



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY¹

Why does the Pastor chant the Words of Christ on a Lower Note when chanting the Words of Institution? Why does the Pastor slow down when chanting Christ's Words?

Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true Body and Blood of the Lord Christ in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by Christ's word to eat and drink.²

With the Words of Institution the pastor **"consecrates"** the elements (bread and wine) of the Lord's Supper. The overriding understanding for Lutherans in the celebration of the Lord's Supper is that it is **this Word of the Lord with His Body and Blood** that accomplishes what He promised when He instituted the Supper. The Words of Institution **are not mere "words"** that the pastor recites as he performs a simple historical remembrance of the original Supper. **They are the words of consecration.** For as Martin Luther tells us in his Large Catechism, **"It is the Word, I maintain, which distinguishes it from mere bread and wine and constitutes it a Sacrament which is rightly called Christ's Body and Blood. It is said, 'Accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum,' that is, 'When the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a Sacrament.'** This saying of St. Augustine is so accurate and well put that it is doubtful if he has said anything better. **The Word must make the element a Sacrament; otherwise it remains a mere element.**"³

By tradition, the Church has **used a lower voice (baritone) when Christ speaks** in any musical work to **give higher honor to the words of the Incarnate One.** Thus, when, in a musical piece, (and this would include the **Words of Institution** as chanted by the pastor or the words of Christ when the Gospel is chanted) Jesus speaks, a lower tone is used to **set apart His words from all others.** This signals the listener to **take note for the words chanted are the words of our Lord.** It is for this same reason that we stand at the reading of the Gospel and it is the same reason that the celebrant **slows down as he chants the Verba** (another name for the Words of Institution). The

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.

² Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 447.

³ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 448.

chanting of the **Verba** and the slowing down at the words our Lord spoke **alert the listener to the holy character and importance** of what he or she is hearing.

*** Soli Deo Gloria ***