

The Formation and Flow of Worship Attitudes in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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THERE IS NO OFFICIAL HISTORY of worship in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Several authors have traced the formation of the various hymnals published by and for the synod. Arnold O. Lehmann's article "Wisconsin Synod Hymnals and Agendas 1850–1950"¹ is the best of these studies, especially because it includes information from early Wisconsin Synod convention proceedings and official church periodicals. Lehmann makes no claims about going beyond the record of the official documents, however, and there is a great deal of history beyond those documents. The official histories of the church body (for example, John Philipp Koehler's *History of the Wisconsin Synod* and Edward C. Fredrich's *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*) include references to worship but offer nothing of more detail than the publication of a new hymnal or how worship was involved in a congregational controversy. There is no history of WELS worship similar to the official history of WELS world missions.

There will be no official history of worship in the Wisconsin Synod even with the publication of this essay, for it does not intend to be an in-depth study. This essay is narrative and anecdotal. It repeats stories that are retold, in the main, without documentation. The essay is more about sights, sounds, and sense than about facts and figures. If an official history of worship in the Wisconsin Synod can be written, it will have to wait for another day. The intent of what follows is nothing more than to give the reader of this commemorative volume a better understanding of the worship attitudes that formed and framed the work of Kurt J. Eggert.

After graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Eggert spent a year instructing high school students at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Michigan, and then served a short pastorate in North Dakota. He spent the rest of his life in or next door to the two cities that hold center stage in the story of the Wisconsin Synod: Watertown, Wisconsin, and Milwaukee. He grew up in Watertown, where his father served the notable St. Mark's Lutheran Church. For eight years he attended Northwestern College and its preparatory department, located six blocks from the St. Mark's parsonage. His second pastorate

(after the Dakota experience) was Immanuel Lutheran Church in Farmington, eight miles south of Watertown. In Milwaukee he served at Gethsemane Lutheran Church, at Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' College, at Atonement Lutheran Church, and as a member of the synodical administration, headquartered in Milwaukee. If it can be said that the general attitude of the Wisconsin Synod, for at least the first one hundred years of its history and probably for longer than that, was most often molded and most consistently modeled in Watertown and Milwaukee, then it can also be said that Kurt Eggert grew up, attended school, and carried out his ministry in the two places where he would be most acutely influenced by the general worship attitudes of the Wisconsin Synod.

What are the attitudes of the Wisconsin Synod toward worship? Without a doubt, the attitudes have changed over 150 years. But it will be impossible to gain a genuine perspective of Wisconsin Synod thinking without a look that goes farther back than the formation of the synod in 1849 and 1850.

GERMAN LUTHERANISM AT THE DAWN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Confessional Lutherans were not the only Germans attracted to America. Pietistic and rationalistic Lutherans came too. They did not come to gain religious freedom, however; in fact, many of them had been detached from active participation in church for years. They had little interest in church or its worship. They came seeking new opportunities in the New World. To their credit, many Pietists saw a need to serve these disattached Lutherans. Groups of Pietists joined with Calvinists to establish mission societies that gave basic training to men who were willing to go to America and gather Germans into congregations. One of these mission society pastors was a middle-aged baker by the name of Johannes Muehlhaeuser.

Arriving in Milwaukee in 1848, he soon established Grace Lutheran Church. Together with two other mission society graduates, Muehlhaeuser formed a new church body known today as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. At about the same time, Friedrich Schmid, another mission society man, was working to gather Lutherans in Michigan and trying to found a synod of sorts. In Minnesota, Pastor J. F. C. Heyer, a product of the pietistic General Synod, was gathering like-minded pastors into the Minnesota Synod. With similar roots, these three groups were drawn to one another and united as a joint synod in 1892.

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FORMATION OF WORSHIP ATTITUDES IN THE WISCONSIN SYNOD

Within twenty-five years of their founding, the “old” Lutherans of the Missouri Synod and the “new” Lutherans from Wisconsin had established a doctrinal unity that found expression in the Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (1872). Primarily through the work of synod president Johannes Bading and seminary president Adolph Hoenecke, Wisconsin moved “to the right” of its pietistic doctrinal position and came to stand side by side with the confessional voices in Missouri.

Wisconsin’s move away from Pietism was neither smooth nor swift, however, and its halting steps often can be observed in its worship practices. The constitution of Muehlhaeuser’s Grace congregation in Milwaukee, for example, includes this paragraph:

Be it resolved that our congregation, founded on the ground of the apostles and prophets, whereon Jesus is the cornerstone, makes confession of the Augsburg Confession and Luther’s Small Catechism. However, never may or shall a preacher of the said congregation use the rite of the old Lutheran church, whether in Baptism or the Lord’s Supper.

