



Beyond Contemporary Worship

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A few preliminary comments

Some of you, especially those who don't know me, may be wondering why I am speaking about this topic today. Some background to our discussion...

Because I worked with a worship team in our church this past year, I was given an opportunity to become acquainted with worship issues that pertained to content, style and order of worship as well as the question of what to do with "contemporary worship."

In preparing for a church service using a worship team, there were many ideas and suggestions given to me, and I needed to learn how to respond to them. Some of the opinions expressed, and language and ideas I encountered required me to dig more deeply into the meaning of popular worship expressions and related issues. Some of this language has theological implications, so I will attempt to address that briefly, however, I won't be able to give the theological issues the attention they deserve. Those more in-depth discussions belong to the theology experts.

Also, I don't mean to sound like I am pointing fingers at anyone – I am well aware of the three pointing back at me. I have not always dealt well with worship issues in my own life, and I continue to face difficult music decisions in my role as a parish musician. Some decisions, looking back, I would have made differently. New issues crop up and uncharted waters cause some anxiety. For instance, how am I going to use an experienced harmonica player in worship? That is something facing me when I return to my home church – any advice is welcome.

I have tried to cover this topic thoroughly, but probably not thoroughly enough. There is so much history, musicology, and theology tied into the way we worship it is difficult to present a cursory discussion of certain topics without a little knowledge becoming "a dangerous thing." So, I hope this is only a start for you. I hope that you will read books, talk to people, take in more conferences or even do some coursework to help you continually grow in your understanding of Lutheran worship. Certainly, there is more to learn than one lifetime allows! How you will apply this discussion to your own situation, which may be entirely different than mine, also affects my ability to adequately cover these topics for you. My hope, however, is that this presentation will help get the worship conversations started in your parish.



Beyond Contemporary Worship

I cannot stay away from worship. Worship draws me toward it like a magnet.

Perhaps you have a similar passion for God's house and what goes on in it. After all, you came to this worship conference. And it is good to be here. But unfortunately, like the disciples' unfulfilled wish on the Mount of Glory, we cannot stay here. We go back to our parishes and fight the good fight; most of us wishing we could re-create what we experience here.

But there is always something bigger going on than what we experience both here and in our home churches. There are trends in worship that influence us. For everyone who works with worship in a parish there are many different backgrounds and influences in the lives of the members with whom he or she works.

I have a great curiosity about why people come or don't come to worship. As I see the megachurch filling its worship space and Christians commenting that non-denominational or *Contemporary Worship* is the way to go, I want to know why. So, I went! To four non-denominational megachurches in our area over the past 4 months – one service in each church. I compared what I observed to what I know as a Lutheran raised and educated liturgical worship.

Contemporary worship is more than just an academic interest to me, because some of our church members have expressed an interest in this type of worship for our church. On the positive side, this interest and debate over worship styles presents an opportunity for those involved in worship. As questions about worship arise the need to come together and discuss worship issues is apparent. There is a need to get the worship conversations started, and Lutheran worship needs to be studied together.

Why is this important? Consider this lengthy quote from Paul Westermeyer's book *Te Deum: The Church and Music* which condenses the painstaking process some church musicians and pastors face when choosing music for worship:

On any given Sunday when a choir is singing an anthem, the anthem obviously has to be chosen. What determines the choice? The choir director is likely to ask several questions. 1) Can the choir sing it? 2) Is the music "good"? 3) Is the text religious? (The third question is sometimes phrased, "Does the text mention Jesus or God?") The first question requires a judgment about applied music and perhaps music education, the second one is aesthetic, and the third implies virtually no theological judgment at all or at best a negative theological one.

The minister...who wants a say in the choice of the anthem is likely to have some other concerns. 1) If the church follows historic liturgical patterns, the concern will be for a text that fits the lessons for a given Sunday. 2) If the church is issue-oriented and gearing up for a march related to justice,[not likely in WELS] the clergy is likely to ask for a text that embodies a prophetic call. The request for this text will probably be made very late,

sometimes a week or less in advance...3) If the minister has a pastoral orientation, something with which the people are familiar may be sought. 4) A minister who thinks the service should entice seekers will desire something with immediate appeal. The clergy may want to replace the choir director and choir with a few singers who have microphones. In the first instance the judgment is liturgical, in the second ethical, in the third potentially pastoral, and in the fourth presumably related to evangelism.

Note that the musician in this instance makes virtually no theological judgment, and the clergy makes no musical judgment. The musicians may then accuse the pastor of having no musical understanding, and the pastor is likely to say the musician does not know anything about worship, ethics, people or evangelism. These configurations can easily change so that the musician accuses the pastor of not knowing anything about worship, for example. However the accusations are made and however correct they may be, both parties are, in the final analysis, wrong because they're playing the game in different ballparks. As long as the frames of reference are so different, there is little hope for discussion and much less hope for any happy issue from these afflictions. The study of church music ought to introduce the dimensions of the topic. It will not solve all the problems, but it does have the advantage of getting the players in the same ballpark.¹

Today, we attempt to get in the same ballpark. And we take Prof. Westermeyer's encouragement to get into the same ballpark as pastors and church musicians in our own congregations. We pull back the curtain and see what is beyond contemporary. What is, in Lutheran worship, beyond the moment, the hour, the day, the week, the month, the year, the decade, the century, of this time and place, both in the past and future.

¹ Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998) , p. 2-3.

Beyond Confusing Terminology

Let's briefly talk about vocabulary. Getting in the same ballpark involves speaking a language everyone can understand. Imbedded in these issues about worship are words that mean one thing to one person and another thing to another person.

The term *traditional* has been used to describe liturgical worship. *Liturgical* has been used to describe the Western Rite. Churches that use *traditional* worship are understood to be organ based, as well. *Contemporary* has been used to describe a certain pop-style sound. It is also a word that can imply a different order of worship, or a philosophy of worship. When people want *contemporary* worship, it could mean that they want drums and guitar in church, and songs that "rock." *Blended* worship refers to a mixing of the old and new. Throw in a few more terms such as *creative traditional*, *modern traditional* and *eclectic liturgical* and now no one knows what anyone is talking about!

Pastor Jon Schroeder helped clear up a perceptions in differences between worship based on the Western Rite and contemporary worship three years ago at our worship conference:

Simply put, liturgical worship uses the ancient songs of the Church, the seasons and reading of the Church Year, the vestments and patterns of worship inherited from our Christian forefathers.

...Contemporary worship does not mean using songs written recently. It does not mean using melodies that sound like pop music on the radio. It is not a matter of musical style or instruments. It is a matter of texts.

Contemporary worship does not follow the pattern of those songs and rites of the Church. It does not bind itself to the Christian calendar. It avoids vestments. It is a product of the Evangelical movement in Christianity, and in its present form it is a few decades in the making.

In our circles, discussions of liturgical versus contemporary worship fail to gain traction because they inevitably degenerate into a debate regarding style of music. This misses the point entirely. The difference between liturgical and contemporary worship comes not from style but from texts.²

While this debate between the liturgical and contemporary centers on text, it may also be helpful to discuss perceptions about musical style. I will attempt to address some of those questions, but many of those answers lie in the churches you came from, as you discuss what kind of instruments are appropriate in your parish.

For a point of reference today here is our working glossary. *Liturgical* will refer to *the work of the people*, a form of worship rooted in the people's song, and worship based on the lectionary and seasons of the church year. *Western Rite* will refer to pattern of worship that uses the ancient Biblical songs in a particular order in the service of Holy Communion.

² Jonathon Schroeder, "Rite Worship for North American Outreach" *National conference on Worship, Music and the Arts* (July 2005): 1. Article can be found at www.wels.net.

Biblical songs refer to the ancient texts and songs of the church taken out of the Bible and used in worship: *Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, Create in Me, Magnificat, Song of Simeon, Psalmody, and the Lord's Prayer*. I will try not to use the word *traditional*. I will use the word *contemporary*, most of the time, in a strict sense -the worship order used by many megachurches.

Also, deserving mention from the start, the focus of the discussion today strongly points in the direction of favoring using the Western Rite as a basis for our worship over the Non-denominational contemporary order of worship. The contemporary order raises concerns for the clarity of the Biblical message presented in worship, the participation of the people for the building up of their faith, proclamation of the word, and the understanding of the Body of Christ. There is also a concern for the formation of faith and passing on the story of sin and grace to our youth and children and to those who don't know Christ, as well as concerns for how the sacraments are presented and used.

In contrast, I hope to demonstrate that the Western Rite centers on the use of the word and sacraments by the people in worship. The texts in this Rite point us toward God, toward each other, and toward Christ, the object of our faith. It more clearly reflects the God's encouragement of "the Word of God dwelling in us richly" and his command to "make disciples of all nations" by using what he has given us to use to praise him.

In the same breath, that does not mean that the megachurch church is without saints. We all know that God finds his children in many churches, and in many places, in many orders of worship and styles of worship.

Beyond Doctrinaire Schemes

Marketing is all around us. The church is not immune to it; in fact, churches have used marketing techniques to get people interested in the church.

In regard to worship music, Paul Westermeyer talks about “doctrinaire³ schemes” of the church. In other words, when it is used in such a way as to promote a certain theology, or when only a certain style or type of music is allowed to be used by the church, music becomes “doctrinaire.”⁴

Surveys, research, and the social sciences have offered much information on how to get people in church, yet many of the techniques used by the church (and megachurches in particular) in and outside of worship seem more like doctrinaire schemes and marketing tools.

The Presence of God

“Coming into the presence of God.” “Falling in love with God.” “Singing love songs to God.” This is some of the language that contemporary worship advocates use to separate themselves from mainline Christian churches. The language sounds good, but what does it mean?

Consider the number one criteria that one worship leader uses to express “How God Evaluates Worship.”

1. True worship treasures God’s presence. God welcomes those into his presence who want him. The quest may be one of desperation or of delight, of frantic need or of a loving hunger for fellowship, but the motivation is clear – and so is his pleasure with it...

...Rather than tightly regimented gatherings, concerned over aesthetics, mechanics, and academic theology, we need to encourage people to fall in love with God.⁵

Does God’s presence come only to those who seem to have found some emotional way to God? What is the presence of God at worship? Is it a “holy hush”?

...Have you ever planned the perfect praise set, ended with a beautiful worship ballad and a holy hush fell over the room, only to have a pastor/elder/deacon hop up on stage and crack a joke? Holy hushes can make the people who don’t “get” worship nervous so they tend to crack jokes to break the “tension.” I call this “worship sabotage.” It happens all the time, and destroys and demoralizes the worship leader who has

³ Doctrinaire can mean either 1) dogmatic or 2) theoretical or impractical.

⁴ Carl R. Messerli, ed., *Thine the Amen* (Minneapolis: Luther University Press, 2005), Paul Westermeyer, “No Special Doctrinaire Schemes” p. 179.

⁵ Jack Hayford, “How God Evaluates Worship” *Building Church Leaders*, published by Leadership Resources © 2005 Christianity Today Intl. www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

prayerfully spent hours planning the music to lead people into God's presence.⁶

Notice the subjectivity of what "God's presence" means. God tells us when and where he is present at worship. "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:20)."

Of music in the megachurch Paul Westermeyer says:

It ushers the worshiper from "the outer courts' into the 'holy of holies' of God's presence." Music "is the means for encounter with God." It is "sacramental...it is often as stark and highly charged as medieval eucharistic theology." The language is "almost...*ex opere operato*, the phrase use to convey the perceived efficacy of the priest's words to effect the transubstantiation of the elements in the medieval Mass."⁷

...For Protestants to embrace the theology and practice they have opposed, even if it is worked out with different means, is at the very least contradictory and a little more than curious.⁸

The point is that the Protestant church, over many centuries, has seen the ceremony, ritual and doctrines (for example, *transubstantiation*) of the Roman Catholic Church to be impractical, and somewhat "hocus-pocus." When megachurches use *music* to bring people into the *presence of God*, or to "conjure up" God, are they not guilty of the same "hocus-pocus," since music itself, has no power to do this? Certainly, it is an act of grace that God is revealed in the Word and sacraments, for we need only consult our friend, Moses, to see what the meaning of being in God's presence truly is. No human can be in the true presence of God, or encounter God in his holiness and glory, and still live.

For Lutherans, God comes *to us* in his Word and Sacraments, we do not bring him into worship through an awesome praise song. But the Lutheran church does well to continually examine its music so it does not fall prey to doctrinaire schemes. As Westermeyer says, worship music needs to be "broken to font, word, and table."⁹

Architecture

Some have assumed that church architecture has a lot to do with why people either come or don't come to church. This theory has promoted great efforts to make megachurches (and also smaller churches) not appear too "churchy," assuming it would be a barrier to the unchurched. However,

in a study conducted by LifeWay Research for Cornerstone Knowledge Network, the unchurched preferred more traditional looking buildings by

⁶ Don Chapman, "The Top Three Mistakes in Contemporary Worship." www.worshipideas.com.

⁷ Messerli, *Thine the Amen*, Westermeyer "Doctrinaire," p. 180. Westermeyer is quoting John Witvliet, from *Worship Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 255.

