And it came to pass, when Paul was at Corinth, he and certain disciples came upon a mob that was stoning an organist. And Paul said unto them, "What then hath he done unto thee that his head should be bruised?" And the people cried with one voice, "He hath played too loud. Yea, in the singing of psalms, he maketh our heads to ring as if they were beaten with hammers. Behold, he sitteth up high in the loft, and mighty are the pipes and mighty is the noise thereof, and though there be few of us below, he nonetheless playeth with all the stops, the Assyrian trumpet stop and the stop of the ram's horn and the stop that soundeth like the sawing of stone, and we cannot hear the words that cometh out of our own mouths. He always tosseth in variations that confuse us mightily and he playeth loud an discordant and always in a militant tempo, so that we have not time to breathe as we sing. Lo, he is a plague upon the faith and should be chastised." Paul, hearing this, had himself picked up a small stone, and was about to cast it, but he set it down, and bade the organist come forward.

He was a narrow man, pale of complexion, dry, flaking, thin of hair. And Paul said unto him, "Why hast thou so abused thy brethren?" And the organist replied, "I could not hear them singing from where I sat, and therefore played the louder so as to encourage them." And Paul turned round to the mob and said loudly, "Let him who has never played an organ cast the first stone." And they cast stones for a while until their arms were tired and Paul bade the organist repent and he did. And Paul said unto him, "Thou shalt take up the flute and play it for thirty days, to cleanse thy spirit," and afterwards they returned to Corinth and sang psalms unaccompanied and then had coffee and were refreshed in the faith. Acts 29:1-14

Garrison Keillor’s scriptural parody of an ecclesial conflict in the days of primitive Christianity provides a humorous introduction to my treatment of music ministry and holy baptism. Far too frequently music ministry is viewed as a plague visited upon the long-suffering people of God rather than the service of their common worship in organized sound and silence; far too often music ministers are considered a separate and noxious class within the Body of Christ rather than co-believers putting their artistry at the service of the assembly’s prayer. I hope that the following reflections will not only sketch the importance of music ministry for holy baptism, but indeed for all liturgical worship.

Before I begin my presentation, I need to confess my own trepidation at addressing this Lutheran Institute of Liturgical Studies. I am an ordained presbyter of the Roman Catholic Church, steeped in its practices, understandings and theology; my reflections will inevitably reveal a Catholic bias. I apologize in advance for any offense I might inadvertently give to those of you in Lutheran or other communions. I hope that the insights I share may be applicable beyond my own communion, especially since I have tried to emphasize that which unites us as Christians sharing a common baptism.
I had originally thought to compare music ministry and holy baptism in Orthodox, Catholic and Reformed practice, but realized that an entire conference (not just one lecture) would be needed to treat the topic. Then I thought to compare and contrast musical practices in ancient Christian baptismal practices in the Syriac-speaking, Greek-speaking, and Latin-speaking churches; there I was stymied in finding sources proper for comparison (can one really compare a madrashe of Ephraim the Syrian with a Greek Orthodox kontakion or an Anabaptist hymn?). So I have settled on reflecting about music ministry and holy baptism in present-day experience. These reflections will involve the following tasks: I will first discuss the purpose of liturgical music in general. Next, I will sketch some functions music engages in the liturgy. Third, I will suggest a classification system for analyzing the relation of music to text and action in Christian ritual prayer. Fourth, I will use this classification system to explore possible musical elements in the Rite of Holy Baptism in the 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship (hereafter LBW1978). I will close with a spiritual challenge to music ministers from a text in what some scholars consider the most ancient Christian hymnbook.