The pastors and people who were attracted to the Wisconsin Synod tended to have similar attitudes about worship forms. Now and then convention speakers in the 1850s and 1860s asked the synod to adopt an order of service that was more Lutheran in its orientation and history, but no acceptable rite could be found or produced. Congregations continued to use the nonliturgical orders brought from their homeland. For many years after 1850, the most widely used hymnal in the Wisconsin Synod was the hymnal of the Pennsylvania Synod, recognized by more confessional Lutherans (and eventually also by Wisconsin) to include more than one hundred hymns of dubious Lutheran integrity. So weak was the synod’s early resolve in the matter of hymnody that its first official hymnal (1870) had to endure an immediate revision to cleanse it of nine hymns that should not have been included.

The pietistic worship practices in the Wisconsin Synod led to some serious skirmishes with Missouri Synod congregations located in the same vicinity. This was a battle that had begun in Germany, and the hard feelings and harsh words continued in America. The paragraph in the Grace constitution probably was aimed directly at Trinity Church, Missouri Synod’s congregation across the Milwaukee River, where the old Lutheran rite was firmly in place.

The leading theologian of the Missouri Synod and the president of its seminary, C.F.W. Walther, was the undisputed American champion of a confessional worship rite and hymnody. The use of historic Lutheran worship practices was Walther’s legacy from orthodox Lutheranism in Germany. To gain the freedom to use these forms without the interference of the German government was what led him to follow the immigration to St. Louis. Within ten years of their arrival in Perry County, the Missourians under Walther’s leadership had published a hymnal, *Kirchengesangbuch*, which had as its chief consideration that its hymns be

pure in doctrine; that they have found almost universal acceptance within the Orthodox German Lutheran Church, and have thus received the almost unanimous testimony; that they had come forth from the true spirit [of Lutheranism].²

Walther’s *Kirchen-Agenda*, containing the main Sunday order, arrived on the scene nine years later, in 1856. Visitors to the St. Louis congregations, where Walther served as senior pastor, would have experienced not only an elaborate liturgical rite based on Luther’s Reformation revisions, but chasubles, chanting, candles, and crucifixes as well. They might also have experienced the thrill of hearing Walther at the organ; it is said that regular churchgoers did not have to glance to the balcony to know when Walther was taking his turn on the bench. Walther stood behind the efforts of his former students to establish his worship perspective and rite in every Missouri Synod congregation. So powerful was Walther’s liturgical influence that even congregations in the synod that possessed their own confessional rites were led to abandon them for Walther’s. (In his history of Frankenmuth, Michigan, *Teach My People the Truth*, Herman Zehnder bemoans the fact that St. Lorenz congregation was “forced” by Walther’s contemporary Fuerbringer to give up its Wilhelm Löhe liturgy, thought by Zehnder to be far richer even than Walther’s.)

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The decided difference in worship practices in the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods is easily seen if one compares the following words of Walther with the paragraph Muehlhaeuser inserted into the Grace Church constitution:

We refuse to be guided by those who are offended by our church customs. We adhere to them all the more firmly when someone wants to cause us to have a guilty conscience on account of them . . . It is truly distressing that many of our fellow Christians find the differences between Lutheranism and papism in outward things. It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when one sacrifices the good and ancient customs to please the deluded American sects, lest they accuse us of being papistic.

Indeed! Am I to be afraid of a Methodist, who perverts the saving Word, or be ashamed in the matter of my good cause, and not rather rejoice that the sects can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them?

We are not insisting that there be unity of perception or feelings or of taste among all believing Christians, neither dare anyone demand that all be minded as he. Neverthe-

less it remains true that the Lutheran liturgy distinguishes Lutheran worship from the worship of other churches to such an extent that the latter look like lecture halls in which the hearers are merely addressed or instructed, while our churches are in truth houses of prayer in which the Christians serve God publicly before the world.³

Walther's words about Christian liberty might have been included in his defense of the Lutheran liturgy for the sake of his Wisconsin Synod brothers. Despite the heartening move toward Lutheran confessionalism, Wisconsin was not ready to abandon the nonliturgical practices of Pietism. This was certainly true of its members, but especially true of its pastors. The move toward confessionalism, guided, of course, by the Holy Spirit, was an intellectual move, born out of study of the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessions. But Missouri's brand of liturgical worship and its tastes in hymnody ran counter to what Wisconsin's founders and early leaders had experienced from their youth. Wisconsin was ready for a confessional adjustment, but the assimilation of liturgy, ceremony, and objective hymns didn't feel right to many pastors and people born and bred in Pietism.

It might be supposed that Walther's liturgical leadership would have been powerful enough to have changed the prevailing attitude in the Wisconsin Synod, but this was not the case. Lehmann's article reveals that although Walther's hymnal and service order were available for its use, Wisconsin never formally adopted them or even considered adopting them. An 1874 resolution calling for the adoption of Walther's *Agende* specifically rejected Walther's order of service. It is difficult to document this, but one senses that early Wisconsin Synod pastors (perhaps more often than their leaders) saw in Walther a certain "pushiness" that they resented. It makes good sense that the very qualities that made Walther the premier confessional spokesman in America occasionally would have seemed overbearing to little pietistic Wisconsin. It is likely that Wisconsin—smaller, poorer, and generally less sophisticated than Missouri—compensated for a subtle inferiority complex by dismissing Missouri's ways as somewhat grandiose and ostentatious. The less lovely sister often deals with the lovelier sister's beauty by considering her vain. Anecdotal history leads one to sense that such a compensation occurred in Wisconsin more often than the official histories admit. One gets the impression that Wisconsin tended to look at Missouri's liturgical emphases from what eventually became a rather skeptical perspective. Join this phenomenon to the worship experiences of their pietistic past and it becomes easy to understand why Wisconsin pastors did not take to Missouri's worship rite, to say nothing of the "chasubles, chanting, candles, and crucifixes" that had been among Walther's practices.