⁸ Messerli, *Thine the Amen*, Westermeyer, "Doctrinaire," p. 181

⁹Messerli, *Thine the Amen*, Westermeyer, "Doctrinaire," p. 188.

nearly a 2-to-1 ratio over any other option. Given 100 “preference points” to allocate among four photos of church exteriors, the unchurched used an average of 47.7 points on the most traditional and Gothic options...

Young unchurched people particularly preferred the traditional look. Those between the ages of 25 to 34 gave an average of 58.9 of their 100 preference points to the more Gothic church exterior while those over the age of 70 gave that option only an average of 32.9 points.

One survey respondent said modern churches “seem cold.”¹⁰

The clever architectural attempt at attracting the unchurched to the megachurch seems less than honest and for that reason, impractical or doctrinaire. I had the chance to see the outside of the megachurch through the eyes of my eight-year-old son, who I brought with me to observe worship one Sunday. As I drove into the parking lot of the megachurch I said, “We’re here at the church, Chip.” He said, “Where’s the church?” I said, “Right there.” He said, “Where?” (We were almost on top of the church at this point.) I pointed, “Right here!” He said, “That’s the church?? I thought that was a high school.” How practical is a church’s architecture if individuals can’t even recognize it as such?

The God of Technopoly and Efficiency

One part of our culture that affects almost everyone is continuing advancements in technology. Marva Dawn uses the word “Technopoly” (coined by Neil Postman) to describe the god-like status of technology in our lives. Dawn states through the words of Postman¹¹ that Technopoly

consists in the deification of technology, which means that the culture seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfaction in technology, and takes its orders from technology. This requires the development of a new kind of social order, and of necessity leads to the rapid dissolution of much that is associated with traditional beliefs.¹²

Certainly, technology carries much power and influence in our daily lives. Marva Dawn comments on the way technology’s “efficiency agenda” has influenced worship:

The escalating disruption of intimacy and community...is augmented by the technological society’s idolatry of efficiency. Our culture is characterized by an enormous push to do everything faster. We want faster vehicles, computers, and cooking equipment. We must solve all our problems with an instant technological fix. Things must be on time. The press for efficiency is compounded by the media, and less substantive, commercials get more hyped, the bombardment of sensory impressions increases in

¹⁰ Audrey Barrick, “Unchurched Prefer Cathedrals Over Contemporary Church Buildings” *The Christian Post* ©2006 (7 April 2008): www.christianpost.com

¹¹Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p. 71.

¹²Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Wililiam B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), p. 29. Dawn is quoting Neil Postman.

velocity...Because the Church seeks to minister to people formed by the technological milieu, it easily succumbs to its principal criterion of efficiency.

When this technological mind-set invades the Church, it can be extremely destructive of true worship in multiple ways – especially if we “must” finish the worship service in an hour. The liturgy becomes clockwork, service elements are eliminated, free expression of praise is stifled, the sermon is cut so brief that no deep biblical explication can occur, hymn verses are chopped off, the Eucharist becomes less communitarian, and there is no time for common prayer and sharing of concerns and thanksgivings...¹³

Technopoly and efficiency can have an influence on the choices we make in worship music:

...the bombardment of hyped media impressions creates the need for worship to be similarly “upbeat.” There is no place for sorrowful hymns of repentance, mourning dirges for a crucified Savior, despairing cries for hope in the troubles of life, contemplative anthems that calls for deeper thinking. The speed of the technological society easily invades all our worship tempos...We lose the majesty of many hymns, the moving pathos of the laments of Lent, the profound significance of the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed, the lessons that can be gained by close listening to a slow-paced reading of the Scriptures.¹⁴

If technology “runs the show” at worship, some questions need to be asked about the hidden messages communicated during the service. Also, with the growing use of worship videos, countdowns, and even youtube.com what goes up on the jumbo screen needs to be evaluated carefully. Because of the tendency for society to accept technology and video as objective truth further obligates us to use media wisely in worship.

The Influence of Christian Radio

Fans of Christian Radio can access their favorite station in virtually every daily situation in which they find themselves - in the morning in their kitchens, in the car on the way to work, at work, and at home again. And, even when exercising, the music they have come to love can be played through an iPod, directly into their ears.

Christian Radio, which mostly promotes American evangelicalism, has the potential to be a significant influence on the lives of Lutheran Christians. How does this influence affect the way these members view their church? Do they want church to be more like Christian Radio? How is the influence of Christian radio addressed by Lutherans? Perhaps the church needs to step up its influence in the lives of Christians by offering daily worship opportunities at their local church.

¹³ Dawn, *Reaching Out*, p. 42.

¹⁴ Dawn, *Reaching Out*, p. 42, 43.

Worship that is “alive”

There may be some reasons to avoid getting a praise band in church. Questions about style are good questions to ask and discuss.

Say, for example, that people in your congregation are accusing the worship leaders of conducting worship that is bland, dull, lifeless, or boring. The statements may sound something like, “If we only had...” and fill in the blank with a number of things: a drumset, more pumped-up music, powerpoint, better greeters, more riveting sermons, a better organist, a more charismatic pastor, etc. The tendency may be to look at another church and say, “We want to be just like them.” The fact is one church will never exactly mimic another, since the personality of the church greatly reflects the individual members that make it up.

What is the result if a church starts using a drumset in worship and suddenly, these same people now think that the church’s worship is “alive.” Is that really true? Is it a drumset that makes worship more alive? Of course not. But that is the implication, that we can just simply add a few instruments or other bells and whistles to make our worship better. This is a dangerous assumption because it puts too much pressure on how we worship and not on the content of our worship. There is no end to the road of more “wow” if that is what the people come to depend on. There are better questions to ask. In the end, it may be better to avoid the drumset up in the front of church if it encourages members to make false assumptions about worship.

As imperfect humans, we know that we can always do better. Still, we strive for excellence in our worship. Excellence is not the same as “wow.” Excellence can be simple. Excellence implies that we simply give our best that we have to offer at the time.

How is our worship made better or more alive? God is praised as his word is shared because *that is the way* God is praised – by using and sharing his word. The “life” is found in the living Word. Marva Dawn would say, very simply, our worship is best when it is about nothing else except God:

It is absolutely essential that the Church keep God as the subject of worship since to be Christian means to believe that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is everything to us – Creator, Provider, and Sustainer; Deliverer, Redeemer, and Lord; Sanctifier, Inspirer, and Empowerer. Friendship, instruction, and other aspects of the gathered community are important, but we lose our reason for being if we do not constantly remember that God has called us to be his people and that our ability to respond to that call in worship and life is totally the gift of God’s grace.

We who live by the name *Christian* are those rescued from ourselves by the salvation wrought by Jesus. Since salvation is entirely God’s gift and not deserved or earned, Christian worship above all makes clear who is the giver of that and every other gift and challenges the world to respond to who he is.¹⁵

¹⁵ Dawn, *Reaching Out*, p. 76.

The Model Didn't Work

Willow Creek Community Church, one of the largest megachurches in the Midwest, and also the model on which many other megachurches were planted and grown, has now admitted that it is moving away from seeker-sensitive services.

Since 1975, Willow Creek has avoided conventional church approaches, using its Sunday services to reach the unchurched through polished music, multimedia, and sermons referencing popular culture and other familiar themes. The church's leadership believed the approach would attract people searching for answers, bring them into a relationship with Christ, and then capitalize on their contagious fervor to evangelize others.

But the analysis in *Reveal*, which surveyed congregants at Willow Creek and six other churches, suggested that evangelicalistic impact was greater from those who self-reported as "close to Christ" or "Christ-centered" than from new church attendees. In addition, a quarter of the "close to Christ" and "Christ-centered" crowd described themselves as spiritually "stalled" or "dissatisfied" with the role of the church in their spiritual growth. Even more alarming to Willow Creek: About a quarter of the "stalled" segment and 63 percent of the "dissatisfied" segment contemplated leaving the church.¹⁶

Where are those who are leaving Willow Creek and similar churches going? Diana Butler Bass, author of *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, stated in an article about the shift at Willow Creek:

"I have interviewed dozens and dozens of people throughout the United States who used to belong to churches like Willow Creek but left them in order to become Presbyterians or Lutherans or Episcopalians," she said. "Ex-members of the megachurches have sort of rediscovered a level of being Christian that they were unaware of."

Just as some mainline churches are emphasizing the importance of simple practices like prayer and Bible study, Bass said, churches like Willow Creek are having a similar revelation. "The littlest congregation in the world can do those kinds of things," she said. "It's through those pathways that those churches have actually found revitalization."¹⁷

Perhaps the new church model for the megachurch will be the small church. Maybe the new model will act and look very much like the church most WELS people attend!

Sally Morgenthaler, another high-profile evangelical worship leader and author of *Worship Evangelism* (a contemporary worship how-to book) recently changed her tune. The shift in

¹⁶ Matt Branaugh, "Willow Creek's 'Huge Shift'" www.Christianitytoday.com, posted May 15, 2008.

¹⁷ "Willow Creek find limits to its model" *The Christian Century Magazine*, (January 2008: www.christiancentury.org).

Sally Morgenthaler's mind caused her to completely shut down her worship website, *Sacramentis*.

The upshot? For all the money, time, and effort we've spent on cultural relevance – and that includes culturally relevant worship – it seems we came through the last 15 years with a significant net loss in churchgoers, proliferation of megachurches and all.¹⁸

Prof. Dan Leyrer, evangelism professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, writes about the significance of Morgenthaler's change in thinking.

When she pulled her site off the Web, Morgenthaler posted the following: "We have become convinced that the primary meeting place with our unchurched friends is now outside the church building." Worship can still be evangelism, she asserted, but that means worship must be more life than event. More what you do and who you are than where you go.

What can confessional pastors learn from Morgenthaler's odyssey (and all her research)? Because Lutheran worship contains law and gospel and centers on Christ, it will always be a place where evangelizing happens. We pray it will always be a place where the people of God set a full table of the gospel and thus offer what people need not only to grow as Christians but to become Christians. Because we invite the unchurched to worship and we expect the Lord to bless those invitations, we do our best to make every visitor feel welcome from the property we maintain to the printed materials we produce to the sermons we preach. We expect all this from Lutheran worship that is carefully planned and enthusiastically entered by the congregation members. What we do not expect worship to do is to hit the streets and neighborhoods and talk to the unchurched. While worship may be inviting, it does not invite. That's what we are to do, we witnesses who worship in our everyday lives and not just in sanctuaries."¹⁹

Christian worship does not need doctrinaire schemes. How refreshing it is to know that, after all is said and done in the name of worship, it can be as simple as focusing on God through the use of his word, sacraments, and his good gifts. And, after all that is said and done in the name of outreach, it can be as simple as inviting our neighbor to church with us.

¹⁸ Sally Morgenthaler, "Worship As Evangelism" *Rev!*, (May/June 2007): www.rev.org.

¹⁹ Daniel P. Leyrer, "Worship as Evangelism: A Guru Changes Her Tune" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 3, © Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Beyond the Blank Slate and Neutral Music

These are two common assumptions about worship that people will use to advocate the use of any type of music in worship and to advocate a “God doesn’t tell us how we should worship” approach to the actual service.

While we know that there is freedom in all things for Christians, there is also wisdom exercised by Christians about the way we do things so that the Body of Christ may be built up. I have complete freedom to wear a bathing suit to worship as a redeemed child of Christ, but it is something I just wouldn’t do (especially as the pastor’s wife). While it is probably, in and of itself, not wrong for me to do this, I take into consideration what God says about modesty and how wearing a bathing suit to worship would make other people feel.

We don’t operate in a vacuum when we plan worship. In the name of Christian freedom, however, we sometimes fail to see that God has some things to say about the way we worship in the Bible. Music, as one of his good gifts, if not used well by the church, will be used by unchristian powers as a means to accomplish their purposes.

Assumption: Worship planning starts with a blank slate.

Let’s pretend that thousands of years of Christian history didn’t exist. That would eliminate Creation, the Flood, the Psalms, Jesus, the Apostles...you get the idea. Ludicrous, right? But for each time we start over with our worship practices, we are neglecting that history and the renewal process of learning what God has to say to his church about worship. Forgetting about the lives of the saints who have gone before us is just as if a family would decide to completely forget about all their deceased relatives, never talk about some of the stories they told or wisdom they imparted to them, or the joy they received from talking with them.

The modern Christian church which prides itself on being cutting-edge, blazing new trails in worship by leaving the past behind is deceiving itself.

We would like to believe that we inhabit a new “paradigm” or a world we describe with the prefix “post” (post-Christian, post-modern, post-Puritan, postdenominational, postpatriarchal, etc.). We are right when those designations suggest that our age, like every other age, faces new challenges that are not to be evaded. We are wrong when they deny our biblical roots and our common bond with and debt to the early church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and what followed right up to the present. We delude ourselves when we ...shut out a broader historical vision that would free us from our myopia.²⁰

Principles of Worship

Scriptural expressions of worship abound in the Bible, especially in the psalms. Scholars have drawn out worship principles based on what the Bible says about worship - that God

²⁰Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, p. 319-320.

wants our worship to be edifying (1 Co 14:26), orderly (1 Co 14:33, 40) focus on God, to his glory (1 Co 10:31-33) be faithful to the truth (Jn 4:23-24), and embrace our spiritual heritage (Ph 1:4-5), *to cite only a few passages*. These principles have been brought out in the WELS Commission of Worship's Bible study *Come Worship Christ* and through the *School of Worship Enrichment* Seminars and here in our workshops at the worship conferences. They were also the principles that guided the work on *Christian Worship Supplement*. Here is one way these principles that guide our worship choices can be expressed:

God and his gospel are the focus at worship.