The Purpose of Liturgical Music

The most succinct treatment of the purpose of liturgical music that I have so far found appears in a papal instruction having the “force of law as a canonical code concerning sacred music” entitled *Tral le sollecitudini* [hereafter *TLS*] issued *motu proprio et ex certa scientia* by Pope Pius X on November 22, 1903 (the feast of St. Cecilia, patroness of music), this document brought to a climax a series of reform decrees that Giuseppe Sarto had issued in his earlier offices as bishop of Mantua and as cardinal-patriarch of Venice. Substantially the work of Jesuit Fr. Angelo De Santi, but including Pius X’s personal corrections, *TLS* articulated general principles for sacred music, differentiated its various types, treated liturgical texts, gave guidelines for the external form of sacred compositions, presented legislation concerning singers and instrumentalists at worship and the length of liturgical chant, and suggested various means for developing proper sacred music.

The very first article of *TLS* declares the purpose of liturgical music in a way that has influenced all subsequent Roman Catholic discussion of the topic: “Sacred music, being an integral part of the liturgy, is directed to the general object of the liturgy, namely the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful.” *TLS* yokes the purpose of worship music with the purpose of the liturgy in general, simultaneously God-oriented and humanity-oriented. Any attempt to emphasize one to the exclusion of the other is to misunderstand the liturgy’s very nature. Liturgical worship has both *anaphoric* (“lifting up to God”) and *katabatic* (“descending toward humanity”) dimensions.

On the one hand, God is glorified in the liturgy (and therefore by worship music used in the liturgy). The notion of “glory” is multivalent in both...
Scripture and tradition. Exegetes inform us that twenty-five different Hebrew terms are translated by the Greek doxa in the LXX. The most important of the Hebrew terms is kabod, which denotes “heaviness” or “weightiness,” and thus “importance.” Within the Hebrew world view, the “glory of God” manifests itself whenever God’s importance is felt. Natural phenomena such as fire, cloud, thunder, lightning, or storm may all disclose God’s “glory” to the observer just as historical acts such as the Exodus from Egypt, the forging of the Sinai covenant, or the inspired proclamations of the prophets may reveal it. Human beings “glorify” God whenever they acknowledge God’s importance in natural phenomena and the movements of history. For Christians, in addition to God’s self-revelation through nature and history, the “glory of God” is manifest in God’s self-communication in Jesus of Nazareth. His life and deeds, his mission and ministry, his death and destiny reveal God’s glory in human form. Christians “glorify God” when they faithfully acknowledge what God is and does, when they recognize and celebrate what God has done and is doing through Christ in the power of the Spirit (creating, redeeming and sustaining space, time, matter, and spirit), and when they commit themselves and proclaim to others God’s true “weight” in the scheme of things.

On the other hand, liturgy (and therefore worship music used in liturgy) transforms the participants in holiness and builds them up in faith. Like the concept of “glory”, “sanctification”, and “edification” are polysemous in both Scripture and tradition. At its core “sanctification” means the condition or process by which human beings participate in the very holiness of God. In Eastern traditions the process of entering into this life of holiness is frequently called theopoiesis (“deification”), with the emphasis placed on the divine “philanthropy” bending down to reconstitute and transform human beings by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Western traditions this process was often conceptualized as dikaiosune (“justification”), with the stress placed upon God’s gracious acts in forgiving sinners, reconciling and reincorporating those who were estranged from friendship with God and neighbor. In both traditions, however, the liturgy is identified as the preeminent place for God’s activity in bringing human beings into union with God, where forgiven sinners become radiant with God’s own life. “Edification,” probably related to the Pauline term oikodome, has at its root the notion of (re-)constructing a house, or temple and is used metaphorically to refer to the building up and strengthening of the church. Thus the fundamental purpose of liturgical music is to transform human beings in grace as, Spirit-filled, they acknowledge God’s deeds, preeminently in Jesus.

