

## THE ROAD WHERE FAITH IS FOUND

### GAUDEAMUS DOMINO!

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP • 506

WORSHIP AS A CRADLE FOR GOD'S LIVING WORD



*Bishop Ronald Mayan writes...*

*Gaudeamus Domino! — In the Lord let us rejoice!*

This is the refrain of one of the new hymns to be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* — our church's new primary worship resource. The text of the hymn *The Word of God is Source and Seed* was penned in 1983 by Benedictine Sister Delores Dufner, one of the best-known hymn-writers today. More than 20 different publishers have included her texts in their hymnals and hymn collections. In 1996 she was one of five winners in an international English-language hymn competition. In the October 2000 she was named as one of three outstanding Roman Catholic hymn text writers since Vatican II.

The music for this hymn was composed by David Hurd, widely recognized as one of the foremost church musicians and concert organists in the United States. Dr. Hurd is the director of music and organist of the Church of the Holy Apostles. He is also professor of church music and organist at The General Theological Seminary. He is the composer of dozens of choral and organ works.

The bringing together of Dufner's text with Hurd's hymn tune results in a powerful testimony to our theology of the Word of God, meant to be sung in simple unison — with one voice.

Martin Luther said that the Bible is the cradle of Christ. As a father himself, he witnessed and participated in the cradling of an infant in his arms, hands providing support under the infant's neck and under the small of the back. That's the image Luther draws on to tell us how to understand the purpose of the Scriptures. They are the loving arms that surround, enfold, and carry Christ to us. Beginning with the vague Messianic glimpse of Genesis 3, through the clear prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, everything in the Old Testament is pointing ahead to the great Christ-Event contained in the four gospels. And everything from Acts through Revelation points us back to the Christ-Event: what it meant and continues to mean — that Jesus was born, lived, died, rose again, and ascended. The Bible contains a fascinating complexity of stories and figures of faith. And yet Luther aids us, with disarming simplicity, toward that *eureka*-moment: ah, yes! That's what The Book is essentially about — the Bible *is* the cradle of Christ!

Luther was also greatly concerned that the people of Christ know and believe the

faith of the Bible. Today we refer to it as *catechesis*—passing on the faith. Recognizing that faith is *caught* just as much as it is *taught*, Luther set himself to the task of passing faith on by all means. He wrote the *Small Catechism*, *Large Catechism* and the *Smalcald Articles*, and he set the chief tenets of the Christian faith to music in the form of hymns. I choose to believe the rumour that Luther listened to the pub-music, creatively borrowed the best of the tunes, and then set the words of the faith to the most memorable and singable songs. Passing on the faith by all means: through reading of the Word, hearing it preached, learning how to recite it by rote memory, singing the faith through word and music—by all means. Repetition and recitation are the method, until the Word has become as thoroughly our own, as native to our nature, as breathing. Then faith is at the fingertips of our minds—and we can confidently say: “We believe, teach and confess...”

Liturgy and hymnody—the whole worship package—is a cradle for imparting the Word in each of its forms: Living. Written. Spoken. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* stands foursquare in Luther’s (and Lutherans’) tradition of inculcating faith by all means.

The text of Sr. Delores Dufner’s hymn is a song in praise of the Word, teaching us—in essence—that the Bible is the cradle of God’s Living Word.

The Word of God is source and seed;  
It comes to die and sprout and grow.  
So make your dark earth welcome warm;  
Root deep the grain God bent to sow.

— *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 506, stanza 1

We become what we receive. I may have heard this notion expressed before, but it has expressly struck me since I have encountered Marty Haugen’s and Susan Briehl’s *Tree of Life* Communion liturgy. There is a lovely and moving post-Communion canticle, *By Your Hand You Feed Your People*, in which I collided head-on with those words: “...we become what we receive.” Precisely. That is the very nature and effect of the Word of God preached in its truth and purity, and the Sacraments rightly administered. By the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the means of grace, we do indeed become what we receive...”Christ’s own body, blest and broken, Cup o’erflowing, life outpoured, given as a living token of your world redeemed, restored.” (*Holy Communion: Tree of Life Setting*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2001) Generation by generation, God’s people are an incarnate people, embodiments of Christ, living expressions of God’s Living Word. So Sr. Delores Dufner wrote:

The Word of God is breath and life;  
It comes to heal and wake and save.  
So let the Spirit touch and mend and rouse  
Your dry bones from their grave.

— *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 506, stanza 2

In the introductory materials to the ten Eucharistic liturgies contained in our new worship book (*Holy Communion: Pattern for Worship*), we are reminded of the form and flow of historic worship. “In the principal service of Christian worship, the Holy Spirit gathers people around the means of grace—the saving Word of God and the Sacraments. From the table of communion where Jesus Christ comes with forgiveness, life and salvation, God sends us out to share the good news and to care for those in need... The whole people of God are joined by the same gifts of grace, for the sake of the same mission of the gospel, into the life of the one triune God.” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 91)

Worship is meant to be a mountain-top experience, a transfiguration of sorts. We emerge from worship as changed people. We should have mercy on our pastors and other worship leaders in this regard, reminding ourselves that such experiences are Spirit-driven, not clergy or worship committee-created. The lowliest sermon or the highest liturgy cannot make this happen for us. But the Holy Spirit continues to use those elements to make it so.

The mountain-top of Lutheran worship has twin peaks. Indeed, these twin peaks are nothing less than the identifying marks of the true church. Where you find the Word preached in its truth and purity, and where you find the Sacraments rightly administered, there you have found the true church. Since our worship is characterized by these twin peaks, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, with its ten settings for Communion, is inviting all of us across the church to re-establish the practice of communing at least every Sabbath.

Likewise, each Communion setting offers an alternative to Confession and Forgiveness in the form of Thanksgiving for Baptism. While we each experience the sacrament of Holy Baptism only once in our lives, it needs to be honored and remembered as the starting-point of our faith-journey. Through God's amazing grace in water and the Word we become God's beloved children. Whatever we can do in the worship setting to affirm what God has done for us in baptism, and whatever we can do to remind ourselves of the pilgrimage we have undertaken in the triune Name, should be our duty and delight. Churches with centrally located and easily-accessed baptismal fonts filled with water are helping congregants to remember who and *whose* they are. Encouragements for congregants to sign themselves with the water of baptism, and the occasional practice of asperging (sprinkling) the assembly during the Thanksgiving for Baptism, is a means of keeping this sacrament in our faith's focus.

We read in our chief confessional document, the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, Concerning the Church:

It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. As Paul says in Ephesians 4 [:4-5]: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

The final stanza of Dufner's hymn is an invitation to enter into the Christ-life in both a personal and corporate sense. It reflects the Apostle Paul's theology of what it means, and how it looks, to be the justified and regenerated child of God. To the Romans Paul writes: "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." (14:7,8)

And to the assembly of saints in Galatia Paul taught: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of

God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (2:19,20) Dufner conveys these spiritual truths when she writes:

The Word of God is flesh and grace,  
Who comes to sing, to laugh and cry.  
So dare to be as Jesus was,  
Who came to live and love and die.

— *Evangelical Lutheran Worship 506, stanza 3*

Gaudeamus Domini! — In the Lord let us rejoice!

Indeed! Let all the people say “Amen!”

+ Ronald

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Quotations from the Confessions are taken from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000)