as they were sung in worship, even as we do today. The **Gloria Patri** is the earliest form of the **Trinitarian doxology**, and was added to the psalms to indicate that these Old Testament prayers have now been fulfilled in Christ our Lord, who commanded Baptism in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. When the first Christian hymns were composed and sung, they were generally seen as psalms in verse, and hence the **Gloria Patri** naturally found its way into their last stanza.

Since the Psalmist declares that it is by His Name that God saves (e.g., Psalm 54), it is meet, right, and salutary for Christians, according to long-standing custom, to honor the blessed Name of the Holy Trinity whenever it is expressed aloud. Indeed, not only standing, but also the bowing of the head is appropriate at the point when the Name Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is sung. Some churches even have the custom of making the sign of the Cross at this point. Such bodily involvement in the liturgy is always helpful, as an indication that in Christ our whole body, mind, and soul are held captive to the Word of God.

✠✠✠ Soli Deo Gloria ✠✠✠

¹ Much of this series on the Liturgy of the Church is found in *Why? A Layman's Guide to the Liturgy*, by Rev. Burnell F. Eckardt Jr., Repristination Press, (Malone, TX.), and first published in *Gottesdienst, The Journal of Lutheran Liturgy*, in a series by the same name between the years 1985-2005. Used by permission.