Wisconsin had no liturgical champion of its own. There is no doubt that Adolph Hoenecke had as much theological influence in the Wisconsin Synod as Walther had in the Missouri Synod, but Hoenecke did not carry the dual mantle of synod and seminary president as Walther did and thus could not influence his synod in the same way that Walther influenced his. Hoenecke's practical theology field was homiletics, not litur-

gics, and although he served on several hymnal review committees, he does not seem to have had as much interest in music and the arts as Walther did. Not until J. P. Koehler (Walther's student in St. Louis) arrived at the seminary in 1900 was there an emphasis on teaching confessional hymnology at the seminary, and not until after Hoenecke's death in 1908 was there a course on liturgics.

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Roots in Pietism, few financial resources, resentment of Missouri's perceived overbearing leadership, and a resulting skepticism over practices considered show and ostentation—these combined to establish a generally negative attitude toward liturgical worship, ceremony, music, and art that lasted well into the second century of Wisconsin's history.

THE HISTORY OF TWO HYMNALS

One might have supposed that J. P. Koehler, seminary professor (1901–1930) and president (1920–1930), would have become a liturgical leader to match Walther, his teacher. Koehler had a deep interest in history (he authored the first synodical history), church music (he founded the seminary chorus), and ecclesiastical art (his paintings of biblical scenes hang in the seminary library and his influence led to the classic design of the present seminary campus). But Koehler's knowledge of history (and to a certain extent an observation of church life in his own era) led him to the conclusion that too often liturgy and ceremony were imposed on the church in a legalistic way and led, not to a faith-wrought liturgical life, but to one that was formalistic instead. This concern may have been so deep that he could not bring himself to become a champion for liturgical enrichment in his own synod. His writings on hymnody in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* run to several hundred pages; his lone article on the liturgy includes nothing more than the outline of his seminary liturgics course.

Some have deeper reservations about Koehler's liturgical thinking. In an article in the first issue of the *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Victor Prange (who married Koehler's granddaughter) observed:

Koehler shows an appreciation for protestantism; one misses an equal appreciation for that which is catholic. Koehler speaks of how the life of the church so easily "becomes materialistic." One suspects that he might have been just a bit uncomfortable with some of Luther's writings on the Sacrament of the Altar. At times one gets the feeling

that Koehler would have felt right at home in a Zwinglian church building cleansed of all distractions so that in that plain and bare setting the Word alone could impact the soul. Koehler appreciated hymnody; I find little evidence that he cared much for the liturgy. The liturgy is catholic; hymnody is protestant.⁴

Brenner specifically stated, “I want a person on that committee who has both feet in the congregation so that we don’t get a monument to the musicians of the Missouri Synod.”

It is interesting to note that the first scholarly article on the history and value of the Lutheran liturgical service did not appear in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* (a predecessor of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*) until 1938, thirty-four years after the publication’s first issue. Entitled “What Benefits May Be Derived from More Emphasis on the Study of Liturgics,” the article was written not by a seminary professor, but by a parish pastor, Gervasius Fischer, who also served on the liturgics subcommittee for *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH).⁵

The lack of liturgical leadership became obvious in the publication of Wisconsin Synod’s first English hymnal, the *Book of Hymns* (1917). Missouri had published a major English hymnal in 1912, the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book with Tunes*. Not surprisingly, that volume contained the 1888 Common Service, prepared by east-coast Lutherans and purportedly based on the best and most widely used liturgical orders of the Reformation Era. The Common Service was more than an order of service; it included translations of the introits, graduals, and collects for all the Sundays and festivals of the Christian year. The musical settings had been prepared by Luther Reed and Frederick Archer in 1901. *The Book of Hymns* borrowed a few of Reed’s and Archer’s settings from Missouri’s hymnal, but very little else. In fact, a May 1918 article in the *Northwestern Lutheran* included a determined defense of the rejection of portions of the Common Service. Despite the fact that the Agnus Dei had been attached to the Holy Communion service since at least the second century and was positioned in the Communion liturgy by Luther in both of his orders, the author concluded,

There is very good reason for singing . . . “O Christ, Thou Lamb of God” immediately after the Confession of Sin; hence we put it there, but omitted it later where it is often found.