God's creation proclaims his praise with the best of his gifts at worship.

God's people actively participate at worship.

God's story and the stories of the saints are shared at worship.

Other scripture about worship, which stand alongside the principles, reveal the variety of worship expressions found in the Bible: bowing down (Ps 95:6, 2 Ch 20:18), clapping (Ps 47:1), dancing (Ps 149:3, Ps 150:4, 2 Sa 6:14), kneeling (Dn 6:10), lifting hands (Ps 134:2, Ps 63:4, 1 Ti 2:8), playing musical instruments (Ps 150:3-5, 1 Ch 15:16), shouting (Ps 66:1, Ps 35:27), silence (Ps 46:10, Hab 2:20), singing (Ps 147:1, 2 Ch 29:30, Ps 149:1, Col 3:16), standing (Neh 9:5, Ex 33:10), giving an offering (1 Ch 16:29).²¹

The expressions of worship in the Bible provide a colorful backdrop to a discussion of the many postures and expressions of worship available to use with the Body of Christ at worship.

The Principles as a Guide

The principles of worship drawn out of scripture can guide us in thoughtful evaluation while observing other Christian churches worship and in our own church's worship life.

In my observations, while the Gospel was found in some small ways at worship in the megachurch, it did not clearly predominate. The focus was mainly on the people. The texts of many praise songs used suggest that we are doing something for God when we sing, and there is very little language that actually tell something about God. This prompts us to ask, "Who is worship really about?"

There were no scripture readings outside of the texts used in the message. Expert theologians could assess the sermons much better than I, but I did pick up on a strong message of self-improvement and/or spiritual activism. One of the sermons I listened to ended with a two words on the jumbo screen, "Do something." The messages were usually 30 minutes or more in length.

The participation of people was minimal. The praise band did the work of worship and the people were along for the ride. Some sang, but their song was not heard because the band was too loud. Some raised their hands or clapped, but they, as a group, were not in charge of the song and the voice of the soloist predominated. There were no spoken confessions, psalms or prayers. The worship leader lead prayers, but the people just listened and no actual prayers ever came from their lips.

²¹Bill Heiges, "Biblical Expressions of Worship" a Bible-study.

The gifts being used in worship, however, were top-notch. For this, we can commend the priority that the megachurch has given to worship. Soloists and instrumentalists strive for excellence, and sound systems are state of the art. But I wondered how many of the musicians on stage were professional, hired to do the work of worship. There is something unsettling about handing over worship to professional groups. Where were the gifts of the people featured in worship? Was it the *people's* best that was offered?

Another area where the megachurch excelled was in the initial welcome of the visitors and members. Smiles abounded, doors were opened for me, and I was welcomed into a very inviting gathering area. There was lots of activity and fellowship, and almost always a coffee bar (free for visitors) nearby. The carpet, furniture, and interior decorating were lovely and also very inviting. Well-decorated restrooms had ample space and were clean and well-supplied. Childcare was also readily available if needed. If there is anything we can learn from the megachurches is that they welcome very well. They also understand that we live in a society used to creature comforts and guest-friendly services.

Inside the worship space, however, the heritage of the church was barely present in the services I attended. There was a general order – Gathering, Songs, Announcements, Songs, sometimes Communion, Sermon. But there were no canticles or psalms, no ancient greetings (“The Lord be with you”) or blessings, not even the Lord’s Prayer or scripture readings. Jesus’ words of institution weren’t used in Holy Communion, and there was no confession of sin or creed. The only hint of tradition was found in modern settings of hymns like *Amazing Grace* or *Be Still My Soul*.

From attending these megachurches one could get the impression that not much in the Christian church happened before the year 2000 AD. Will the megachurch be re-inventing itself again in the near future as the upcoming generations long for something more rooted? Will it begin look to the past instead of starting from another blank slate?

In looking at new ideas for a worship model at Willow Creek Community Church Pastor Greg Hawkins said:

Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we do church. That we take out a clean sheet of paper and we rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace it with new insights. Insights that are informed by research and rooted in Scripture. Our dream is really to discover what God is doing and how he’s asking us to transform this planet.²²

What will take precedence – the clean sheet or the Scriptures?

²² Bob Burney, “A Shocking “Confession” from Willow Creek Community Church” www.townhall.com, October 30, 2007.

Assumption: Music is neutral.

The next time you are in the mall, walk into several stores of varying types. Notice the music. Try to think about what the music does to you while you are in the store. Does it make you want to buy something? Does it make you feel good about yourself?

Marketing research has provided much information on how music affects people. Different styles of music send different messages. Some may say Classical music reflects wealth, or the finer things in life. For some, Country music reflects blue-collar life. Music can send a strong message.

Music is also a gift of God. He gave it for us to use, and its highest use is when it beautifully carries the message of salvation. But music can be used for evil, too, as Paul Westermeyer reveals:

...singing, like nothing else, *binds together a corporate gathering*. Leaders of nonviolent marches know of and use music's tremendous power. They use music not only because it gives a group a common physical response, but because in the process it also creates a psychosocial unity. Dictators, including Adolf Hitler, have been highly aware of music's potentials. They have used music's power for deadly demonic ends, which need to serve as a solemn warning to all of us in the church. If we do not use music well, tyrants will fill the vacuum and use it for devious purposes. But music can be used positively for the common good and for an incredible shalom.²³

Not only does music have an intrinsic power but it also has the ability to shape specific ideas, feelings, and even beliefs. Consider this thoughtful answer to a question about music style posted on the Q & A section of the WELS website:

Today some Christians question the use of certain musical styles in worship, and so the battle continues. Musical styles are not inherently sinful; the Bible has no list of acceptable and unacceptable musical styles. The fact remains, however, that Satan will use the arts and artists whenever he can to move the emotions of Christians in a way that will lead them not only to sin but also to theological error and confusion. We certainly know the sinful nature leads some Christians to listen to music with lyrics they know are sinful. We should also be aware that the sinful nature can convince Christians to accept flawed and false religious ideas. In other words, the power of Satan is strong, and the faith of Christians is weak. With this reality in mind, we struggle to make choices that are consistent with faith. And we are concerned not only about our own faith, but also the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ. A musical style that may not be a problem for me may cause my fellow Christians to stumble.²⁴

²³ Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, p. 28.

²⁴ WELS Q&A, www.wels.net, December 19, 2006.

Proponents of the contemporary music movement use the argument that music is neutral to advocate the use of any style of music in worship. Yet, ironically, you won't find an organ in these newly-built churches because of the very fact that organs and organ music send the message of "church" to the listener. Since megachurches are trying to be the "antichurch" they don't include the organs. Isn't this in itself an admission that music is not neutral?

The man who first said "the medium is the message," was ahead of his time. What Marshall McLuhan said about how we receive messages through media is worthy of note in regard to worship and neutral music:

A McLuhan message always tells us to look beyond the obvious and seek the non-obvious changes or effects that are enabled, enhanced, accelerated or extended by the new thing.

...He writes, "it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium."...And it is the character of the medium that is its potency or effect - its message.²⁵

Questions about musical style in worship are valid because the style of the music has a message in McLuhan's theory. "Is the message of the music consistent with the message of the Word?" we may ask. What are we communicating with the music we use in worship?

The writings of McLuhan are too in-depth and cranial to adequately cover here, and I am just barely scratching the surface of his theory. But it is worth digging into. His theories can shed light on all media used in church including powerpoint, video, and even written work and language.

Resources

Te Deum: The Church and Music, Paul Westermeyer

Keywords in Church Music, Carl Schalk

Reaching Out without Dumbing Down, Marva Dawn

Christian Worship Manual

Text, Music, Context

McLuhan for Beginners by W. Terrence Gordon

²⁵ Mark Federman, "What is the Meaning of The Medium is the Message?" article available at http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/article_mediumisthemessage.htm.

Beyond Menu worship

Give people what they want and they will be happy. Contemporary people want a Contemporary Service. Traditional people want a Traditional Service. Don't try to combine them, then, no one will be happy.

Really?

There is no end to the styles of worship a church could offer to make everyone "happy." One brief skimming of the Saddleback Church website will show this. Saddleback, of Lake Forest, California, is now offering at least eight different types of worship. Actually, they are called "worship venues" on the website.

1. Praise – Gospel choir
2. Overdrive – Rock n' Roll
3. Ohana – "Island" or Hula
4. Elevation – "Saddleback with an edge"
5. Family
6. ¡El Encuentro! – Spanish
7. Traditions – Classic hymns and choruses
8. Passion – praise and worship²⁶

And there are probably more to come. What does this say for unity in the Body of Christ? That church isn't about unity? In reality each of these services probably becomes a separate "church." The church is subdivided.

Much of the reading I've done about contemporary worship reflects exactly that understanding. Unity does not matter. In fact, many mistakenly believe it is mostly a personal experience, beginning with us instead of with God, as these thoughts reveal:

Our first purpose is not to "get something out of worship" but to extend to God glory and adoration. Though providing inspiration and nurture for worship is important, it is secondary...*The major activity of worship happens in the vertical dimension.* Forget about the person next to you. Concentrate on your relationship with God.²⁷

When the person next to you in the pew doesn't matter, then, why not choose a worship style that trips your trigger? But what we know and teach about worship involves the Body of Christ being built up *together*, proclaiming the word *together*, receiving God's forgiveness and goodness *together*, and *together*, thanking and praising him at worship. Our fellowship practices also reflect this understanding.

²⁶ From the website www.saddleback.com, as of June 21, 2008.

²⁷ Norma Dewal Malefyt and Howard Vanderwell, "Worship as Dialogue" *Building Church Leaders*, published by Leadership Resources © 2005 Christianity Today Intl., www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

Historically, Lutheran worship has always been a blend of styles, which is one of its unifying strengths. Refer to the above list and picture a Lutheran service incorporating many of the stylistic elements above:

1. A Gospel style anthem
2. A very upbeat setting of the Gloria
by a worship team
3. An Ohana interpretation of a hymn during
the offering (maybe on Mission Sunday!)
4. A somewhat jazzy but dignified setting of
Psalm 130 by a soloist and guitarist
5. A family choir sings the Verse or a verse of a hymn
6. A congregational hymn with Spanish roots –
maybe a djembe plays along
7. A “classic” hymn
8. A radio song (a good one) sung by children, a choir, or worship team for
a postlude.

The likelihood of all these styles combining in one service is slim, but the point illustrates that Lutheran worship has historically made use of all of the best church music available, whether it be folk or art music. Lutherans continue to have the freedom to choose from a variety of cultural and stylistic music, provided that it has passed the tests of text, music and context.²⁸ The variety of music at worship reflects diversity within unity.

Some Lutheran churches have tried to appease the population within a congregation calling for a different style of music by forming two separate services on the weekend - a traditional service and a contemporary service. Despite the obvious problem of dealing with loaded terms that don't accurately reflect what is going on in the different services, a church will eventually have to deal with the division occurring within their midst when one style becomes favored over another.

When people unite around a particular style of worship it blurs the true reason for unity in worship. Our unity in the Body of Christ is centered on the word of God and our confessional unity in that word. If our unity becomes centered on style a shift occurs in our view of the Body of Christ and in our uniting force.²⁹ Worship becomes about “God and style” instead of simply about God and his word. Marva Dawn’s simple words ring in our ears – worship must be about God.³⁰ With this in mind our worship becomes a blend of styles that serve the word and serve the Body of Christ rather than serving one particular group who favors a particular style. This is a challenge in our day when people are used to having everything “their way” from their burger at Burger King to their latte at Starbucks. This unity is part of what makes the Christian church countercultural. We set aside our some of our individual preferences for the sake of the Body of Christ at worship.

²⁸ Text, Music, Context is the title of a publication which guides church leadership and musicians through the process of choosing worship music. It is an excellent resource for a congregation’s worship board or music committee to study.

²⁹ Thank you to the gentlemen who so eloquently brought this point out in the live presentation.

³⁰ See Marva Dawn’s quote on page 12.

Permit me to illustrate further what happens to a church when divisions are made across stylistic lines. This year our church receptionist asked me for all the dates for the rest of the year in which the worship team participated. When I asked why she wanted to know, she gave me the bitter truth. She had received a phone call from a member who wanted all the worship team dates posted on the church website so she could be sure to avoid them. This is just one example, but it was enough to really make me think about what polarizes people at worship. Even if this woman may have never attended one of our services, just the reality of existing as a “different” service could have given her enough reason to express a preference and stay away.

I know of another church musician who has been very proactive about handling this problem of stylistic preferences. He has trained his secretaries to answer questions about worship styles. When the call comes in about what styles of worship are offered at their church the secretary politely and most positively answers that all their worship services are vital and uplifting regardless of the time of the service.

While a church may use the same orders of worship in each service on the weekend, other unity challenges may exist whether they are physical or issue-related barriers. One challenge to unity in our congregation is the number of services we offer on the weekend: five, over a period of three days. If a member varies his worship attendance time, he can literally go weeks or even months without seeing someone again at worship. While five services on the weekend are convenient, it cannot provide the type of closeness in the Body of Christ for which some members may be looking.

