

[Editor's note] The Rev. Dr. A. R. Kretzmann was, for more than a generation, a legendary pastor at St. Luke's Lutheran Church on the north side of Chicago. A great preacher, parish pastor, and community leader, he also deeply cherished his church musicians. In this timely essay, he reminds pastors of the importance of music and the arts in worship and, at the same time, challenges church musicians to live up to the fullness of their holy calling.

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## The Pastor and Church Musician: A Constant Doxology



### Adalbert Raphael Kretzmann (1903-1989)

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When the congregation of Jesus Christ recognized the loss of the Old Testament *cultus*, [the form and practice of worship] they had to find something in music as rich and as glorious as that which the old temple had brought. They realized that the praise of God remained the joyous privilege of the children of God. The song of everlasting praise was to remain, and human beings would have to be entrusted with the "new" song.

How does a pastor show understanding and true devotion also in this department of the church's work? How can he truly become the consecrator, hallower, and sponsor of all the good gifts that come to him in a fine, devoted church musician? First of all, he must be very conscious of the fact that his office of Word and sacrament is the same office which the church musician has in a special way. If both the church musician and the pastor will be conscious of the basic principles that are involved in the New Testament worship of the Godhead, they will find the gates wide open to real joy and great faith.

In the church of Jesus Christ there is only one sacrifice after the one-time sacrifice on the cross, and that is the thank offering of the people of God. It is more than just saying thanks to God. It is the overwhelming conviction that everything good comes to us in and through God. This thanksgiving to God must manifest itself in attitudes of the highest quality. We cannot read what the apostles say about the new church in Ephesians and Colossians without feeling the richness of the relationship that brings proclamation and adoration together.

As Christians we have drawn the entire love and work of Jesus together in what we call the Gospel, the “glad tidings,” the joyous proclamation of the life and death and resurrection of our Lord. It expresses very simply for all of us the assurance that God has drawn near to man and that in that light everything must work itself out as a blessing to the people of God. It is a joyous message retold in glorious music and in thankful hymns.

The pastor needs the poetic aids of hymns as well as the exaltation of music to make the “message” come alive with splendor. The hallelujahs sound best when they are set to music and have an added dimension which the pastor himself could never give in any words. This understanding of the power of music to add a new dimension to the proclamation of the Word ought to draw pastor and church musician together in dialog and understanding as nothing else can. The beautiful emotions which are evoked by the great music of Christmas, the Passiontide, and the Resurrection, can scarcely be logically defined or explained, but certainly any bringer of glad tidings should recognize that he has one of the ablest allies in an understanding, good church musician. The “whole” man is redeemed by Jesus Christ and the “whole” man responds to the message. The two media, preaching and music, are thus not only culturally and esthetically involved, but they have a proclaiming and theological dimension<sup>1</sup> which can hardly be estimated unless we have fallen prey to the popular but erroneous feeling that the “spoken” Word is *the* thing. This causes not only the neglect of the sacrament but brings about a blankness for the great musical and visual arts which comes close to a rejection of the outreach of God through their media.

The injunction of the apostle in Col. 3 should be remembered: “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, the Father, through Him.”

In 1530, when Luther was spending his time in Coburg while his colleagues were presenting the new confession to the emperor at Augsburg, he noted down five points which all pastors and church musicians should remember:

Music is a gift of God.

Music rejoices the soul.

Music turns away Satan.

Music arouses innocent joys (with music anger, greed, lust, pride, etc. must fade away).

Music is a peaceful art form (contrasted with the training and drilling for war, et.).

We all observe at once that these cannot be applied theologically to all music as a criterion, but it is of great interest that Luther preserved this great gift of God as a special heritage of the church, whereas Zwingli and Calvin rejected it with the claim that there was too much opportunity for abuse. They knew and felt, as all of us do, that Satan moves in with music that is not exactly of the right kind. They seemed to forget that Luther separated church music from music in general by labeling *notae ecclesiae* as one of the specific marks of the true church. (This may give direction or thoughtful reevaluation to some of the things perpetrated under the name “music” in the church today.) The church musician has his original guide in Gennadius of Marseille (+492): *Vide ut quod ore cantas, corde credas et quod corde credis*

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<sup>1</sup> This dimension is laid out beautifully in the pamphlet, “The Theological Character of Music in Worship” by Robin A. Leaver, published by CPH. Order No. 99-1296.

*operibus probes.* (“Take heed that what you sing with your mouth you also believe with your hearts, and that what you believe with your heart you prove by your works.”)