He followed with another incredulous observation: “We believe the average churchgoer will thank us for not putting in more

than one Scripture lesson.” With the Agnus Dei (or the Kyrie in the alternate service) following the Confession of Sins and with only one Scripture lesson, the *Book of Hymns* had no need for either introits or graduals. Perhaps this is part of what Martin Albrecht, longtime liturgics professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, noticed in his early ministry in the 1930s. Asked what he felt was the most significant change in WELS worship practices over his sixty years of service, he said, “When I first entered the ministry, our pastors had no sense of the Christian church year.” The liturgical rites in the *Book of Hymns* substantiate his observation.

Almost from its initial publication date, the *Book of Hymns* met with disappointment. Subsequent issues had to include numerous corrections. And there were pastors who were chagrined by the book’s liturgical and hymnological poverty. Already by 1925, WELS convention resolutions were looking for something better: an appendix to the *Book of Hymns* containing more and better hymns, or perhaps a completely new book, maybe even a joint effort with Missouri and the other synods of the Synodical Conference.

Work on the former suggestion began but was never completed. The latter suggestion eventually led to the joint effort that produced *The Lutheran Hymnal*. The primary work was done over a period of twelve years, from 1929 to 1941. The Wisconsin Synod sent representatives to the meetings—among them seminary professors John Meyer and August Zich and Pastors Otto Hagedorn, Gervasius Fischer, William Schaefer, and Arthur Voss—and these men contributed. Fischer was especially active in the work of the liturgics subcommittee. Several hymn tunes by Fritz Reuter, the renowned Dr. Martin Luther College musician, were included: Reuter (TLH 283) and New Ulm (TLH 50). The book contained an original hymn text by WELS poet Anna Hoppe: “O’er Jerusalem Thou Weepest” (TLH 419). Several WELS members produced hymn translations. But in the main, *The Lutheran Hymnal* was Missouri’s book. The Order of the Holy Communion was essentially the order from the 1912 *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book*, and Wisconsin’s men could not prevail upon the Missourians to include some of the WELS favorite hymns, for example, “Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep” from the *Book of Hymns*. The leadership of the synod sensed a new hymnal was necessary, but old prejudices died hard. When synod president John W. Brenner appointed William Schaefer to the joint committee, Brenner specifically stated, “I want a person on that committee who has both feet in the congregation so that we don’t get a monument to the musicians of the Missouri Synod.”

Whether or not Brenner’s concerns were realized with the publication of the new hymnal is difficult to know. What we do know is that Wisconsin Synod congregations purchased copies of *The Lutheran Hymnal* by the thousands. Northwestern Publishing House encouraged the purchase of the new book with an ingenious offer: During a fifteen-month window, WELS congregations could purchase the book for the special price of eighty-one cents on the mere declaration that an equivalent number of older books was being replaced. That was a mighty incentive for thrifty WELS members! Most congregations were willing to make the change for other reasons too. In articles throughout

the 1930s, the *Northwestern Lutheran* had done a good job preparing the people for the new hymnal. There were many new hymns, and some of them quickly became popular, for example, “God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage” and “For All the Saints.” There was enough interaction between WELS and LCMS congregations in those days that many Wisconsin Synod members knew Missouri’s Common Service (in fact, more than a few WELS congregations used Missouri’s 1912 hymnal). Where the service was less familiar, worshipers remained after services and practiced. While there are no official records to substantiate this, it can be safely said that *The Lutheran Hymnal* was being used in almost every WELS congregation by the end of World War II.

A significant number of WELS congregations, however, usually pastored by synodical veterans, still felt uncomfortable and put off by the new order of service. Martin Albrecht recounted an incident that took place in the fall of 1941 in the sacristy at Calvary, Thiensville, Wisconsin, where he was serving as pastor. He was preparing for the opening service of the Milwaukee pastoral conference and had posted “page 15” (The Order of the Holy Communion in *The Lutheran Hymnal*) on the hymn board. Just before the service, his district president and the chairman of the synod’s Board of Trustees arrived at the sacristy door and suggested that Albrecht not use “that high-church liturgy.” Albrecht was not deterred, but the Trustees chairman never did inaugurate the service in his congregation, First German in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. First German’s old Mecklenburger rite (in translation, of course) was used until he retired in 1966. Grace Lutheran Church in Yakima, Washington, never did adopt the Holy Communion rite in *The Lutheran Hymnal*; it moved straight from the liturgy in *Book of Hymns* to that of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*! Fifteen years after the publication of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, another district president, Pastor E. Arnold Sitz, was still criticizing the Holy Communion rite in a lengthy essay presented to his Arizona-California District brothers in the mid-1950s. Commenting on the conclusion of the Vesper service in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, he wrote: “This long post-sermon drag merits a short German epithet ‘Sopf’ (pigtail)! Not only good liturgical principle, but plain common sense dictates the shears for it.”