Note that TIS emphasizes the “logo-centric” or “word-oriented” character of liturgical music without providing a theoretical justification for non-texted music. There is nothing in this understanding of liturgical music to support the use of purely instrumental music to create a mood or establish an emotional aura during liturgy.
The Functions of Liturgical Music

If TLS presents the most succinct statement of the purpose of liturgical music, a later curial document presents the most concise declaration of its functions. On March 5, 1967, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship issued an instruction on sacred music entitled *Musicam Sacram* (hereafter *MS*). Not "a collection of all the legislation on sacred music, but a statement simply of the principal norms that seem most needed at this time" (*MS* 3), the document presents itself as a continuation of the 1964 instruction by the Sacred Congregation of Rites (predecessor of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship) on the proper implementation of SC. After sketching a definition of sacred music and its purpose in Roman Catholic liturgy, the document lists some general norms; distinguishes the roles of various participants in the liturgy; offers guidelines on singing at Mass, during the Liturgy of the Hours, at various sacraments and sacramentals, in celebrations of the liturgical year, and as part of Bible services and popular devotions; presents norms for preserving the treasury of sacred music and the use of traditional and vernacular languages in the Roman Rite; exhorts composers in their work of providing musical settings for vernacular liturgical texts; notes the proper use of instrumental music during worship; and calls for the establishment and support of various institutions to promote sacred music.

In article 5 *MS* proposes a new five-fold taxonomy of the functions liturgical music provides in achieving the glorification of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful:

A liturgical service takes on a nobler aspect when the rites are celebrated with singing, the ministers of each rank take their parts in them, and the congregation actively participates. This form of celebration gives a more graceful expression to prayer and brings out more distinctly the hierarchical character of the liturgy and the specific makeup of the community. It achieves a closer union of hearts through the union of voices. It raises the mind more readily to heavenly realities through the splendor of the rites. It makes the whole celebration a more striking symbol of the celebration to come in the heavenly Jerusalem.

In a recent article I have explored the functions ascribed to liturgical music in *MS*. First, *MS* lists an "alluring" or "decorative" function for worship music when it asserts that singing "gives a more graceful expression to prayer." The document recognizes that music has sensual appeal, that it can influence psychological states, and that it can clothe language in such a way that the sentiments expressed gain more powerful emotional resonances. But *MS* does not limit worship music to a decorative function, understanding music simply as an aesthetic enrichment of liturgical rite, a potentially pleasant but by no means necessary addition to the prescribed texts and ceremonies. While worship music may be alluring, it must also provide other functions.
Second, MS registers a "differentiating" function, noting that singing "brings out more distinctly the hierarchic character of the liturgy and the specific make-up of the community." What texts are sung when and by whom discloses liturgical roles operating within the ecclesiastical community. Notice that this differentiating function operates both personally and structurally. Certain chants are reserved to ordained ministers, other chants may be led by a cantor, still others may be executed by a choir/schola, while still others are in the purview of the entire assembly. Refusing to respect these personnel distinctions is to distort the liturgical expression of the structuring of the church. But distortion can also occur when elements intended to be sung are recited or when the genres of the various elements of worship music are not respected.

Third, MS records a "unifying" function for worship music. TLS had claimed that the "universal" character of Gregorian chant made it eminently suitable for unifying the diverse personalities and groupings that comprise the liturgical assembly. Conciliar and post-conciliar documentation, recognizing the historical, linguistic, and cultural limits of the Gregorian repertoire, no longer makes this claim. But the search for music that genuinely unites believers in heartfelt worship continues, perhaps especially intensely in nations such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, where local congregations include so many ethnic and linguistic groups.

Fourth, MS specifies a "transcendental" function for worship music, asserting that it "raises the mind more readily to heavenly realities through the splendor of the rites." A subtle transformation has taken place: where before splendor in ceremonial and the music that accompanied it was yoked to the purpose of glorifying God, it is now associated with transforming the worshippers' attitudes.

Finally, MS notes an "eschatological" function for worship music, asserting that music "makes the whole celebration a more striking symbol of the celebration to come in the heavenly Jerusalem." Both Jewish and Christian scriptures image heavenly worship in terms of song performed by the angels, creatures, elders, and saints in concert. A concluding phrase in certain Roman Rite Prefaces expresses this eschatological function well: "... with angels and archangels, with thrones and dominations, and with the whole band of the heavenly armies, we sing a hymn to the glory of God, chanting without end." Although technically eschatological there is also a sense in which the use of worship music from other eras connects us with those "who have gone before us in faith" and are now celebrating celestial worship. An exclusive diet of "contemporary" worship music would defeat this eschatological function.