Is there a positive side of having an “alternate” service? One idea deserving consideration may be having a mid-week, or Thursday night alternate service perhaps once a month in which different types of worship music or orders of worship, such as the *Haugen Morning Praise* or Compline services from *New Service Settings* could be used. Members would come to this service with the understanding that they may encounter worship music that is quite different than what they are used to hearing on Sunday morning. For example, this alternate mid-week service may be a good way to introduce the music of Taizé, a chanted liturgy, a new gathering rite, more cultural music, sacred music in a blues style, country gospel or even unaccompanied Gregorian chant!

The idea would be to simply expose members to the vast variety of church music available for us to use as Lutheran Christians as we worship. Their feedback would be welcome. If a particular type of music or anthem or order of worship was well-received, then the next step may be to use it in a Sunday morning service. Since it would be held just once a month or less, the service would not become a divisive preference issue. It may be a context in which worship study could also be carried out in more of a Bible class style message. (In our circles, however, I believe more members would attend this if they understood it to be an actual worship service on the level of a Sunday Morning service rather than a Bible study.) A pre-service discussion before worship that evening could further enhance the appreciation for the music being used in the service.

Resources

LCMS brochure on Contemporary/Alternative Worship

Beyond Thinking Outside the Box

Practically everyone here today has heard or used the phrase “thinking outside the box.” Although many see this ability to “think outside the box” as a desirable trait, it can be overrated. There are some good things that come “out of the box.” For example, if one does a brief survey of the history of art and music, the truly great, innovative creators were those who did a thorough study and practice of the “box.” They mastered the box and then were led to new expressions of creativity in the boxes in which they were living.

Assumption: Because we live in America, everyone’s opinion has equal value.

One of the funniest jokes I’ve heard about opinions involves the universality of armpits and the scents that go with them. It does give us pause to not take ourselves too seriously in our biases, but it also implies that some opinions smell better than others.

Carl Schalk, who has taught and written about the lives, training, and work of early Lutheran church musicians, writes about what we can learn from the past.

...Early Lutheran church musicians brought their musical and theological *judgment* as they sought to deepen and extend the faith in the congregations they served. But mature judgment is not the same as opinion. Everyone has an opinion – not all exercise good judgment directed toward a practice which will help congregations grow in faith and mature in understanding of music in the lives of Christian people.

...The church has addressed the matter of new musical styles in virtually every age of its existence. This is nothing new in our day. In every age the church has looked at its musical culture, adopting or adapting elements into its worship where such might be desirable, at other times avoiding elements of current styles. Pastors and church musicians need to examine carefully the theology and theological suppositions underlying much of the new material as well as the music itself. Here seasoned musical and theological judgment needs to be exercised.³¹

No doubt pastors and worship leaders in our churches face this problem of remaining winning, accepting, kind and approachable in their roles, while at the same time guiding, educating and leading. Perhaps Carl Schalk’s re-introduction of the word *judgment* can remind those in these roles that God has not called them to please everyone. When decisions need to be made, especially difficult decisions about worship, they need to be made thoughtfully, with discussion and understanding, not merely to placate loud or influential voices or to boost one’s own success in ministry.

Perhaps the greatest cause for concern in the continuing worship wars is that they are not wars anymore. The possibility that great changes are being made in worship by those who

³¹ Carl Schalk, “Learning From the Past:: What the Lutheran Tradition Can Teach Church Musicians of Today” *The Institute on Liturgy, Preaching and Church Music*, Carthage College (July 2005): p. 12.

do not exercise any thoughtful judgment about worship without a debate or battle from anyone may be the greatest challenge. That more indifference to worship orders, style, and content exists than passion. That worship is merely seen as a leader's "thing" that they do, and "that's not my thing." How do leaders instill in their people that worship is every member's thing? And that knowing about it and caring about it is worthy of their interest?

Assumption: The box of yesterday contains nothing for today.

In our throw-away society, it may be the popular thing to do – to throw away the box. But the fast-growing Green Movement would argue that the box could be recycled. Put an antique dealer in the mix and he or she may argue that one should look carefully through the box in case there is something of value in it.

Carl Schalk's discussion of the worship "box" sums up nicely what can be found there for Lutherans.

In recent years there has been increasing clamor for church musicians and worship leaders to "think outside the box." (The box presumably representing what is perceived as the confining and constricting restraints advanced by those obsessed by the glories of a musical and liturgical heritage that are simply no longer relevant in today's world.) Spurred on by declining numbers in some congregations, such importuning is often promoted by those who have little or no knowledge or experience with what might be found in that box, who are captive to the present culture, who mistakenly find novelty and change to be the key to relevance, and who have too readily accepted the often soft conclusions of the social sciences as the unquestioned guide for setting the direction the church should follow.

What has been forgotten is that the church has a unique culture of its own, a new and larger vision of reality, a culture of worship and song born in baptism with the sign of the cross, a sign which nurtures and nourishes the Christian life until it is made over us one final time as we are laid into the grave. That culture has developed a unique musical and liturgical heritage, a dynamic and glorious body of song, ritual, and tradition that has in Fred Pratt Green's words, "borne witness to the truth in every age, [or tongue]" a heritage we as Lutherans can rightfully call our own. What is needed today is a musical expression that is not wedded to the popular commercial culture but a musical expression which reflects a greater reality, a larger and more inclusive vision of the church. For the ever-present danger is that when the church becomes captive to the culture it loses its voice, the Gospel itself is turned out, and we find ourselves on the road to producing results aligned with a particular, and unbiblical, view of success.

If the purpose of the Christian life is the praise of God and the proclamation of the Gospel – to God in thanks and praise for what he has done for us, to each other in the mutual building up of the people of God

in the faith, and to the world in the proclamation of the good news – then perhaps we might want to take a second look at what is in that box before dismissing it so cavalierly. Among the riches we will find there is a treasure of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that is as timely and relevant for our day as it has been for the countless generations of Christians whom it has nourished and for whom it has been a life-sustaining vehicle of praise and prayer.

That treasure, that past, to paraphrase William Faulkner³², is never dead and buried – it isn't even past. It is alive and well in many Lutheran parishes which have discovered, or are recovering, the richness and vitality of a treasure that is part of our unique heritage and tradition as Lutherans. We just have to listen, and learn, think inside that box, and, in our vocation as church musicians and pastors, put those riches into practice in our parishes.³³

Assumption: We must throw out the box to reach people in worship.

In his plenary address at the WELS Worship Conference three years ago, Pastor Jon Schroeder related how “Rite” worship reached the unchurched in his community by providing some key ingredients at worship: Gospel content, stability, accessibility, and variety. Schroeder says that liturgical worship

...serves the cause of North American outreach because it provides stability to our worship forms. This stability lends itself well to outreach among the lost in our rootless society. These generations stricken by marketing fads look for authenticity, historicity, and time-honored practices in worship.

Our liturgical worship forms have that; they are the living faith of the dead who have gone before us. They express the unity in the Holy Christian Church that we share with believers around the world. They communicate the joy we have of knowing this song doesn't cease in death, but our worship will continue with the angels in heaven, and with saints on earth who follow the path we trod.³⁴

Schroeder explains that when we know our worship and do it well, it will send a clear message of our belief to others.

It is for freedom that Christ set us free. God's people are free to worship in infinite styles and forms that please Him. There is no one right form to worship God or share Him with the lost. But in the rites and texts of

³²“The past is never dead. It's not even past.” Act I Scene III of *Requiem for a Nun* by William Faulkner (1897-1962).

³³ Schalk, “Learning From the Past,” p. 12 – 13.

³⁴ Schroeder, “Rite Worship,” p. 4.

Lutheran liturgical worship we have a tool well fit for outreach to the post-modern, post-literate, and increasingly post-Christian society in which we live.

Don't abandon it. Instead, know it, this gift given us by the saints who have gone before, this living faith of the dead. Adorn it, with things modern and things ancient, the best of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Excel at it, by bringing the best of our talents and efforts. Love it, with the courage of conviction and the celebration of who we are. Then, finally, trust that the Lord of the Church will do his work and will keep his promises and will call his children home.³⁵

One implication of being able to reach out at public worship is the practical side of making worship orderly and doable, so as not to frustrate the person at worship. Worship that unfolds in a smooth, orderly way can remove the common Lutheran distractions of when to sit, when to stand, turn to this page, then that page and other such directions.

Sometimes our worship contains too many "commercials" that break the flow of worship and make the person in pew concentrate more on what to do next rather than absorb a lesson that was just read, or a hymn that was sung. The commercials sound like, "now we're going to sing hymn # so and so..." or "turn to page _____ in the hymnal for the creed." These commercials can make worship sound more following a recipe than coming to sit at the feet of Jesus.

Although it may take a little extra time and effort, printing out a worship folder that gives all the necessary information of what to do and where to turn can remove the commercials and distractions from worship. I believe that pastors themselves are more able to concentrate on the flow, *gravitas*, and joy of worship, too, when they are less concerned about peppering their words with little directions here and there.

Pastor Schroeder's thoughts bear consideration:

"Liturgical worship is too hard for a first time visitor to follow." How often isn't that put forward as unassailable truth? I agree that going from page 17 in the front of the hymnal to Psalm 85 on page 97, to hymn 370 in the no-page-number section of the hymnal, back to page 19 for the Creed, is nearly impossible for a first time visitor without pedantic instructions at every step of the service.

Our congregation addressed that problem by printing the entire liturgy in the service folder every Sunday. All the words, all the responses, all the canticles appear in full. This provides a number of benefits.

First, no one has a problem following the service. No one is lost. The order of service is in the service folder in its entirety; the hymns are sung from

³⁵ Schoeder, "Rite Worship," p. 8.

the hymnal³⁶. No first time visitor has ever commented that this method was too difficult to follow.

Second, printing the entire service every week allows for great variety in an accessible format. A gathering rite for Advent can be seamlessly brought into the service. Adornments of the liturgy that incorporate congregational responses are handled in their place in the service—no flipping for an insert or a supplemental book.

Third, this format provides the opportunity to explain the words, the actions, and the symbolism of liturgical worship to those new to the faith and old. Footnote and explain the history and the content of the *Te Deum*. Footnote and explain the seasons and festivals of the church year. Teach some and remind some of the meaning of *Maundy*, and *paschal* and *Agnus Dei*. Explain the advent wreath, the farewell to Alleluia, the reasons we do what we do.

If we want accessible liturgical worship for outreach, on-demand publishing is a must. Our new worship resources like the *Supplement* are being provided with digital images for insertion into the service folder.³⁷

Worthy of note, here, is that even though the worship folder is printed out every week, the Biblical songs do not necessarily change every week, and repetition in some parts of the service is present, for reasons which will be discussed later. Hymns are sung from the hymnal for some good reasons (see Pastor Schroeder's footnote - #34). On the practical side, it is very labor-intensive to use music notation software every week to put lead lines and the texts for hymns into a worship folder. Using the hymnal also gives the congregation the option of singing in parts. Finally, using the hymnal for the hymns avoids the process of having to research every copyright for tunes, texts, and settings, which can be very time-consuming.

³⁶ Additional comment at live presentation: We still put a hymnal in everyone's hands because we know how important it is. How it says we're part of something bigger than the people meeting in these four walls. How it is the prayer book of the people.

³⁷ Schroeder, "Rite Worship," p. 7.

Beyond Assumptions About Children

Parenting author John Rosemond says:

Some thirty years ago, “helping professionals” (a term that awards the benefit of the doubt) snatched the child-rearing baton away from the older generation, took a sharp left turn, and led America’s parents into a blind alley, where we are still piling up, unconscious of going nowhere.³⁸

Rosemond has written several parenting books that encourage parents to take a second look at what it means to take on their role and to keep children in theirs. Rosemond, whom some may think a bit on the radical side of today’s parenting standards, strongly encourages parents to resist the influences of our time that do not serve our children well.

It may seem odd for me to turn to a source about children in worship which was written in the 1950’s. I did this to gain perspective and to take us away from some of these influences of our time which do not serve our children well at worship, influences that remove children from the Body of Christ for different reasons. Current schools of thought may assert that children gain nothing at worship; it is too hard for the children or too hard for the parents to take them to worship, that it doesn’t relate to them, that they need something separate from adults at worship, and that worship can wait for children until they are older.

It was refreshing to read, however, that there is much for a child at worship and that worship benefits their faith-life in many ways. So, I included text from this source from 1959, views expressed from Lutheran church musicians who were involved in educating children. It provides for a good discussion-starter about the role of children in worship. Included also are comments from Lutheran church musicians of today that echo those same thoughts expressed decades ago.

Assumption: There’s nothing for children on Sunday morning.

Lutherans believe that children, through baptism, are members of your church. Our attitudes toward children in worship either reveal that we believe this about children, or they reveal that we believe children are just taking up space at worship. Have you ever heard this comment – this assumption about children? That there is nothing for them at worship? How did you respond to this comment?