Younger pastors took to the new hymnal with more enthusiasm, perhaps more out of pragmatism than on principle. *The Lutheran Hymnal* had arrived on the WELS worship scene with auspicious timing. The years after World War II were good years in the synod. The war economy had allowed the synodical debt, so crippling during the 1930s, to be finally retired. Discussions about mission expansion, on both the home and world fronts, highlighted conferences and conventions. English was replacing German at the main Sunday service in most congregations. Elementary schools were growing, and their success soon encouraged the birth of a dozen or more Lutheran high schools. Wherever the Wisconsin Synod went, *The Lutheran Hymnal* went along. Converts, children, and even old-line Germans learned its hymns and liturgy, and various tracts and booklets helped make the hymnal’s contents understandable.

Encouraged by growth and a post-war economy, congregations and schools embarked on notable church and chapel projects. The formality of the liturgical rite in *The Lutheran Hymnal*

seemed to fit well with the neo-Gothic style, the style of choice for church architects and building committees in the 1940s and 1950s. Dozens of WELS congregations erected churches with high ceilings; long, narrow naves; deep chancels; and notable pulpits, lecterns, and altars. An individual gift enabled Northwestern College, the synod’s preseminary institution in Watertown, to erect a fine neo-Gothic chapel in 1955. Eventually that chapel housed a set of stained-glass windows given by Professor Ralph Gehrke in memory of his parents and a Schlicker pipe organ designed by Paul Bunjes, thought by many to be America’s leading expert on the classic north-German organ. In the 1950s, through the influence of growing liturgical thought, both an organ and an altar were added to the chapel at the seminary, which for many years had neither.

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Already in the 1920s, Professor Koehler had begun encouraging the use of the great hymns of Lutheranism’s golden age, which, until then were usually unknown by most WELS members. A weekly class period was devoted to singing and learning the Lutheran chorales (seminary students from the 1920s through the 1980s will recall this class being held in the fifth hour on Wednesday). Koehler encouraged the formation of a male chorus at the seminary and then created an opportunity for the seminary men to form a choir with young women from Lutheran High School in Milwaukee to take these hymns “on the road.” (There is evidence that this mixed choir eventually became the Lutheran A Cappella Choir, still active in Milwaukee today.) A similar effort was taking place at Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) in New Ulm, Minnesota. Frederick Reuter (d. 1924) had laid the foundation for a solid music education program and had encouraged the teachers he trained to carry out his principles in their congregations by using his own organ and choral compositions. Emil D. Backer (d. 1958) carried on Reuter’s work and helped create a musical atmosphere in which the great chorale-based music of classic Lutheranism could flourish. The music of Bach, Schuetz, and Scheidt, with its roots sunk deeply into the Lutheran liturgical rite, was a regular feature of DMLC concert programs and remains so to this day.

DIFFICULT DAYS

The musical scene in the synod’s pastor-training track was not as bright, although this was no fault of the man at the center of it, Professor Hilton C. Oswald. Oswald had been called to

Northwestern College in the 1930s to teach German and Latin. The fact that he later accepted the position as an editor of the American Edition of *Luther's Works* attests to the reality that the languages remained his first love and interest. Oswald also enjoyed music, however, and was persuaded (with some persistence) to accept the responsibility for Northwestern's band and choirs when Depression realities made it impossible to call a replacement for a departed music director. Oswald's task was formidable. Northwestern was a predominantly male school; actually, it was two schools, a preparatory school and a college. Many of his "boys" arrived on campus either as ninth graders or college freshmen with little inclination toward music and less training in it. Add to this that during his tenure, first Northwestern's basketball teams and then its football teams

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gained national recognition. From 1945 until 1960, Oswald also served as director of music at the seminary. He dutifully traveled to Thiensville (Mequon) every Tuesday and rehearsed the choir (at 9:00 P.M.) and taught the courses in hymnology on Wednesdays. Then he returned to Watertown. It is not surprising that musical interest lagged in the pastor track during those years, although this problem dare not be placed at Oswald's feet. Under the best of circumstances, a man would have found it difficult to maintain enthusiasm with students who had no other music teacher for twelve years of school!

If the musical scene at Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary failed to move pastoral interest forward, unhappy developments in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod moved enthusiasm backward.

At first glance, Missouri's worship activities in the 1930s and 1940s hardly seem unhappy. With more innate interest, more financial resources, and more opportunities for scholarship, the Missourians stood at the forefront of efforts to reclaim the rich worship heritage left by the Lutheran reformers. I mentioned previously the reputation of Paul Bunjes in the pipe organ world. Bunjes's doctoral dissertation on the Praetorius organ set the standard and supplied much of the impetus for the *Orgelbewegung*, a worldwide movement that sought to re-establish the dominance of the organ that had been designed to accompany the hymns and music of Lutheran worship. Often working with organ builder Herman Schlicker, Bunjes designed organs for many of Missouri's schools and sensitized a whole generation of students in the Concordia system to the glories

of the classical Lutheran instrument. William Heyne, professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, directed the Seminary Male Chorus at the same time he led the St. Louis Bach Choir. Both ensembles regularly supplied the music for the *Lutheran Hour* and its nationwide audience. Heyne's colleague at Concordia, Walter Buszin, earned a solid reputation among Lutherans and non-Lutherans for his scholarly commentaries on Lutheran liturgy and hymnody. Carl Halter at Concordia College, River Forest, Illinois, was the first in a long line of capable and well-loved musical leaders who exerted enormous influence on future LCMS church musicians. Arthur Carl Piepkorn, another St. Louis professor, produced a meticulously researched monograph on the history and use of the liturgical vestments, which was and is recognized as the standard work on the subject.

