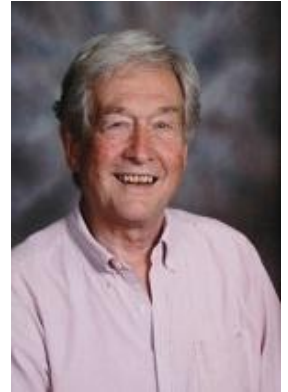


Author: Paul F. Bosch [ [paulbosch31@gmail.com](mailto:paulbosch31@gmail.com) ]  
Series: Worship Workbench  
Issue: Essay 220 + July 2018  
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## **BENEDICITE, OMNIA OPERA** Personal Paraphrases of Praise: Two Spiritual Exercises

1 Faithful reader, here are yet two more in my on-going series of Spiritual Exercises. This posting presents my fifth – and sixth! – entry in this series. Previous postings include:

Essay 204, Signs of the Kingdom;  
Essay 208, A Spiritual Autobiography;  
Essay 211, Daily Prayer; and  
Essay 214, My Ten Greatest Hymns.

2 With this posting you'll have six Spiritual Exercises on hand, and you'll be ready to hang out a shingle: "Spiritual Director". Hah!

3 I'm shocked – shocked, I say! – that our new Lutheran worship resource, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*, does NOT include the *Benedicite, Omnia Opera* in its pew edition NOR in its Leaders Edition. It is a magnificent canticle (song) of praise, and it is furthermore an important part of the Easter Vigil. I cannot imagine the thinking that led to its exclusion here.

4 In any case, you can find the text, pointed for singing, in our previous worship resource, *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*, as Canticle 18, just after the Psalms and before the Hymns. (Unfortunately for contemporary worshippers, it appears in *LBW* in non-inclusive language.) Lutheran composer Scott Weidler has prepared a splendid musical setting of this poetry, in inclusive language, in Volume Two of *Psalm Settings for the Church Year* (Augsburg Fortress 2008, ISBN 978-0-8006-7856-2) The *Benedicite*...may also be found, in inclusive language, in the Augsburg-Fort. volume *Music Sourcebook for Lent and the Three Days*. And you can find it as well in any complete Bible that includes the *Apocrypha*.

5 Any Lutheran Bible should always include the *Apocrypha*, those extra-Biblical books and canticles that, while not strictly canonical, can enlarge or otherwise amplify our canonical scriptures, such as *Tobit* or *Judith* or *Baruch*. Luther admired these so-called Deutero-canonical books and other additions to the canon as worthy of a Christian's study.

6 The *Benedicite, Omnia Opera* is thus among these extra-canonical writings, and it represents a hymn presumably sung by the three Hebrew youths – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – thrown into the “burning, fiery furnace” by the wicked Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar.

7 Accordingly, It is often known as well as *The Song of the Three Young Men*. It is meant to be inserted into the text of the *Book of Daniel* between lines 3:23 and 3:24. The Latin of my title can be translated “Bless [the Lord], all you works [of the Lord.]” – the first words of its text.

7 So what I am proposing here, as a fifth spiritual exercise, is the following:  
Compose your own *Benedicite*!

8 Note the form of the canticle. The poetry consists of ten sets of triplets – after a two-line introductory verse – sung by choir or cantor, and each ending with “bless the Lord”. And each set of triplets is followed by a recurring congregational refrain, “Praise and magnify the Lord forever.” Thus:

9 “All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord –  
Praise and magnify the Lord forever...”

This is the two-line introductory verse. Then the first of ten triplets:

You angels of the Lord, bless the Lord;  
You heavens, bless the Lord;  
you powers of the Lord, bless the Lord –  
Praise and magnify the Lord forever...”

10 It would not be difficult to add more triplets – a “personal paraphrase of praise” Here are a couple, inspired by some of my favourite items. I believe I am theologically justified in extending my praise beyond the natural (“...you works of the Lord...”) to include also human endeavours I especially admire:

11 “You 1993 *Mazda Miata*, bless the Lord.  
You 2001 *Chrysler PT Cruiser*, bless the Lord.  
You 2017 *Cadillac El Dorado*, bless the Lord –  
Praise and magnify the Lord forever...”

12 Or how about this:

“You Gustav Stickley library table, bless the Lord,  
You New York City *High Line Park*, bless the Lord.  
You *Mackintosh Air* Laptop computer, bless the Lord –  
Praise and magnify the Lord forever...”

13 Aside: Thirty-five years ago my wife and I went “skinny-dipping” with a young couple in a wooded glade in a remote western Massachusetts creek. My “personal paraphrase of praise” after that experience does not bear – bare? – repeating here. But I was filled with the praise of God for many days thereafter, you can be certain.

14 You get my point. Anyone can compose some new verses for this wonderful extra-Biblical song! A spiritual exercise for the ages!

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15 On a related note: The Hebrew *Barakah* (“blessing”) is a form of prayer from the Jewish tradition that is even simpler. It begins with a formulaic ascription of praise to God, and cites a single blessing. Thus a Hebrew *Barakah* at mealtimes:

16 “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. You bring forth bread from the earth. Amen.”

17 The *Barakah* (plural: *Barakoth*) is therefore the parent of all Christian prayers, from the Prayer of the Day (the so-called *Collect*) to the Thanksgiving at Table (the so-called *Eucharistic Prayer*). See the models in *ELW*, pages 18-87.

18 Every pious Jew to this day, as I understand, is enjoined to pray one hundred *Barakoth* every day.

19 So: Compose your own *Barakoth*. Every day! A hundred of ‘em! Still another – a sixth! – Spiritual Exercise for your tool box!

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