Children need to worship

At the heart parish life is the gathering for worship. In worship, all of God’s children, young and old come together. From this togetherness around the Word and Sacraments flow all the activities of the congregation. Before a child is considered a student of the LES or Sunday school, they are first members of the church, part Body of Christ. Children mature in their faith in the fellowship of the Body at worship. It is not enough to send a

³⁸ Rosemond, John, *Because I Said So!* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1996), p. 163.

child to LES or Sunday school and think children are getting what they need for their faith, because these agencies of the congregation point toward the fellowship of the Body of Christ, the regular worship gathering. Children need to worship as part of the Body of Believers.

The analogy of music serves to demonstrate the value of worship in Christian education. A teacher cannot teach piano to a non-practicing child. In the same way, a Christian teacher cannot teach Christianity to a non-worshipping child. The practice of the presence of God in corporate worship is of value in Christian education.³⁹

At first, this assessment may seem harsh, simplified, and depressing. And it takes awhile to digest it. We know that there are many children in our churches who don't come to worship. We know that this does not necessarily mean those children are eternally lost. We also know that there are ways through Sunday school and Lutheran elementary school that we can give children an idea of what worship is like by worshipping in the classroom with their classmates. But if there is no corporate worship in the child's life how does a child understand a big part what being a Christian is or who God is? How does a child understand what the Body of Christ is and their role in that Body? Children need worship to help understand, express, and form their faith.

Children understand worship

Although it may seem as though a child doesn't understand what is going on in worship, they absorb so much in ways that we don't immediately recognize. Seboldt says,

I...quote again that illuminating remark of T.S. Elliot: "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood." The great hymns, prayers, liturgical responses, and Scripture selections develop a feeling of wonder, awe, adoration, and gratitude. This is true, long before they are able to grasp the words themselves. This observation does not imply that meaning is not important. Meaning of words in conveying the truth of God is important, indeed. But for our discussion of the child receiving blessings in corporate worship, it does not matter that a child can grasp with his mind **all** ideas expressed. The feeling of respect for God, of love to God, of need for God, of reverence before God is developed through the experience of the emotions...The child is capable of Christian feelings long before he is able to express religious thoughts in words. To measure the power of the Holy Spirit by the number of intellectual facts a child knows is to deny His power.⁴⁰

The ideas children receive about worship come from the worship environment, the pastor, the music and song, the stained glass, the spoken Word, the sights and sounds of Baptism, the smell of the communion wine on the parents' breath, and ultimately, from the parents' attitudes about worship and the attitudes of the fellow believers in the pew. Seboldt again:

³⁹ Roland H. A. Seboldt, *The Child in Worship*, (River Forest: Lutheran Education Association, 1959), pg. 79.

⁴⁰Seboldt, *The Child in Worship*, pg. 80.

The meaning of faith and of Christian love can be conveyed through believing people. The expression of faith by the adult at worship in a public service makes a deep impression on the young child. The attitude of attention, of confession, of praise, and of offering in the service may accomplish much more than thousands of words spoken to the child...The life of a child is enriched by the example of every Christian in the worship service.⁴¹

There are obvious ways children can participate in worship: giving an offering, filling out the friendship register, going up to the front of church for a children's sermon, singing along on the hymns and Biblical songs. These are ways children can stay "busy" in worship, but maybe we've become stuck on the idea that in order to get something out of worship children need to stay busy. We need perspective on this idea that children need to be always doing something at worship. We can't underestimate what our children are learning from us simply by how we go to worship, participate in worship, and value worship. Indeed, just by going to worship they are participating in worship and learning to worship.

Children participate more actively in worship as they attend regularly

One of my favorite things to see in children at worship is at what age they begin participating in the Biblical songs of the liturgy. Regularly, I see children as young as two and three years old trying to sing the Biblical songs. But these are the children that are *regularly* at worship, *repeating* these songs on a consistent basis. My informal research indicates that the first one they pick up is the *Gloria in Excelsis*. Yes, who wouldn't want to sing along with the angels who announced Jesus' birth?

This same angels' song was taught to the Sunday school in our church using the *New Service Settings*.⁴² A boy that was in Sunday school came to worship team rehearsal one evening. After we rehearsed the *Glory to God* from a David Haas setting of the communion liturgy, he said, "Oh, Mrs. Hennig. That's just like the song we sang in Sunday school. I know that one." To him, even though it was a different setting and different music, the words were the same, which, in his mind equaled, "I can do it."

Carl Schalk, who wrote about children in worship in his book, *First Person Singular – Reflections on Worship, Liturgy and Children*,⁴³ said about repetition in worship:

"Tell me again," children say, as we repeat a familiar story for the hundredth time, "Tell me again!" Some stories they know so well that they can say them right along with us. Changing even a word or two brings the instant response, "That's not how it goes." How do children learn to throw a ball, to jump rope, to tie a knot? Repetition! Not mindless repetition, to be sure, but repetition which ultimately liberates them from concentration on the mechanics and frees them to focus on the joy of doing whatever it is they are doing...That is how all of us – children and adults alike – learn to

⁴¹Seboldt, *The Child in Worship*, pg. 81

⁴²Northwestern Publishing House, 2004.

⁴³For another article about hymns and children from *First Person Singular* see the resource guide.

worship. Worship is best when the actions of worship are second nature, when we don't have to consciously be asking ourselves "What do we do now?" As long as we are thinking "What comes next?" or "Do we stand or sit or kneel?" We are not worshipping. We are still learning to worship.⁴⁴

Children learn through repetition and they also receive comfort from repetition, just as a special night time routine might help them settle into sleep. Throw-away bulletins that contain the new material each week and leave out the familiar songs of the Bible may give a child the feeling of being out of the "worship club" at church. They might not know what's coming next or be able to keep up with words and songs that are foreign to them. They may come to the unfortunate conclusion that worship is not for them. What will children do instead? They will turn to things that give them the feeling of sameness in worship – like asking for a stick of gum, coloring the children's bulletin, or whatever they can do to feel like they belong there.

But why not give them the familiar spoken words of the worship order and songs they can sing from memory, the angels' song, the Palm Sunday song, Simeon's song, King David's songs - *songs that the whole Christian Church on earth sing somewhere around the globe every day of the week and probably every hour?* Why not do what we can to impress the words of Scripture on children in singing and saying them? The sooner the child does, says, and sings the same things as the older members the sooner they will understand their place in the Body of Christ and in worship, not a place of toleration, but a place of value and importance. As Seboldt states: "The worship of a congregation is complete only when it embraces the total age span of those who have been grafted into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of Holy Baptism."⁴⁵

Is it easy to "do" worship on Sunday morning with small, restless children or older children with an attitude – especially if you are an adult doing it single-handedly? ...when everything seems to go wrong on Sunday morning and you're late and crabby – again? Of course it is not easy. Sin and Satan will try to get in the way when we want to honor God by remembering the Sabbath Day. On a Sunday when I was feeling particularly crabby and was running late, I decided something had to change. My attitude needed adjusting. I needed to pray against my heart. Without a word of explanation I started singing, *Blessed Jesus at Thy Word*. Now it is a tradition in our family – our on-the-way-to-church song. The kids join right in, and we're working on memorizing the second and third stanzas. I am waiting for the day when the kids start singing before I do. Personally, this has helped set the tone for worship in our car.

A congregation as a whole can discuss ways to help make this Sunday morning effort easier on families, too.

⁴⁴ Carl Schalk, *First Person Singular – Reflections on Worship, Liturgy and Children* (St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, 1998), p. 13.

⁴⁵ Seboldt, *The Child in Worship*, p. 86

Assumption: Children form a worship life only through church.

At a time when the church is receiving pressure to become more like the outside through bringing Pop, Rock, Rap, and R & B styles of music into worship (to name a few), through pressure to use the latest technology, wouldn't it be a refreshing reversal to keep church "churchy" and incorporate more "churchy-ness" into our daily lives? Yet, so many people do not take church home with them, to the unfortunate point that God and his Word are not even discussed in the home. What does this teach children? Sadly, it may teach them that worship is a once-a-week obligation and what is heard and seen there may not necessarily apply the rest of the week. Children need to learn that their whole life is a song to God, and that their song lives itself out through every hour of the week in thought, word, deed in their own personal worship.

In forming their own worship lives children look inside and outside of church, to their role models: parents, extended family, their friends, teachers, and pastors.

Children can worship at home

Setting aside a family home devotion time is problematic in this present time. Some may say that the very idea is out of touch, idealistic, or impossible. But how would *a child* answer this question: "If Jesus came to visit, would you find time to talk with him and listen to him?" Family devotion is Jesus coming to visit. Children probably understand this concept better than adults. Adults can find many excuses to avoid attempting family devotions, or to give up having them. Especially when there are very small children involved worshipping at home may seem like an exercise in futility. Considering what was discussed before about how much children absorb about worship, including the significance of simply sitting down together as a family, they will eventually learn that this is a special time together, and that it is about God. If we have been neglectful or inconsistent at best, God, in his mercy, gives adults the opportunity to try again each and every day.

Worshipping in the home carries over into the worship of the gathered church family. Children may feel more at ease in worship at church the more they worship outside of church. Rather than exploring the options of how to conduct family devotions, at this time, however, let me just express my enthusiasm for the wonderful home devotional book that *Christian Worship Supplement* will be. The Meditations on the chief parts of the Catechism, the Morning, Midday and Evening Meditations, the prayers for the days of the week, the Divine Services (with that *Gloria* that children love), and the body of songs, hymns, and canticles that are included make the *Supplement* an excellent home worship resource. Anything that is learned in the *Supplement* will carry over into their worship life at church. At-home worship is unquestionably worth the time and effort in developing children's worship lives.

Children can worship at LES or Sunday school

Teachers, do not underestimate your powerful role in the formation of your students' worship lives. They will know by how often conduct worship in the classroom what place worship has in your life. Your students think highly of you and the example you set. Are you shy about singing a hymn in front of your class? Get some help – maybe even a

student blessed with a fine voice or some piano playing ability can help lead. Or, lead worship in the classroom without using music. Do not back away from using your classroom as a mini-chapel.

To this day I remember the teacher who had us open our hymnals to a virtually unused portion of TLH to read the *Morning Suffrages* responsorially with him. Now, maybe that teacher didn't sing a lot of hymns, but he liked using the hymnal, and it made an impression. When we did that, the classroom felt like church. Morning devotion time presents a good opportunity for the teacher to use the order of Matins (or Morning Praise) as a model for classroom worship.⁴⁶

Classrooms can also feature the different Sundays of the Church Year through a display, and prepare children for Sunday worship by finding out the readings, hymns, and themes ahead of time. Setting aside just 10-15 minutes for this on Friday will make the Pastor's message and the focus of the worship clearer to the children. Consider the ideas of one resource for classrooms:

Grade school and Sunday school teachers may wish to arrange a worship center in their classroom or chapel, using Church Year posters as a central focus and adding flowers, candles, and signs of the season, as well as a Bible for class devotions. Creative crafts people may be able to construct a classroom worship center with an altar or a wall shelf along with a place to display the poster and symbols appropriate for each season of the Church Year...⁴⁷

Studying the Church Year is a valuable worship tool for young Christians. The Church Year points them to the life of Christ, to key events in the life of the church, and to scripture that speaks of these events. The scripture readings, repeated in a three-year cycle, present an opportunity for students to add to their understanding each time they hear them. Following the Church Year also teaches them that God is the subject and object of our worship, pointing them to Christ instead of inward.

Another way to involve school children in the worship life of the congregation is to make a school or classroom choir available to sing at funerals. In cases where the school is attached to the church it may simply be a matter of less than an hour out of the school day to process over to church. Through their song the children can bring welcome comfort to those attending the funeral. The children receive affirmation of their place in the Body of Christ.

As a child worships often during the week at home and at school they are able to make connections between worship in church and their daily lives. They begin to see that their

⁴⁶ See resource guide for an order for Matins (Morning Praise) worship in the classroom by Prof. Bruce Backer.

⁴⁷ Arden Mead and King Schoenfield, *I Love to Live The Story – A Guide to Understanding and Celebrating the Christian Church Year* (Fenton, MO: Creative Communications for the Parish, 2006), p. 4, www.creativecommunications.com.

daily life is a song to God, and that the spiritual impact of worship has staying power through their week. Can the results be measured? No one can see the heart. But wouldn't it be interesting to know if, given more worship opportunities through the week, children's relationships with their parents, teachers, and with their friends became more loving, cooperative, and joy-filled.

Assumption: Children can't and don't need to learn hymns.

Singing is a birthright – we are all born with this ability. Carl Schalk said, “Faith inevitably erupts in song.” Creation praises God - humans and all creation. By teaching hymnody, psalmody and other Biblical songs to our children we are not only helping children claim their birthright in the song of the eternal Christian church, and learn the joy and value of worship, but we are helping them build the Armor of God in the only way that it can be built. From the inside...out.

Hymnody Builds the Armor of God

As a teacher in a small, two-classroom school without a gym and not a lot of developed programs for the children, it was tempting to look at the local public school and see all that was being offered to children and to think, “Why do we try to educate children anyway? The public school has it all over on us, plus the teachers actually get prep hours and free lunch hours.”

The answer came to me in an unexpected way. I was sitting in a Lutheran Worship class which I took while I was an emergency instructor at DMLC. Prof. Bruce Backer said, “There will be times in our lives when all our sins will come crashing down on us, and we won't have *time* to reach for a Bible.” There was my answer. That is why we have Lutheran Day Schools and Sunday Schools. We see a need and have a spiritual obligation to assist in building the Armor of God – to equip believers. That is why we teach memory work of Bible passages beginning at young ages, and that is why the church has taught hymnody to children at young ages. It builds the Armor of God from the inside...out.