By any gauge, these men from the Missouri Synod were giants in Lutheran liturgical studies. Most of them carried on their activities within the context of the Lutheran liturgical movement, however, and this is where their work was often compromised and came to be suspect among WELS pastors. Begun in the 1930s, the liturgical movement attracted pastors, teachers, church musicians, and laypeople from various Lutheran synods who were interested in the liturgical, musical, and artistic legacy of orthodox Lutheranism. Unfortunately, many of these individuals were also interested in Lutheran ecumenicity and arrived at conferences and symposiums not only for the study of worship but also to discover how the confessional walls that existed between Lutherans might be broken down. Among those quietly pushing for Lutheran unity were theologians who had begun to accept the conclusions of the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation. One can hardly blame Wisconsin Synod pastors, cautious and conservative by nature (and generally wary of ostentation anyway), for their disapproval of and distaste for the emphases of the Lutheran liturgical movement. Attending the sessions of the Valparaiso Liturgical Institute or subscribing to the publications of the Liturgical Society of St. James could put an ugly brand on a man during the 1940s and 1950s. The essay by Pastor E. Arnold Sitz (cited previously) included this paragraph:

It is our opinion that men like Dr. Luther Reed of the United Lutheran Church and Dr. Piepkorn of the Missouri Synod have done the Lutheran Church in America grave disservice in departing from the sober-minded and simple dress and ritual of the past century into the labyrinth of the high church movement. Fred Lindemann and many others are pressing so on this high church trend as to insist that the climax of the service can be nothing other than Holy Communion or, as they prefer to term it, the Eucharist, which in itself already gives a biased slant toward Roman Catholic terminology and toward Roman sacramentarianism, from which Luther set us free. Sad to say, they are losing sight of the position Luther rightly took that the Word is central; also of the stand of Luther that of the two sacraments, Baptism outranks Communion.

There is a story that somehow leaked out of a Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary call meeting that suggests that a certain board

member spoke against calling Kurt Eggert to the seminary because his wearing of the “high church” cassock and surplice rendered him doctrinally “unsafe.”

There were a few pastors and teachers in the synod who understood that there was much to learn from the Lutheran liturgical movement and that one need not buy into the ecumenical agenda to learn it. There were few opportunities, however, to share or put into practice what had been learned. The great debate with Missouri was waged during the 1950s, and that debate dominated the scene at conferences and conventions and in the synod’s schools and congregations. Hardly anyone in the Wisconsin Synod was left untouched by the battle. Countless families were divided, not only those with Missouri Synod ties but also those who experienced the defection of family members to the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Three of its largest and most historic congregations (Immanuel in Mankato, Minnesota; St. Martin in Winona, Minnesota; and St. John in West Bend, Wisconsin) and dozens of smaller ones left the synod, most to the Church of the Lutheran Confession but some to the Missouri Synod. The president of the seminary resigned. The Synodical Conference disbanded after 91 years of glittering history.

By the time the battle ended—Wisconsin ended its long fellowship with Missouri in 1961—the anti-Missouri spirit was high, and whatever good would come out of Missouri in the area of worship in the years following the break was more or less disregarded by the majority of WELS members. Besides, the synod was ready to go its own way and do its own thing in missions, benevolences, and worship.

NEW ATTITUDES

If pastors and teachers tend to exert more influence on worship practices than laypeople, then the role of the schools that train pastors and teachers is vital—and the four schools that prepared pastors and teachers in the 1960s witnessed the inauguration of new worship and music leaders. For the first time in its history, the seminary established a full-time liturgics chair in 1962 and called Dr. Martin Luther College’s music division head, Professor Martin Albrecht, to fill it. Albrecht reorganized the school’s liturgics and church-music curriculum, revitalized the Seminary Chorus, and kept students up-to-date on worship activities in the wider Lutheran world. Professor Meilahn Zahn succeeded Albrecht at Dr. Martin Luther College and presided over the expanding music program that was needed to serve a growing student body. Zahn guided the school’s choral activities to a new level of sophistication that enabled complete performances of Brahms’s *Requiem* and Bach’s *St. John Passion*. It was during Zahn’s tenure that the Memorial Organ was installed in the school’s auditorium, a three-manual Casavant organ designed by Paul Bunjes, perhaps the finest instrument in the Wisconsin Synod at the time. Arnold Lehmann, a Northwestern College graduate with a Ph.D. in liturgical history, arrived at his alma mater in 1962. Lehmann grabbed Northwestern’s musical reins with dogged determination, insisting on high standards for the school’s musical groups, refusing to excuse students from music rehearsals for sports activities (a new experience for this school), and insisting (he stood against the school’s most illustrious president on this issue) that a clas-