The Classification of Liturgical Music

Having considered the purpose and functions of liturgical music in general, I now turn to a consideration of how liturgical music in practice may be classified for analysis. Joseph Gelineau notes:
There are many different ways of classifying (the) musical activity (during Christian worship). One may consider it according to its function—a hymn to reflect on the word, a litany for the intercessions, a processional for the offertory. Or one might adopt more formal criteria and label a piece as responsorial, antiphonal, strophic, with or without a refrain, etc. The more traditional classification by genre could be adopted—psalmody, antiphon, hymn, etc. Another starting point would be to consider the person who executes the piece—celebrant, deacon, cantor, choir. A further tool of analysis would be the musical style—homophonic, polyphonic, concertante; or the idiom—modal, diatonic, atonal.6

Recently Edward Foley and Mary McGann have offered a new and useful framework for classifying liturgical music as events within a ritual framework. They distinguish the following: music alone; music wedded to ritual action; music united to text; and music wedded to text, accompanying an action. Though we may not have many liturgical experiences of textless, instrumental music as a self-contained liturgical unit, music alone is and should be possible. A poignant example from non-liturgical ritual is the playing of taps at a military funeral. In this example there is no text, properly speaking, to give this music its ritual import, nor is there any accompanying action which the music must support. Liturgically, this is the type of ritual music with which we have the least amount of experience, mostly because of the dominance of the word in Christian worship. This is music as rite, and defines in the simplest terms the nature of ritual music.

Remaining with textless music, our next type of ritual music is that which combines instrumental music with ritual action. From a non-liturgical context, a familiar American example of such is the arrival of the President of the United States to the strains of "Hail to the Chief." Liturgically our most common experience of this genre of ritual music is the wedding processional. Here familiar ritual action, traditionally prescribed as the entrance of the bride on the arm of her father, is amalgamated with festive music. The fundamental link between the action and the chosen music is so stable that many brides cannot imagine an opening processional without such music. In (this) situation, music and ritual action are so intimately bound together that they form a single symbolic unit.

A third type of ritual music presupposes the joining of music and text, without any accompanying ritual action. A most familiar example of this genre in a non-liturgical setting is the singing of the national anthem. Though a specific posture is normally assumed during the rite, i.e., standing, there is no activity during the ritual other than singing the song. Liturgically this category is well exemplified by the singing of the Exultet at the Easter Vigil. Here word unites to melody, forming a single and identifiable unit of meaning. No other action accompanies the moment, which is the essence of sung worship.

Our final category of ritual music brings all three elements of music, text, and action together in a single ritual moment. Non-liturgical examples
of this genre are readily found in dance music where text, tune, and prescribed steps converge in “Swing your partner” or “Put your right foot in.” Liturgically the gospel procession well exemplifies this type of liturgical music. In this ritual complex it is not only the text which demands a musical setting, but the procession of the gospel book as well. Though it is true that the text by itself could presume a musical framework, the gospel procession is not an example of music united to text because the movement, (i.e., the procession of the gospel book), is an integral part of this complex. Though it is possible to disconnect the sung text from the action—just as it is possible to take “slave melodies” out of fields and put them into the concert hall—in doing so one disconnects the sung text from the ritual.

Adapting Foley-McGann’s classification scheme for the integration of music, text and action in Christian liturgy, I will now analyze musical elements present in the Rite of Holy Baptism in the LBW1978 and suggest further functions that music might play in the celebration of baptism.

**Liturgical Music at Holy Baptism in LBW1978**

Contemporary liturgical studies caution analysts to ground their analysis in the lived experience of congregations at prayer rather than simply the graphic records of that prayer. However, since I had neither the expertise, time, or funding to survey musical practices at Lutheran churches using the LBW1978 according to social or behavioral sciences models, my study must be limited to the texts I find there with their pastoral interpretations as found in the Minister’s Desk Edition of the LBW1978 (hereafter LBW1978MDE). It is clear that the rite of Holy Baptism is intended to be inserted into a larger ritual unit, but my analysis will treat only the twenty-one articles of the rite itself. First I will comment on the prescribed musical elements of the rite and then offer some alternative suggestions.