The words can be applied to all of us, but when you want to draw a tight ring around “proclamation” in the church, then pastor and church musician are bound together in this great thing. Surely the office of the church musician must center primarily around the worship services of the congregation, and there it is inescapable that the finest kind of understanding be developed between the pastor and the musician. The church musician must know as soon as the pastor does the exact character and feeling of every single service throughout the year. As the pastor’s sermon thoughts and themes are reflected in the hymns which he chooses, so he must give the church musician time to prepare music which makes the worship service a unit and not a series of disjointed and sometimes utterly unrelated (good) parts. This requires study and preparation on the part of the pastor, a complete openness and willingness to regard the importance of the work and service of music as being the important, single, ingredient of the service alongside of Word and sacrament. Both of the latter only come alive when this preparation and cooperation are manifest in all the work and worship of the church. This may mean preparation which goes into quarterly or even annual selection of texts, themes, and hymns far in advance, so that the conscientious church musician may have opportunity to select and bring to the worship the very best compositions (or even well prepared improvisations) as preludes, voluntaries, postludes, choir selections, etc. There is no reason to try to expand the great distance between the pulpit and the organ into a great impassable gulf. Each worship service should begin with the assurance that both in the pulpit and in the music there has been preparation, consideration, understanding, true love of the Gospel, and true cooperation.

Search for a reason if you find great differences between the pastor and the church musician. Who has forgotten the Gospel, and why has it happened? Can you explain moods and temperaments in the light of the cross? Has the congregation come to expect tensions born of pride? Why should there be pride when the only interest is the glory of God? Is not the service of music as important a function of the ministry as any other part of it when souls are involved? Study will be needed, and good discussions, long and deep, will have to prepare for worship sometimes or arise out of the performances at either end of the church at other times. Honesty is required of us, and love and faith can give us good answers and better music and finer and more thoughtful offerings of praise.

The details in which both pastor and church musician share are, of course, found in the base plan of the worship services. It may even be that the Daily Offices are involved with music of some kind, or, in a larger congregation, Matins and Vespers. There is a definite plan to the services of Marriage and Burial in which both ends of the church are deeply and evangelically involved. The understanding about correctness is subordinated to the desire of having the Gospel message come through for love and consolation and ultimate redemption. Where there are regular schools, children’s choirs or larger choirs will become a real challenge and bring an almost indelible character to the life and faith of the young members of the congregation. Confirmation classes will give an opportunity for interpretive work in the hymn book and the liturgy. Time must be set aside for rehearsal with instrumentalists. In the day school (if any) as well as the Sunday school, attention must be given to the joyous outpouring of faith for and with the children.

Out of the discussion and planning the missionary and cultural thrust also come through. Plans for organ recitals, visiting choirs, etc. must be organized on a regular schedule so that both pastor and the church

musician can see clearly the emphasis for each particular presentation in order to keep spontaneity, variety, and originality alive and avoid a patterned sameness which is so often the death of good church music.

To establish a sense of significance it is necessary to make reference to services, recitals, concerts, etc. both *before* and *after* the event so that the public may be helped to understanding enjoyment and spiritual involvement. It is often difficult for a church musician to be his own publicity agent, and he will need the encouragement and the help of the pastor in the articulation of his ideals and hopes. Good laymen trained in public relations and publicity can also be very helpful on the music committee.

Encouragement to do "big" things is a vital necessity. The narrowness of thinking that the church has only a preaching mission, without discerning the mission to the "whole" man, has been a blight for years and years. The fear of over-emphasizing things which are not of the essence of Christianity has held many good Christian performers back and has lost forever the opportunity to open a new way to the heart of man and make him more ready to receive the message of the Cross.

Proper allowances must be arranged for the church musician so that he is free to buy music for experimentation as well as performance. The great volume of literature in the field of music will necessitate a constant search for what is best and most impressive so that the liturgy will shine through, give variety to the organ music, and prepare the way for constant growth in all things spiritual. The liturgical piety of a good organist and choirmaster is often the key to exemplary behavior on the part of the choir and participation by the singers in the full functions of the worship service. If the church musician has once recognized the potential of a great singing congregation, he will be very careful but also very insistent on moving the congregation ahead to new experiences in worshipful singing. In planning the organ music, proper concern must be exercised so that it fulfills its function as the leading musical instrument in worship services as well as the accompaniment for choir and congregational singing. Other instruments must also be taken into consideration, and the versatility of the church musician should be acknowledged regularly and graciously by proper support.