sically voiced pipe organ be placed in the chapel. The fourth of the synod’s worker-training schools, Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers’ College was born during this era. It began with the objective of supplying more teacher candidates for the synod’s overcrowded and understaffed elementary school system. Everything about the school was new and somewhat disorganized, and its first music director often found himself working in less than ideal circumstances. But from his position at the new college, located in the center of the synod’s constituency and in view of the synod’s administration, Kurt J. Eggert was able not only to serve the greater Milwaukee area, as he had already begun to do (see Professor Ralph Gehrke’s contribution to this commemorative volume), but also to influence the synod at large. These four men, and especially Albrecht and Eggert, were to have profound influence on the emerging worship attitudes in the Wisconsin Synod as they trained future pastors and teachers and as they carefully led the church body to new levels of liturgical appreciation.

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Despite its break with the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod was still dependent on Concordia Publishing House for its hymnal and service books. When Missouri began to consider a revision or replacement of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, therefore, Wisconsin was invited to join the discussions. The 1963 synod convention, reacting to a memorial from the Conference of Presidents and recognizing the need for broad-based involvement in these discussions, authorized the formation of a standing committee on worship. The Commission on Liturgy, Hymnody, and Worship was born with Martin Albrecht (chairman), Kurt Eggert (secretary), and Meilahn Zahn among its original members. At the same time Missouri was moving toward the 1969 publication of *Worship Supplement* (that is, supplemental to *The Lutheran Hymnal*), it also became involved with the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW), an organization that had as its stated objective the dream of the original Lutheran liturgical movement—a common hymnal for all of North America’s Lutherans. Although the Wisconsin Synod did not join the group officially, Albrecht and Eggert began attending the Chicago sessions of the ILCW in 1965.

After Martin Albrecht arrived at the seminary and as he began to chair the Commission on Worship, he and Kurt Eggert formed an interesting partnership. Their personal and social interests were not the same—Albrecht was Eggert’s senior by

fourteen years—but their individual abilities were complementary. Albrecht was the technician; Eggert was the artist. Eggert wrote the music, and Albrecht scribed it with his meticulous hand. Eggert philosophized, and Albrecht summarized. Eggert stood on the front lines encouraging the synod to reclaim its worship and musical legacy and to strive for catholicity in form and excellence in performance. To this effort Albrecht supplied his substantial reputation and thereby allowed a discussion of worship issues to be considered legitimate and prudent. Each man, in his own way, influenced a slow change in the worship attitudes of the Wisconsin Synod. Professor Albrecht, by his nineteen-year tenure at Dr. Martin Luther College (1943–1962) and his long association with the seminary, had personal contact with thousands of pastors and teachers. He was, in fact, a graduate of both schools. Because he edited music for church choirs and produced the very popular “Our Favorite Hymns” series (some three thousand cassette tapes were sold over thirty years), his name was well known to many who had never met him. Choir tours carried him to WELS congregations from Tacoma to Miami and from Tucson to Ottawa. Choir members sensed that someone knew him well at every church on the itinerary. Eggert’s sphere of personal influence was narrower but perhaps conceptually deeper. Those who came under his influence tended to attach themselves to him and his priorities with intense loyalty. He set high standards for those who followed him, and never being quite convinced that the best had been achieved, he encouraged them to strive for what was better. This quality was especially obvious in his work with the Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee, a choir of WELS members from various churches that he directed for thirty-six years.

The *Worship Supplement* was published in 1969, and the Commission on Worship analyzed the book’s contents and shared its resources with the synod on the pages of its publication, *Focus on Worship*. The new supplement did not enjoy wide use. It was in the pews at the seminary and at the Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel in Madison and was used by the choirs at Dr. Martin Luther College, but it was not purchased by Northwestern College or by any congregation known to this author. It was not above suspicion, either; seminary students often referred to it as “the worthless supplement” (it was from Missouri, after all). Its influence was deep, however, deeper than anyone might have expected in 1969. It exposed future pastors and teachers to dozens of new hymns, among them the hymns of Martin and Werner Franzmann, and to many fine old hymns as well. The book’s service orders notated the liturgical chants for both the congregation and the pastor, something WELS members had not seen before, and a few pastors gained permission to copy these services for experimentation at pastor and teacher conferences. The book included prayers arranged for leader and congregation, another concept that seemed innovative in 1969. The *Worship Supplement*’s contemporary setting of the Matins was regularly used in the seminary chapel.