Only two musical elements are explicitly mentioned in the rite of Holy Baptism, and only one of these is mandated. Article 1 states: “While a baptismal hymn is sung, the candidates, sponsors, and parents gather at the font” (LBW1978MDE, 308). Since the LBW evinces a clear preference that Holy Baptism be celebrated in the context of Holy Communion, I will further presume that this “baptismal hymn” is the Hymn of the Day following the sermon. As the pastoral notes in the MDE state, “In the Holy Communion, the liturgy for Holy Baptism follows the sermon and the Hymn of the Day, which should be a baptismal hymn or an appropriate psalm. The song should be of adequate length to allow for the movement of the people approaching the font.” The hymn would here function as a communal affirmation of baptismal faith. It allows the assembly of the baptized to respond to the word proclaimed and preached with both intellectual and emotional intensity. A baptismal hymn at this point would clearly fulfill the unifying function articulated in MS, and depending on the quality of text and tune might also fulfill the alluring function. But certain difficulties present themselves. Is the hymn to be classified as “music wedded
to a text” or “music wedded to a text, accompanying an action”? If the former, then the movement of “candidates, sponsors, and parents” to the font should probably occur after the hymn is concluded. This would value the integrity of the textual/musical unit, clearly identify the candidates, sponsors, and parents as grounded in the worshiping assembly, and respect the hymn’s closed musical form. Movement would take place after the hymn was concluded, possibly accompanied by instrumental music based on the hymn tune; the instrumentalist could easily tailor the length of music to match the movement. On the other hand, if the hymn is classified as “music wedded to a text, accompanying an action,” then its form should probably be “open”: a memorizable refrain that would free candidates, parents, and sponsors from carrying hymnals or programs while moving and a variable number of verses sung by cantor or choir that would cover the movement involved.

(As historical precedent, I was fascinated to note that Luther’s 1526 Second Taufbüchlein directs that the minister should recite a psalm-verse at the parallel ritual point where the candidate for baptism is being led to the font: “The Lord preserve thy going in and thy coming out from henceforth and forever” (Psalm 121:8). While I doubt that Luther intended that this text be sung during the motion, it might provide an appropriate refrain in the present rite.)

In addition to this mandated baptismal hymn while candidates, sponsors, and parents gather at the font, article 12 makes provision for an optional musical element: “A psalm or hymn may be sung as the minister and the baptismal group go before the altar.” This “psalm or hymn” clearly should be classified as “music wedded to a text, accompanying an action.” As we have noted above, this suggests an open musical form. In fact this “traveling music” marks the transition from one ritual unit to another, from a “font-based” series of events (admonition to assembly, presentation and questioning of candidates, admonition to sponsors and parents, intercessory prayer, thanksgiving, profession of faith, and water baptism with trinitarian formula) to an “altar-based” series of events (request for the Spirit, signing with the cross, optional giving of a lighted candle, optional prayer for the parents of baptized infants, formal welcome of the neophytes by the assembly, and a sign of peace). Again one might ask if this ritual transition might not be made more effectively simply with instrumental music. Though these are the only two musical elements mandated or recommended in the rite of Holy Baptism, it seems to me that further musical enrichment is not only possible but desirable. Articles 2-7 present what appears as the first sub-unit in the “font-based” rites: admonition to assembly, presentation and questioning of candidates, and admonition to parents and sponsors. In my opinion none of these texts would be enhanced by being chanted, nor would the unity of the actions be enhanced by instrumental “background music.”