The relationship of the church musician to all the others in the congregational hierarchy---pastors, assistant pastors, teachers, choir leaders, instrumentalists, vicars, etc. is most vital. All are engaged in the one work---the Gospel. The service which the Gospel demands for the "outside" must first be gained "inside." All of us who do the works of mercy need the singing heart and music to share with dreary, dried-up lives. All are members of the church, the body of Christ. All have basically one and the same function, to make Him known. This ties us down to specific emphases but also bring out the theme of redeeming love in everything we do and say and sing. In all these things, however, the church musician, with his gifts, becomes a solo voice for the congregation. He is a leader in joy and peace for all who sing with him. His relationship to the pastor as minister of the Gospel should be abundantly clear to everyone who has contact with either one of them. He is the primary cooperator with the preacher so that the Word becomes more palatable and the hearer becomes more ready to listen. Music, in this sense, is to inspire and open up the way of the Holy Spirit. This is almost impossible if the preaching schedule is not known and remains a mystery until Friday or Saturday night before the service. Planning, hard planning, careful planning, insistent planning, time-consuming planning, but happy planning makes the whole thing work and makes the faith sing.

The pastor can be the one who makes the church musician, but the church musician can also be a great help in making the pastor. The inspiration that comes to the preacher from music may be the difference

between dull sermons and sermons which are bright with the love of Christ and the beauty of holiness. While the pastor deals with the means of grace directly in Word and sacrament, the church musician moves right in alongside to see to it that the response of joyful praise or proper penitence is not bypassed in the rest of the worship service. Surely all singing and all church music lives on the *viva vox evangelii* ("the living voice of the Gospel") and therefore the pastor must see to it that he brings the message of the Gospel in a live way in order to inspire a live response.

Doxology is the name of the game---we give God praise and glory. The Triune God cannot be worshiped in mere earthbound words. Only as His praise is sung and the best in music is written to support that praise, will the heavy heart find relief from its burdens and be able to go out to lift the burdens and bring help and offer the assurance which is the Gospel out where it is needed most.

None of us, thank God, is self-made. Always and at every critical point in life, especially in our profession, God sends us the right people to support us, inspire us, revive us. Each one of us, as he thinks back over his years of service, remembers how, at each critical point, his ministry was saved and his career rebuilt by the fine touch of a great co-worker who would not let the music of the Gospel fade but revived it again and again until you could not but go singing on your way with new courage, new hope, and a renewed faith. Great figures from the organ bench often overshadow the pulpit. You come with hesitation to the last prayer on the lowest step of the pulpit and suddenly the music was what you had prayed that it would be---uplifting, certain, sure, strong, and filled with all the outpouring of the Spirit of God. The congregation sometimes wonders about the grateful look directed to the organ bench. They would hardly understand if you insisted on telling them. "that was exactly what I needed in order to bring you what we all need." Forty-three years of service in the same church and in the same pulpit under the strain of the conditions in the modern city would simply have been a nightmare and a beastly confusion if it had not been for the sustaining power which came from great music and great musicians in order to make the service a genuine thank offering to God.

As the pastor needs his quiet time in order to let the Spirit take over, so the church musician must have a built-in time for quiet preparation. Even while most organists would insist that theirs is the most joyful and happy office in the world because they are constantly involved with singing and making music to the Lord, we must also acknowledge that the making of music, even under the happiest circumstances, is a serious business. The finely tuned ear of the congregation, brought up on the perfection of musical performances on radio and television cannot bear the wrong note or the imperfections which grow out of no work, no practice, no love, no understanding for worship.

If we are to rise to the heights of a constant doxology, we must rise together. The pastor as well as the church musician dare not shave percentages---it must be perfection by a wide margin. The world whom we strive to reach will not grant us grace to be *almost* right with the Gospel and its music. It must be perfect. For that it will have to reflect all the love and strength and beauty which is the Gospel and our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever dares to be less must face failures and realize shortcoming and repent to the sound of the unworthy and the unfit moving in on the sacred precincts of the thank offering of faithful Christians.

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[Editor's postscript]

Fourteen years after the Kretzmann essay appeared, Carl Schalk further laid out, in an engaging dialogue format, the dynamics of this relationship in a pamphlet, "The Pastor and the Church Musician: Thoughts on Aspects of a Common Ministry", published by CPH, Order No. 99-1256 (1984). It is included in *Singing the Church's Song: Essays & Occasional Writings on Church Music* – Carl Schalk, published by the Center for Church Music in 2015 through Lutheran University Press (Fortress).

More recently, Nancy Raabe, in turn, unwrapped Schalk's principles as the inaugural offering in the feature "Both Sides Now" for *in tempo*, a practical quarterly resource published by the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. (2021, No. 3, pp. 32-34)