Singing God's praises through hymnody has given God's young children much joy at worship. The passages and songs are in the children's hearts because they learn them by heart. And if they are in their hearts they are accessible at any time – especially in times of need.

There is no question that we need to build the armor of God in children to prepare them for what life brings their way. Learning hymns are a worthy way to accomplish this. We need a successful approach to teaching hymnology in our schools.⁴⁸

Hymnody is memorable

Hymns capture the Word of God in poetic form. Poetry can be easier to memorize than prose. Poetry is beautiful and memorable. Poetry set to music helps the singer think longer about the words. Poetry can capsule doctrines of the Bible and aid us in times when we are talking about our faith. Think of the Vajda hymn, *Where Shepherds Lately Knelt*

⁴⁸ For an idea on teaching hymns in the Lutheran Day School and Sunday School see the resource guide.

where he says “Can I, will I forget how Love was born, and burned its way into my heart unasked, unforced, unearned?”⁴⁹ In three words Vajda explains the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Good hymn texts are power-packed with food for our faith because they are about the many attributes of God, about our Lutheran doctrine, and they re-tell us all the many things he has done for us, with the plan of salvation at the center.

Children enjoy the challenge of a hymn. They rise to the occasion and then sing and recite with more conviction than most adults. Children grow into hymns. The sometimes serious and heavy words of a hymn may not relate to them immediately. But they sense the strength in them, and understand more than even they are able to explain.

Maybe this has happened to you. A hymn you memorized in your youth has stayed with you and taken on different meaning in your life as you grow older. The words of the hymn have been illuminated in different ways as you encounter life in this world and your understanding of God’s Word grows. The imagery of the hymn takes on new meaning to you as you peel back the many layers of the poetry each time you sing the hymn.

Earlier this year, while my children and I were going to the 10:30 church service we were listening to the live radio broadcast of the 9:00 church service in the car. The hymn, *All Depends on Our Possessing*⁵⁰ came over the radio and I started to sing with it.

Vs. 1 All depends on our possessing
 God’s abundant grace and blessing,
 Though all earthly wealth depart
 They who trust with faith unshaken
 In their God are not forsaken
 And e’er keep a dauntless heart.

Vs. 2 He who to this day has fed me
 And to many joys has led me
 Is and ever shall be mine.
 He who ever gently schools me,
 He who daily guides and rules me,
 Will remain my help divine.

Vs. 4 Well he knows what best to grant me;
 All the longing hopes that haunt me,
 Joy and sorrow, have their day.
 I shall doubt his wisdom never –
 As God wills, so be it ever –
 I to him commit my way.

This is a hymn of trust which was a favorite in my childhood home. As a child I sang the cheerful tune and learned the easy rhyme in a carefree way. Today I sing this hymn thinking of friends and family who have gone through divorce, who have buried children,

⁴⁹ *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993) #54, Where Shepherds Lately Knelt, text by Jaroslav J. Vajda, © Jaroslav J. Vajda, 1987.

⁵⁰ *Christian Worship* # 421 Text by Andächtigte Haus-Kirche, Nürnberg, 1676, abr.; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827-78, alt. Public Domain.

who have suffered through painful or deadly disease, or endured a very difficult life circumstance, and I can barely get through it. It sends a message of trust that convicts my inner doubt and reduces me to tears of surrender and thankfulness. It is part of my armor of God. Perhaps you have a hymn that is part of your armor. These are the hymns that get picked at funerals – the dear ones that people carry with them in their life and to their grave. These hymns have staying power for all ages.

Children Can Learn Hymns and Love Them

I remember when my son was in first grade, dealing with the stress of his first longer Bible passages and a hymn verse. At first he acted hopeless about the situation and was convinced that he couldn't do it. I looked at him and said, "Chip, you memorized the entire *Goat Song* from the movie *Hoodwinked*. I think you can handle this hymn." The look on his face was a complete revelation. He *didn't know* he could do it! Children already do memorize – sometimes without even knowing it and sometimes things that we would rather not have them memorize. They simply need to be shown that they can do it, given the tools to do it, and they need to be given some inspiration and encouragement by the adults that are helping them.⁵¹

Barbara Resch, a Lutheran church musician who has worked with various ages in the singing of hymnody, believes that hymns relate well to children.

The period of the Reformation gave the Church a wealth of new songs – songs that were new to the people of that time and that taught and encouraged them in their faith. Centuries later there is still a newness in the engaging melodies and confessional texts that can nurture children of our time. It is not easy being a child or raising a child in the twenty-first century, but neither was it easy in the sixteenth century. The hymns written for that generation still serve us well. The Lord God help our singing!⁵²

Earlier in this essay Resch shares an example of a teacher who used hymnody to help teach the *Catechism* to students.

...some corners of the church still recognize the critical importance of catechesis, of teaching children the tenets of their faith, including the "shalts and shalt nots" laid out in the Law. One Lutheran teacher whose young students sing this hymn [*The Ten Commandments are the Law* – CW #285] with great energy uses it to teach the *Catechism*. Each stanza of the hymn is an answer to the question, "What does this mean?" She spends a week or two on each stanza, making sure that the children understand the vocabulary and the implications of the text...This tune has been described as "bouncy," a reference to the characteristic eighth note/quarter note pickup rhythm that is found in so many of Luther's hymns, and they love it. She reports that they clamor to sing this hymn so much that, once they have learned it, they like to play a game where they write the number of

⁵¹ For an idea sheet of many things that may be taught by using our hymnals more extensively in the classroom see resource guide.

⁵² Messerli, *Thine the Amen*, Barbara Resch, "A New Song Here Shall Be Begun," p. 177.

each stanza on a slip of paper and then choose a slip at random from a box to determine which one they will get to sing from memory.⁵³

As a teacher my group of Kindergarten through Third graders learned the first two verses of the great Reformation hymn, *Dear Christians One and All Rejoice*.⁵⁴ As I introduced it to them I wasn't sure if they'd take to it. Well, the hymn took on a life of its own and all I did was help them through it. I wouldn't have needed to accompany them with the piano. They sang so loudly and convincingly and with *each other* in mind. It was classroom worship. To this day I wonder if part of their enthusiasm for this hymn was they could sing the word "hell" without getting admonished for it. I'm sure they felt very grown up as they sang those strong words.

Assumption: There's more for children to do in contemporary worship.

How has contemporary worship affected the child's role in worship? In my observation of megachurch contemporary worship in our area, I am seeing less and less for the children to do in worship. In one particular church, I didn't see children around much at all during worship, and, frankly, to me, together with the dramatically dimmed lighting all around, it was kind of eerie. There are other things that are offered to children elsewhere during that time – some sort of church "adventureland," video games, or "children's church."

In attempting to be progressive by "modernizing" worship children have been quite simply, left out of worship. There may be plenty of other things for children to do, but worship itself is for "big people." Sometimes, this has to do with the rejection of infant baptism, and the false teaching that children really don't become members until they "choose" Christ at a later age. But whatever the reason, children are not being included. Taking into consideration that much of a child's value system is formed before they are ten years old, the chances of being able to pass on the faith to children left out of worship is greatly reduced. Maybe these are the children, who, as they become adults are going to be looking for worship more rooted in substance than ambiance, participation than exclusion.

In this age of clubs and sports teams for every age group, and age-centered groups for children when they come to church, *it is quite possible that children rarely even have to interact with adults*. Is that what being part of the Body of Christ is about? Are children getting the idea that they are just interfering at worship? For those times when very small children cry loudly during worship how is it handled in the church? What help are we giving to parents in our congregations? Especially for single parents?

We know there is much for children at worship. The Holy Spirit *works* in children at worship. Children *need* to worship as part of the Body of Christ. Children *grow* their ability to participate in worship already at very young ages. Children *build* the Armor of God through hymnody and Biblical songs in worship. Children *form* a worship life through

⁵³ Messerli, *Thine the Amen*, Resch, p. 166-167.

⁵⁴ *Christian Worship* #377 *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice*, text by Martin Luther, tr. Richard Massie, alt. Public Domain.

worshipping. There is not more worship for children in Contemporary orders of worship – there is less. If your church is thinking about making some changes in worship, remember the children. Don't leave them out. God is growing your worship future with the presence of children in worship and their faith is being fed whether we can tell or not.

Resources

What you can teach from a hymn – resource packet

Christian Worship Supplement for home devotions

Singing Through the Church Year – T. M Albrecht, Morningstar

The Liturgical year poster – resource packet

Order of Morning Praise for the Classroom – resource packet

Linda Moeller's Bible Passage songs

I Love to Live The Story – A Guide to Understanding and Celebrating the Christian Church Year by

Arden Mead and King Schoenfeld, www.creativecommunications.com

First Person Singular – Reflections on Worship, Liturgy and Children

by Carl Schalk, MorningStar Music

Idea for Teaching Hymnology – resource packet

Beyond Assumptions About Youth

Now that your child has been in Sunday school or LES for the past seven or eight years he or she must be a worshiper, right? Certainly there has been enough said and done that has prepared his or her faith for the high school years. That is your and my prayer! But what have you *seen* in youth at worship? Are they participating?

Assumption: It is enough for teens to merely be present at worship.

I have not had the blessing of teenagers – yet. As my children grow I will be watching them carefully to see what attitudes crop up about church and worship. Some parents are concerned. They know that statistics show that many youth fall away from the church after confirmation. It would be a difficult situation to face if a teenager acts like going to church is torture. Parents need good guidance in this area. Teens need to continue to develop their worship lives, and worship leaders can think of ways to involve teens in worship. Meanwhile, parents will continue to convey their own attitudes about worship to their teenagers. If they value it, make it a priority, participate joyfully both at church and at home, the chances that their teenagers will value worship are increased, as God wills. Patience is required.

Worship implies activity

The big difference between this age group and the last is that, if familiar with worship in church, a teenager (who can read and sing) should be able to fully participate in understanding and following along with the order of worship. But is our youth really worshipping if they just show up on Sunday morning without cracking a hymnal or speaking a prayer? Should adults be content with that? Here is an insightful reminder from Lutheran church musician George W. Hoyer about what a worshipping young adult looks like:

Worship is something your child must do. It is not something he receives – although of course he never could worship or even exist if it were not for what God initially does for him and to Him; nor could he continue to live from day to day or even be able to worship apart from the gifts of God’s grace and love. But no matter how much God has loved the world or does for your child, he is not a worshiper until he loves, until he does something. And...if it were possible to imagine our life as existing without any gifts received from God, still our worship would be required. What seems to be an abstract point is really very pertinent, because parents and teachers assume so easily that if they give a child more information, or admonition, or paragraphed words called prayers to be memorized they are making him into a worshiper.⁵⁵

...But the point is that the ability to do that worship act of adoration and confession [*also thanksgiving and supplication – ACTS – thoughts the author*

⁵⁵ Sebolt, *The Child in Worship*, p. 2-3.

expressed earlier] is what we would help our children to obtain – and they are able to do it in the crisis time for having learned to do it in more normal circumstances. And they learn most effectively to worship as they apply the working Word of God to themselves by worshipping.⁵⁶

These quotes emphasize that youth become worshipers by worshipping. It is a response that flows from within them having been fed by the Holy Spirit. Worship has a broad meaning here – it involves both the Sunday gathering and what happens in the lives of youth during the week. But it implies activity and inclusion in the Body of Christ.

Getting Teens Involved at worship

Teens are busy. They have school-related activities on week nights and many have jobs on the weekends. This makes it difficult for the church to serve this age group, and to have a cohesive youth group meeting regularly.

But there are many things that teens can do at worship. An individual with a heart for youth who possesses some creative planning ability can serve this group well.

Teens can: usher, work in the sound booth, be part of a handbell choir or choral group, be part of a youth instrument ensemble or youth worship team, come to youth group meetings, go to youth rallies, host Easter breakfast, play a musical instrument or sing a solo during worship, deliver a reading at worship, assist in a Sunday School classroom, volunteer to help during summer VBS, attend Bible study, volunteer in the church office, babysit in the childcare room on Sundays, and, together with a group of teenagers, plan a youth service for one or two Sundays a year.

No doubt there are many ideas for getting teens involved at worship, but, as in the case with children, they don't always need to do activities with their own age group. Perhaps a mentoring program could pair a teen up with an older adult, so teens could get to know members outside of their age group at church.

Teens are capable of doing many things at church and have the ability to do it with excellence if they are guided well.

Assumption: The worship at church turns off teens.