Article 8 states: “When baptisms are celebrated within the Holy Communion, The Prayers may be said at this time, with special reference
to those baptized (LBW1978MDE, 309). A model version of The Prayers for Holy Baptism appears among the proper texts for holy baptism (LBW1978MDE, 189). Their structure seems similar to the eucharistic General Intercessions in the Order of Mass of Paul VI: an invitation to prayer, a series of variable petitions with an invariable cue ("Lord, in your mercy") to which the assembly responds with an invariable refrain ("Hear our prayer") and a concluding summary prayer to which the assembly responds "Amen." The petitions of The Prayers thus demonstrate a classical litany structure and could probably benefit from being chanted: if not the entire petition, at least the cue and refrain could be chanted by cantor and assembly in alternation.

Article 9 provides the text for a Preface-styled ministerial prayer, clearly based in the so-called "Flood Prayer" of Luther's 1523 First Taufbüchlein. The ritual weight of this prayer might be enhanced if it were to be chanted by the presiding minister to the same tone used for eucharistic prefaces. Such chanting could both clarify the thought-structure of the text (initial address of praise to God the Father, anamnestic recall of the use of water in biblical history, invocation of the Spirit upon the candidates, concluding doxology) and make a ritual connection to the eucharistic prayer later in the service.

Article 10 provides an interrogatory form of the Profession of Faith. In its present form, I believe it would not be enhanced by chanting. I would raise the question, however, of the substitution of a faith-hymn (especially one biblically based, such as "There is one Lord, there is one faith, there is one baptism, one God who is Father") as an alternative to this interrogatory form of the Creed. Article 11 details the unitarian baptismal formula recited during the triple pouring of water. Chanting these texts by the minister may highlight their ritual import, but it seems to me that they would normally be recited. None of the texts in the "altar-based" ritual unit cry out for musical enhancement, with the possible exception of the ministerial prayer in article 13, which could be chanted to a collect tone. However, if the great baptismal thanksgiving has been chanted, the text in article 13 should probably be recited to signal the secondary character of this text.

I would call your attention to one further pastoral adaptation with musical implications that has begun in some Roman Catholic celebrations. In article 18 there are formal texts provided for a congregational representative and the assembly as a whole to welcome the neophytes, followed in article 19 by an exchange of peace between ministers, neophytes, sponsors, and parents, and the assembly. Sometimes instrumental or solo vocal music is used to "cover" this action, most notably Marty Haugen's song "Child of Wonder." While the text and tune may be judged too sentimental and may emphasize too strongly the incorporation of the neophyte into a particular congregation rather than the church universal, the practice does exhibit a further function music ministry may provide at holy baptism.
Conclusion

After this analysis of contemporary problems and possibilities in the exercise of music ministry at holy baptism, I conclude with a text representing music ministry at holy baptism in a primitive Christian community. The following verses from the Syria Ode 16 of the Odes of Solomon, considered by at least some scholars as the earliest Christian hymnbook, beautifully evoke the spirituality of a music minister. May they inspire those who serve the church's liturgy in enacting holy baptism:

Ode 16 (Syria)^12

1 As the work of the ploughman is the plough-share, and the work of the helmsman is the steering of the ship, so also my work is the psalm of the Lord in his praises.

2 My skill and my service are in his praises; because his love nourished my heart, and unto my lips it belched up his fruits.

3 For my love is the Lord; because of this I will sing to him.

4 For I am strengthened in his praises, and I have faith in him.

5 I will open my mouth and his Spirit will speak by me; the glory of the Lord and his beauty,

6 the work of his hands and the service of his fingers,

7 the multitude of his mercy and the power of his Word . . .

20 Glory and honour to his name. Alleluia

notes

1 Garrison Keillor created and copyrighted this scriptural parody, but I have been unable to find a publication reference.