The *Worship Supplement* was never intended as a replacement for *The Lutheran Hymnal*, and it became obvious to the Commission on Worship that the final product of the ILCW probably would not be acceptable to the Wisconsin Synod. (As it turned out, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, completed in 1978, was

not acceptable to the Missouri Synod either.) The commission did analyze the ILCW’s revision of the Christian calendar and its proposed three-year lectionary. A committee chaired by Pastor Victor Prange advised the 1974 synod convention that nothing stood in the way of using the new calendar and lectionary. The convention agreed, and soon thereafter Northwestern Publishing House began printing the lessons from the three-year cycle on the back of its bulletin covers. The Commission on Worship determined that its wisest course of action was to prepare materials to supplement *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Contemporary translations of the historic collects and graduals were produced. The commission developed a new concept for the Introit (psalm sections were placed between hymn stanzas) and shared several sets of these with the synod. In 1971 the commission produced a booklet entitled *Service of the Word*, which contained a new rite for Holy Baptism and a set of responsive general prayers besides a worship order for services at which Holy Communion was not offered. Plans for a booklet offering new hymns were begun but never brought to completion.

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There was a certain urgency in the Commission on Worship’s work in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mission expansion was occurring at a breakneck pace in the southern, northeastern, and southwestern regions of the United States, and evangelism efforts were attracting many people who were not Lutheran from birth. The synod was on the verge of going from nine districts to twelve. “In every state by ’78” was a quasi-official synodical motto. Old-line city congregations gave birth to daughter congregations in the suburbs as their members moved away from the central city. Congregations located in rural communities for their entire history became located in bedroom communities without changing their addresses. A hymnal that contained old English language, old English script, less than a dozen twentieth-century hymns, and no liturgical canticles newer than 1750 began to seem somewhat out of sync with the space age. Pastors began looking for something more relevant. They looked for hymns in a variety of resources, many decidedly non-Lutheran. Homemade orders of service proliferated. It seemed occasionally that the synod was living in the liturgical period of the judges, “where everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” The commission sensed that a new hymnal was vital if the synod was going to avoid a liturgical chaos it had experienced at the beginning of its history.

As the 1980s dawned, there was some hope that Missouri Synod's new hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*, could be adopted or at least adapted by the Wisconsin Synod. Pastoral conferences studied the new volume in earnest after its 1982 publication. But the book's thick liturgical section simply highlighted the long-standing differences between worship concepts and practices in the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. Once again, Wisconsin might have been willing to accept Missouri's hymns but not its liturgies. Although the concern ran deep in many places that Wisconsin lacked the talent to produce its own hymnal and the necessary accompanying publications, the Commission on Worship recommended to the 1983 convention that the synod embark on the production of its own hymnal. As they say, the rest is history, and Victor Prange tells the story of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* elsewhere in this commemorative volume.

CONCLUSION

One wonders what Johannes Muehlhaeuser would think were he to visit his Grace Church 150 years after its founding. The worship rite used twice every month in the four weekend services with Holy Communion is *Christian Worship's* Service of Word and Sacrament, which purports itself to be "a version of the historic liturgy of the Christian Church." Grace's two pastors are vested in alb and stole and regularly chant the liturgy. The Psalm and Verse of the Day are sung by a cantor, a children's choir, or one of several adult choirs. The Hymn of the Day is always sung in its historic liturgical position, connected to the Gospel and Sermon. Processions with crucifix and candles begin worship on festival days. By any gauge, "the rite of the old Lutheran church" is in place at the congregation Muehlhaeuser founded. Although he died apparently convinced that his synod's move toward a more confessional position was the right move, we're guessing he would react to worship at Grace with a frown.

One wonders what Kurt Eggert would think were he to have attended either the 1996 or 1999 version of the National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts, sponsored by the Commission on Worship he served for so many years. He would

have witnessed many of the historic Christian and Lutheran rites he had endeavored to restore. He would have experienced rituals that, while new to his synod, he knew had edified countless Christians in many eras and many places. He would have listened to music that may finally have met the standards he had set in his mind but was not always able to achieve in his concerts. He would have noticed the chasubles, chanting, candles, and crucifixes! And he would have observed the joy that this worship elicited from several thousand Wisconsin Synod participants. By any standard, the attitude of the synod that Eggert served has changed over 150 years. How would he react? We're guessing he would react with an incredulous smile!

On the other hand, he might have expected the change. He might have supposed that an appreciation for a rich liturgical life would eventually flow from his synod's love of the Scriptures and its commitment to the doctrines of the Reformation and the Lutheran Confessions. He might have expected attitudes to change as the synod overcame the prejudices of its early history and began to do the work of worship on the basis of its own studies and perspectives. He might have sensed that *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* would effect such changes. Such was the desire he had in the Introduction, which he wrote: "May [the hymnal's] use among us foster and strengthen appreciation of liturgical worship and enrich and enliven our relationship with God and each other." He might have longed to see the fruits of his labor, but the Lord took him to heaven, where the richest sort of worship is more than a dream; it's a reality. **LOGIA**

NOTES

1. *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 16, no. 2 (October 1998): 3–37.
2. Quoted in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 89.
3. C. F. W. Walther, *Essays for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 1:194.
4. Victor Prange, "Review of J. P. Koehler's 'The History of the Wisconsin Synod,'" *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 40.
5. *Theologische Quartalschrift* 35 (1938): 109–130; and 36 (1939): 97–118.