Adults may fall into the trap of thinking that church just isn't cool enough for their kids and that if we just changed the music style or if the pastor would just take off his robe and be more approachable, it would help. Are we asking youth what they really think? In his article, "Comfortable or Compelling?" Bryan Gerlach quotes Tom Beaudoin, a strong voice for youth and church in America:

The church always goes wrong when it tries to appear cool. It never goes wrong when it tries to attend to people's deepest thirst...I find most Gen-

⁵⁶ Seboldt, *The Child in Worship*, p. 16

Xers suspicious when the church comes too closely to resemble what they're doing in their secular lives.⁵⁷

Some Teens like Hymns

In the article, “My Grandmother Saved it, My Mother Threw It Away, and Now I’m Buying It Back,” Kevin Twit explains why young people are returning to old hymns. One student writes,

Coming from a typical praise chorus-reliant high school youth group...I didn’t understand a lot of the poetic and imagery-driven lyrics, and the word hymn automatically meant boring music. But I found myself falling in love with the old hymns...The words are so profound and full of truth one can’t help but be broken. Singing hymns has seriously changed my life and freed me from feeling frustrated by surface lyrics that focus on how I feel about God, which is always changing. Hymns have allowed me to center my worship on the Gospel, which in turn compels me to love the God I am prone to hate and wander from.⁵⁸

Twit explains that youth are seeking out hymnody, but with a twist. To make hymns their own, youth have been attracted to new tunes for these texts. (Not necessarily changes in the Elizabethan language, however!) Certainly, a hymn can be sung with a new tune, or a new accompaniment. Some are more successful than others. Twit states more reasons why youth are interested in hymnody:

Hymns offer a fuller emotional range of expression...than many modern choruses do...Hymns tend to engage our imagination, intellect and will together...while...praise choruses sometimes get stuck in clichés that no longer engage our imaginations...Hymns tell a story and walk us through the Gospel...Hymns remind us that the church is bigger than the people we know, or even those who are alive today. Through hymns we connect with believers who lived centuries before us. We can have “mystic sweet communion, with those whose rest is won” (*The Church’s One Foundation* by Stone). When I introduce people to Anne Steele’s hymns, they are struck by the powerful way she dealt with the immense suffering. They find that her cried can become their cries, her tears can elicit their tears, and her faith can encourage their faith. Seeing that we can connect with an English woman who lived in a small village 300 years ago and feel what she felt is powerful! All of a sudden the kingdom of God looks much bigger!⁵⁹

And isn’t that what youth want? To be a part of something bigger than themselves? They can identify with the saints that have gone before them in God’s Church – but only if they learn about them. They can sing the strong words of these saints – but only if they are exposed to hymnody. Start by just putting the words on a piece of paper and let them read

⁵⁷ Bryan Gerlach, “Comfortable or Compelling” *Lutheran Leader* (Fall 2003). Available at www.wels.net.

⁵⁸ Kevin Twit, “My Grandmother Saved It, My Mother Threw It Away, and Now I’m Buying It Back” *Reformed Worship*, no. 70, p. 30. Article also available at www.igracemusic.com.

⁵⁹ Twit, “My Grandmother,” p. 31.

them, comment on them, “chew” them. Share the story of how these words came to be written. You may be surprised at the reaction. When you think they are up for it have someone try to lead them in singing the words. After they experience the depth of a good hymn they may see how they can use it in their own faith-life.

A Traditional “Mix”

A recent survey sponsored by the Commission on Youth Discipleship of our synod reveals some interesting statistics as to what WELS youth are thinking about worship. When asked “When it comes to weekly group/public worship, what would you like your church to offer?” Youth answered:

- 12% Historic worship using only the orders of service and hymns from the hymnal, led by an organ
- 50.5% Creative worship using the hymnal along with a variety of other resources, led often by an organ but also regularly involving other instruments
- 21% Contemporary worship, informal, with nothing from the hymnal, with praise choruses and a praise band involving other instruments
- 16.7% I am not sure

This survey reveals that the assumption that youth will like church better if we use drums, guitar and radio songs is simply not accurate. The survey reflects that youth don’t necessarily want church to be radically different from what is already going on, but that they do appreciate variety along with the familiar.

Post-modernism and Teens

We can see that the youth are moving in a worship direction which is different than some presume. Much has been written about the era of post-modernism. Pastor Steve Degner explains it this way:

The postmodern era offers a challenge to the Christian church because all truth is viewed as relative. The Christian who sets forth claims for Christ from Scripture will be brushed off with the discussion ending words, “that’s your story.” The post-modernist thinks to himself, “You have your story on the facts and I have my story. I will gladly listen to your story and you can listen to mine, but please don’t ever tell me my story may be wrong.”⁶⁰

The way the Gen-Xer’s and Millenials are reacting to the emptiness of post-modernism, however, is by looking for something with more substance and structure. Degner, again:

As we enter into the new millennium is it possible that we will find more people coming to us who are worn and weary from the excessive subjectivism of the 90’s? As the baby boomers lose their grip on the Christian community will people want more in worship than simple repetitive worship and praise songs that reflect the genre of the music in the sixties? Something has to fill the vacuum after excessive emotionalism

⁶⁰Steve Degner, “Not Ashamed of the Gospel in a Post-modern Age,” October, 1999, (Article available at www.wels.net) p.4.

has emptied the hearts of people. Ravi Zacharias⁶¹ sounds a startling alarm when he shares his fear that this emptiness might be filled in America with a more structured religion like Islam. Will the Muslim reach the scattered sheep before we do? Our structure in worship, our structure in classes, and our requirements for membership may seem out of tune to the baby boomer, but what about Generation-X and its search for transcendence? Gene Vieth⁶² quotes the song “Opener” by the Lutheran group Lost and Found. These words reflect a craving for substance and transcendence:

I am looking for something stronger – Than my own life these days.
 Yet the church of my childhood – Seems like the YMCA.
 Well, every Sunday – Is just like the last,
 As if church has no history – And the people have no past.
 We just sing what we like to sing – And we preach about the news,
 And think of some new thing – Just to fill up the pews.
 I want palms on Palm Sunday – And Pentecost to be red.
 I want to drink the Wine – And eat the Bread.
 And they search for attendance – While I starve for transcendence.
 But I count among this Body – Of the living and the dead.⁶³

Kevin Twit has some further thoughts on worship as it relates to youth reacting to our post-modern world. Shifts in thinking include:

...an intense desire for community (while not wanting to give up individualism)...a longing to be part of something rooted rather than ephemeral (renewed interest in liturgy and ritual)...convergence as the route to the future: rather than new styles we have new combinations of old things.⁶⁴

In another insightful article about the Millennials (young people born between 1981 and 2000) Uwe Siemon-Netto explains that young people are turning toward tradition – not away from it. He quotes Robert Webber, director of the Institute of Worship Studies at Northern Baptist Seminary in Lombard, Illinois:

What is happening in the religion of teenagers is nothing short of astounding...They want to return to a more stable time, a period of tradition. Not the tradition of the fifties, but of a much earlier time, the tradition of the old, very old times.⁶⁵

The same article also quotes a youth director who said:

⁶¹ Ravi is

⁶² Gene Vieth, “Through All Generations” essay on www.issuesetc.org.

⁶³ Degner, “Not Ashamed,” p. 15.

⁶⁴Kevin Twit, “Some Thoughts On Understanding Postmodernism And Why It Matters,” www.igracemusic.com, 2005.

⁶⁵Uwe Siemon-Netto, “Faith: New Generation Is Looking Back,” www.bachorgan.com/Rampage/Article-020319.html.

What appeals to this new generation is the cathedral and the stain-glass window. Take the pews out, let them sit on the floor, burn incense, have Scripture readings, lots of music, chants even, and have communion, and they say “Wow, this is me.”⁶⁶

U.S. News and World Report recently included an article reflecting this shift in thinking about worship.

Something curious is happening in the wide world of faith, something that defies easy explanation or quantification. More substantial than a trend but less organized than a movement, it has to do more with how people practice their religion than with what they believe, though people caught up in this change often find that their beliefs are influenced, if not subtly altered, by the changes in their practice.

Put simply, the development is a return to tradition and orthodoxy, to past practices, observances, and customary ways of worshiping. But it is not simply a return to the past – at least not in all cases. Even while drawing on deep traditional resources, many participants are creating something new within the old forms. They are engaging in what Penn State sociologist of religion Roger Finke calls “innovative returns to tradition.”⁶⁷

Similar thoughts are echoed in a recent *Washington Post* article.

Fasting, and giving up chocolate and favorite pastimes like watching TV during the 40 days before Easter are practices many evangelical Protestants have long rejected as too Catholic and unbiblical.

But Lent – a time of inner cleansing and reflection upon Jesus Christ’s sufferings before his resurrection – is one of the many ancient church practices being embraced by an increasing number of evangelicals, sometimes with a modern twist...

...This represents a “major sea change in evangelical life,” according to D. H. Williams, professor of patristics and historical theology at Baylor University. “Evangelicalism is coming to point where the early church has become the newest staple of its diet.”

Experts say most who have taken on such practices have grown disillusioned with the contemporary, shopping-center feel of the megachurches embraced by baby boomers, with their casually dressed ministers and rock-band praise music.

⁶⁶ Siemon-Netto, “Faith.”

⁶⁷ Jay Tolson, “A Return to Tradition” *U.S. News and World Report* (13 December 2007) www.usnews.com.

Instead, evangelicals – many of them young – are adopting a trend that has come to be known as “worship renewal” or “ancient-future worship.”⁶⁸

There is also an awareness in Millennials of the Body of Christ, and a willingness to give up one’s own preferences for the sake of the community. This article reflects that concern for “togetherness” at worship:

For Generations X and Y, and the Millennials, finding authentic belonging and identity within a faith community is compelling enough to trump individual autonomy and preference. Within a culture facilitating the personalization of everything from post-secondary study options to beverage choice (it’s not about ordering coffee, it’s about the empowering array of choices accompanying that coffee order — cappuccino/espresso/latte? tall/regular/short? skim/soy/half & half? earth-sustaining mug or 80 percent post-consumer waste to-go cup?), any group of people choosing to coalesce their lives into communal experience constitutes true countercultural phenomenon. “All the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:44).⁶⁹

These views can be good for Lutheran worship – the desire for community, to be part of something rooted and to use the old to make the new. But as with the swing toward contemporary worship, this new traditionalism needs to be handled in a balanced way, so that the pendulum doesn’t swing too far in the other direction, as is the tendency in human nature.

Parents and Youth Leaders do well to become informed on the way Lutherans worship so that they are able to answer the tougher questions about worship from teens.

Assumption: Teens want their listening music to be their worship music.

In an extensive survey of teens and worship by Barbara Resch, she examined teens attitudes toward different musical styles and their appropriateness in church. Resch says in an article about her research that the teenage years are a vulnerable time for a Christian’s worship life:

For years we’ve been aware that the adolescent years are among the most turbulent in the life cycle. More recently we’ve begun to understand that the emotional, physical, and intellectual changes of these years may be especially difficult for Christian teenagers, who often begin to question their

⁶⁸Jacqueline L. Salmon, “Feeling Renewed By Ancient Traditions” *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2008. www.washingtonpost.com

⁶⁹ Karis Thompson, “The ritual of relationship” from “What is authentic Lutheran worship? Angles of vision on worship for and by Lutherans” *Metro Lutheran* (April 2008). MyWebPal.com.

childhood beliefs and allegiances, including their relationship with their Lord and his church.⁷⁰

Churches that are concerned about the youth may be contemplating starting up a contemporary worship service for the sake of the teens. They believe that a change of musical style will appeal to them and get them to come to church, helping them through this faith-testing time in their lives.

This is the assumption that Resch tested. Here's how she did it:

...Going into general education classrooms in public and private high schools, I played a tape of forty musical excerpts representing the range of music used in American churches today, including chant, hymn arrangements, anthems, contemporary Christian songs, oratorio choruses, and gospel music. Students indicated...that the piece was appropriate for church services...They were not asked if they liked the music or would like to hear it in some other context. Rather, we suggested that they picture themselves in a familiar church setting and decide how appropriate this music would be if they heard it there. Since the five hundred teens we talked to represented thirty-three different religious groups – including the world religions, cults, non-denominational churches, mainline Christian churches, and 12 percent who were unchurched – the imagined church setting obviously took many different shapes.

Here's what she found:

We undertook this project with the hunch that most teenagers would declare rock and pop music to be appropriate church music sounds...The findings showed, however, that this large and diverse group of adolescents gave the highest ratings of appropriateness to traditional choral music and the lower to Christian rock music. The responses to contemporary Christian music (CCM) were clearly divided into two groups, expressing either strong approval or strong disapproval. Apparently these teenagers were able to separate a judgment of the kind of music they liked to listen to in some settings from that which they considered appropriate in the context of the church service.

...There was also a link between the perception of appropriateness and how often students said they heard that type of music in church. Therefore, it is clear that the music young people consider appropriate for worship is likely the music they already hear in the context of the church service. Rather than bringing an external set of standards from the world of leisure listening to the church situation – which is what we have assumed

⁷⁰ Barbara Resch, "Teens and Church Music: What do they really think?" *Reformed Worship*, no. 44, www.reformedworship.com

teenagers are doing – the church situation itself seems to determine what teenagers feel is right for that setting.⁷¹

The article goes on to explain that although contemporary music is often used to attract youth to church, it is not what reaches them because that type of Christian music is the preferred musical style of the baby boomers.

This is good news for church leaders and parents. It means that your teenager is open to the present musical style of your local congregation. Doesn't it also show that teenagers, despite what they show on the outside, are really ready to let their role models lead them?