2 It should be noted that the participants in the post-Vatican II Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States had noted as early as their second session: "For all practical purposes, there was no disagreement on the biblical presentations (on holy baptism). It was generally agreed that baptism is the rite of initiation into the community of faith, that it involves transition from the realm of darkness into the realm of light; that through it the believer is united to the death and resurrection of Christ; and that certain biblical passages relate it to the forgiveness of sins. The early Christian community surely had a conviction of the necessity of baptism, although there is no clearly expressed conception of the reason for this necessity. The necessity of baptism seems at least in part to be connected with the giving of the Spirit." Joseph W. Baker, "A Catholic View of the Chicago Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue," in Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue II: One Baptism for the


Baptism should be celebrated within the chief service of the congregation. When extraordinary circumstances require Baptism at other times, a public announcement should be made at the service Sunday following. When Baptism is celebrated within the Holy Communion, the propers for Holy Baptism...may replace those for the day if the appointed color is green. Otherwise the baptismal prayer may be said after the appointed Prayer of the Day. ...It is appropriate to designate such occasions as the Vigil of Easter, The Day of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day, and the Baptism of the Lord for the celebration of Holy Baptism.” LBW:978MDE, 50


The following information on the Odes of Solomon is gleaned from the Franckmann translation mentioned below: "Forty-one [critical editions list 42, but
Ode 2 is missing in all manuscripts) non-canonical psalms form the collection called the Odes of Solomon. They were first published as a collection by J.R. Harris in 1909 from Ms H (Manchester, John Rylands Library, Cod. syr. 9, 15th c.) containing Odes 3:1b (the beginning of the Ode is missing) - Ode 42:20. A second Syriac manuscript (Ms N. London, British Museum, MS. Add. 14538, 10th c.) was discovered by F.C. Burkitt in 1912, containing Odes 17:7b-42:20. A Greek version of Ode 11 appears in Cologny-Geneve, Bibliothèque Bodmer, Papyrus Bodmer XI, 3rd c. published by M. Testuz in 1959.

Prior to the 1909 publication of Ms H, the Odes were known from five quotations of the text in the Coptic Gnostic work Pistis Sophia (Odes 1:1-5; 5:1-11; 6:9-18; 22:1-12; 25:1-12: London, British Museum, MS. Add. 5114, 4th c.) and from Lactantius' quotation of Ode 19:6-7 in Divinæ Institutiones IV.12.3.

Scholarly opinion settled very early on dating the Odes in the second half of the second century. This has been disputed most recently by Drijvers (1981) who has pushed the dating of the Odes into the second half of the third century; his position has not been accepted by all scholars working in the area.

Egypt was considered a possible place of origin by early scholars working on the text, but the majority of later scholars have opted for Syria. The choice between Antioch and Edessa as the city of origin was of interest briefly in the 1930's and 1940's, but elicits little interest today.

Investigation of the community of origin/author has centered on whether the Odes are Jewish, Gnostic, or Christian, with more recent work focusing on the latter two. Opinion remains divided. From the beginning there has been investigation of possible docetic tendencies in the Odes. Of more significance has been the investigation of possible origin in, or certainly of links with, the Qumran and/or Johannine communities. Suggestions for an author have been relatively few. Of these Bardaisan has been the most frequent choice.

The search for parallels to the Odes, or, more frequently, the search for parallels in the Odes to other literature, has covered a wide range of texts: canonical biblical writings, esp. the Johannine literature and the Wisdom of Hammadi, the Montanists, the Mandaeans, the Manichaeans, the Hermetica, etc.

The debate remains unsolved as to a Syriac or Greek original. In the latter part of the 20th c. most scholars had opted for Greek but there has been more recent defense of a Syriac original by Charlesworth, Drijvers, and L. Abramowski. The question of the unity of authorship of the Odes has not been satisfactorily answered.

A major problem in the scholarly treatment of the Odes has been the attempts of scholars to divide some Odes into speeches of the Odist and speeches of Christ. The divisions made by Harris and Mingana in the 1920 edition are reproduced exactly in Charlesworth's 1977 edition.

The early consensus was that the Odes are named for Solomon because of their connection with the Psalms of Solomon in the canonical lists (Pseudo-Athanasius' Synopsis Scripturæ Sacrae' 74 and Nicephorus' Quæ Scripturæ Canonicae'). Other theories center on Solomon's reputation as a poet and possible parallels between the Odes and Wisdom literature.