



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY¹

Why is church music so different from all other kinds of music?

The music of the Church's liturgy is very ancient in character, but that is not the chief reason the music of the Church is so different. Rather, because the Church is a culture unto itself, set apart from the world, the life of the Church is also set apart from the life of the world. The Church is "...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." (1 Peter 2:9-10a, NKJV) The Church is a people whom God set apart having been sanctified, that is, made holy by the Blood of Christ. The chanting of the words of the liturgy provides an instinctive awareness that here, the worship of the Church, something different is taking place; something we do not find anywhere else in the world, for we Christians live, breath, and have our being in Christ; we live in the world of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Actually this way of singing, a way foreign to the ways of the world around us, arises out of the very Word of God. For the parts of the liturgy which we sing are generally portions of psalms or other parts of Holy Scripture. Most of the psalms came from King David, and David himself sang them when they first came forth.

How did they sound when he sang them? We do not exactly know, of course, but we do know that when St. Gregory the Great, in about the year 600 A. D., arranged for the compiling of the ancient psalm tones, he compiled the materials already in well-established use, which had been taken over and adapted from the old synagogue worship. Thus the Gregorian psalm tones were based on earlier tones, and therefore it is quite likely that the way in which we chant the liturgy today, if it is Gregorian in style (and it is here at Redford), sounds very similar to the way the words sounded when David first uttered them (except for the fact that he sang in Hebrew). Therefore the music of the liturgy does indeed come from another world: the world of the ancients, the world of David, the world of Christ, the world of the Kingdom of Heaven.

✠ ✠ ✠ 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.