Resch's article also shows that teens have an understanding of the community of the congregation (as was mentioned earlier), and that the teenagers surveyed were willing to set aside their own preferences "for the sake of a more inclusive musical language."⁷²

Several students mentioned that they themselves might be comfortable with a certain musical style, but that they knew others in the congregation would not be. One girl said that she kept thinking about the "little old ladies" in her church and called inappropriate anything that would upset them, because, in her words, "People shouldn't get upset in church."⁷³

Perhaps this research indicates that more than anything teens just want to be led confidently into worship and feel like they are a part of it. If that is the case, then their role models need to share their love and understanding of worship with them.

Assumption: Contemporary worship will reach the youth.

In my observation of youth in contemporary services in our area I sensed a great passivity in worship. As I watched these teens I couldn't help but wonder if they felt included in the Body of Christ at worship and if they were getting enough strength from what was going on to last them through the week. There was no sacrament for them, no psalm, no creed, no confession, no Lord's Prayer. They had nothing to say, and just a couple of Christian songs to sing – if they felt like it.

By now we have reached a few contradictions to this assumption. Youth need to develop their worship life becoming involved in the church and by *actively* worshipping in church with the Body of Believers. Youth are *open* to hymnody and to the worship music of church. Youth do *not necessarily think* that their music should be church music. Youth have an understanding and *appreciation of corporate worship*, and desire a *mix of the creative and traditional* in that context.

⁷¹ Resch, "Teens and Church Music."

⁷² Resch, "Teens and Church Music."

⁷³ Twit, "My Grandmother Saved it," www.igrace.com.

Resources

www.igracemusic.com for psalm and hymn settings

Christian Worship

Christian Worship Supplement

Let All the People Praise You - NPH

www.hymncharts.com – for hymn settings – select carefully

Drama for Worship Year A by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

Drama for Worship Year B by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

There Is a Season: Dramatic Scripts for All Occasions

by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

Psalms for Worship Vol. 1 by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

Hymns for the Contemporary Ensemble, Vol. 1 and 2, Phil Magness, CPH

Beyond rejection of hymnody and psalmody

The origins of congregational song are found in Biblical times. Although nothing is known about how these tunes sounded or were sung, we do know the texts: the psalms, Moses' and Miriam's song, Hannah's song, Mary's song, and other New Testament "hymns" like Ephesians 5:14.⁷⁴

What about the hymn as we know it today? Paul Westermeyer looks at the oldest known hymn tunes which rose out of chant:

It is usually assumed that the stanzaic hymn as we know it today...entered the Latin church in the fourth century. Ambrose (340-397) is the most important figure in this development. He wrote hymns, but probably not the tunes for them...Whenever they [tunes] were first composed and however they many have sounded through generations of use, chant tunes represent a very old stratum of the church's music.⁷⁵

We still use some of the oldest chant tunes (or "cousins" of these tunes) such as: VENI REDEMPTOR GENTIUM (Savior of the Nations Come CW #2), JAM LUCIS (Before the Ending of the Day CW #595), CONDITOR ALME SIDERUM (O Lord of Light, Who Made the Stars CW #31), VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS (Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest CW #178), PANGE LINGUA (CWS – alternate tune for CHRISTUS PARADOX), to name a few.

Are hymns that have been around since the fourth century going away anytime soon? No doubt, these tunes and texts have stood the test of time. As the "crown jewels" of hymnody, will we honor them by putting them behind glass and post a security guard next to them so they cannot be used? Or will we make use of them as Christians over thousands of years have?

As we proceed we need to clarify what we are speaking about with the term "hymnody." When we speak of hymnody we can be talking about poetic, religious texts only. We can also be talking about the text connected with the tune. For clarification, however, when we speak about the only melody of a hymn we will refer to the hymn tune.

Assumption: Hymnody is boring.

Hymnody and psalmody have been part of God's church for a long time. Depending on the person, one could say that is the best reason for continuing to include hymnody and psalmody, or, for another person, the reason why we should do away with hymnody and psalmody. This is extreme, but often our reasoning and arguing for or against some aspect of worship doesn't go deeper than that! Before hymnody or psalmody is left out of weekly worship the discussion of what it is and what it means and why we use it needs to take place.

⁷⁴ Paul Westermeyer, *Let the People Sing: Hymn Tunes in Perspective* (Chicago: GIA, 2005), p. 23.

⁷⁵ Westermeyer, *Let the People Sing*, p. 24.

Worshippers are open to Hymnody

We have already seen that both children and youth are open to hymnody. Perhaps the group that needs the most convincing regarding the value of hymnody is the baby boomers. Why is this? Was it too much TLH?

We know that the body of hymnody is broader and more varied than what was contained in TLH and even CW, which is part of the reason churches have produced hymnal supplements. In the hymn “explosion” of the last part of the 20th century, hymnals have begun to reflect the diversity in hymnody by restoring ancient hymns to their original musical qualities, by including cultural hymns, and by including hymns that are sung either in a different way (verse and refrain, or melody without harmony), or accompanied in a different way. This brings new interest to both tune and text. For example, instead of trying to play an African hymn like a German chorale, we get out the congas and maybe a guitar and piano, not necessarily an organ.⁷⁶

A word on cultural hymns...this term “cultural” implies that the origins of the hymn are imbedded within a specific culture, or ethnicity. (The term “ethnic hymns” has also been used.) The number of cultural hymns that are used in WELS is growing. We can guess it is because our 21st century world is shrinking. But the increase in the number of cultural songs may also have to do with the movement of the gospel in the world. Possibly, after taking up residency in the Mediterranean countries, northern Europe and America, the gospel is looking for a new place to live. As the gospel moves into other countries we, as church musicians, are challenged to make use of the best of Christian hymnody of other lands in our own land.

Hymns are congregational

It is impossible to talk about hymnody without talking about what congregational song means to the worshipping church. One of the strengths of hymnody is its clear connection with the song of the people. Why? Because hymn tunes are singable. They are folk-like, or congregational. This is a very important quality of hymn tunes. If the organ broke down in church or computer midi system didn't work, or the pianist was sick, or the worship team slept in, the congregation could still carry on the singing of the hymns with a little leadership from one strong voice. What might be even more interesting to observe in this situation, if it really happened, is how the singers would become dependent on one another for the moving along of the song, instead of depending on an instrument to lead them. Boring? No. All would have to wonder, how is this going to turn out? What do we sound like? We'd actually hear other people singing around us and work together with them on completing the song. The expression of unity in song can be described in this way:

As a royal priesthood, worshipers are functioning as the King's ministers.
Their king is the Lord Jesus Christ. As his ministers they have one duty: to

⁷⁶ For a listing of the cultural songs in the LCMS and WELS hymnals and supplements, see the resource guide. There is also a listing of the different combinations of instruments used to accompany singing in a specific culture.

declare faithfully the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. The king's ministers are able to carry out this mandate at the same moment in worship. All can say the same thing at the same time, and all can understand and be understood, since the gift of music allows the king's ministers to sing the same syllable at the same split second on the same pitch. Therefore all can hear; all can believe; and all can grow in faith and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷⁷

If the songs of church are highly soloistic or performance oriented, congregational song simply can't survive without accompaniment to lead them. There would be too many tricky entrances, rests, and syncopated rhythms. This does not only single out some of the current contemporary Christian songs. This can serve as a test for any song, old or new, sung corporately in church. Can the congregation sing it without accompaniment? Can the congregation function together as the king's ministers in singing this song?

Who's in charge?

Another possibility for boredom with hymnody is that the worshipers do not feel they are in charge of the song. They are being led too strongly or strictly and they are not being allowed to feel the congregational "drag" that naturally occurs when a large group sings.

I try to explain this to my worship team in two aspects: volume and tempo. The mental picture is one of a parent encouraging a small child to walk. On the one hand, the adult can pull the child by the arm and drag him up by the arm when he's about to fall. But that is not really independence for the child. On the other hand, the adult can possibly crouch behind the child with hands ready to catch but not touching the child as he takes each step. This is how I like to picture accompanying a congregation. We don't pull them along and squelch their voices by an accompaniment that is too loud, and we don't hurry them along to fit our speed. We gently nudge, catch and encourage, while trying to give them the feeling of independence so they feel in charge of the song. This approach to accompanying can help the song of the people become more confident and edifying, and less boring!

New Accompaniments for Hymns

While the tie of hymnody with congregational song is a welcome one, the tie of hymnody with the organ may not be as welcome for some. It is true that there is no instrument that can lead song like an organ. The power, the tone colors, the majesty – church is a great place for using the organ. But hymns were sung unaccompanied at the time of the Reformation. These unaccompanied hymns of the Reformation were not dull or boring, however. They were rhythmically and melodically vibrant, daring, and strong.

Somewhere along the way the organ became, perhaps, too strongly tied to congregational song and the people were rarely heard unaccompanied or accompanied by a different instrument. Let the people sing unaccompanied from time to time. If the organ is going to drop out altogether on a hymn verse, however, the congregation should be prepared ahead of time for this. We don't want to shock the congregation with the thought that something bad happened to the organist. That's not boring, but it is disruptive!

⁷⁷Bruce Backer, *Lutheran Worship*, Fourth Edition (New Ulm: Dr. Martin Luther College), p. 122.

Another way to sing a hymn is with a rhythmic accompaniment that does not necessarily support the melody of the hymn. These settings can introduce different harmonies and colors in the song, and even lead worshipers to think about the hymn in a new way. It helps the overall result if the hymn is already well-known by the congregation, or if a soloist or two supports the congregation by singing along on the melody line. The *CWS accompaniment edition* includes optional accompaniments and optional instrumental parts to enhance the congregation's singing of the *Supplement* hymns.

Can one ever have too much variety on the singing of hymns? Yes! A little variety goes a long way. Select carefully. When one of the hymns has been musically enhanced with a full, interesting, or grand accompaniment, returning to a more standard, subtle accompaniment for the next hymn will feel like variety, too.

New ways of using hymns in church

If singing hymns is still boring to some maybe we need to start over. How can we regain an appreciation for hymns and a connection with the Christian lives of the saints who wrote them?

One way to draw attention to the richness of hymnody might be using hymns in a non-musical way. The book *52 Hymn Stories* contains dramatic readings of the stories behind some of our well-known hymns. Using these readings with children, youth, or even adults to introduce the Hymn of the Day could lead the congregation to a completely new appreciation of the hymn.

Using a hymn reading as a response to a lesson is another way to give these beautiful texts some well-deserved attention. Again, children, youth or adults can be asked to do this, provided they are well-prepared and heard and understood.

Using opportunities at various church gatherings to have a hymn sing or scheduling a fall hymn festival led by the senior (or mixed) choir may help to jump-start a congregation's appreciation of hymnody.

One thought that deserves consideration as well is, "Are we setting the bar too high regarding hymnody in church?" Some hymns are like power bars - the snack that a runner might eat before a long run that's packed with vitamins and nutrients. How many power bars can you eat in a row? Not very many! Loaded with good things for your body, power bars are thick, chewy and hard to eat without a glass of water on hand. Some hymns are loaded with good things for our faith, but they are also "chewy" and long and hard to get through without a glass of water! How many of these power bar hymns are we expecting our people to sing on one Sunday? A strategic use of hymnody is wise – not too many hard ones and especially not too many unfamiliar ones in too short a time. Introduce new hymns slowly and carefully. Let the people hear it a few times first before they try it. But do try new hymns and carefully grow the body of hymnody the congregation knows.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ The following is approach is an easy way to keep track of which hymns have been used in our congregation. Since 1994 there has been one hymnal (called the "Holy Hymnal") set aside for the special purpose of keeping track of hymn use in worship. A Post-it note is on each of the hymns used, with the date

Assistance in singing the hymn

This point relates to the power bar analogy used earlier regarding hymns. With certain longer or more difficult hymns it may be wise to provide assistance to the congregation in accomplishing the hymn in worship. Historically, this has been part of choir's role in worship. The choir, in early Lutheran worship, served in assisting the congregation on singing the hymns and other service music. In contrast to this practice many choirs in WELS today serve only as anthem choirs.

The Lutheran Reformation of the 16th century continued and enriched the alternation practice, the unison singing of the congregation now participating especially in the alternate singing of the de tempore hymn (Gradual hymn) sung between the Epistle and Gospel. The congregation, singing the unison chorales unaccompanied, alternated with a unison-singing choir...a choir singing polyphonic settings of the chorales...or the organ playing chorale settings...Johann Walter's polyphonic chorale settings...and many works of the Reformation composers like Michael Praetorius...were intended for use in connection with alternation practice.⁷⁹

Not only does assisting the congregation in the singing of hymns help give the singers a break, it also serves to beautify and enhance the singing of hymns. Different settings of the Hymn of the Day draw worshipers deeper into the hymn text itself. It grabs their attention, and may even lead them to sing with greater vigor and conviction. Since the Hymn of the Day is tied to the Sunday of the church year and the scripture readings, a special treatment of it can also produce a greater understanding of the rest of the service.

In this sense, a worship team has the potential to function in a way more closely associated with the choir's role in Lutheran Worship. With just two to four vocalists and a couple of instrumentalists, the worship team can assist, teach, lead, and enhance the singing of much of the worship music – hymns, psalms, canticles, with possibly an anthem during the offering or for pre-service music. People appreciate this assistance and some welcome results can rise up out of this partnership.

For example, it always impresses me how much better the men will sing a hymn stanza alone if they have a fearless male vocalist leading them along the way. Boring is the last word that comes to mind when these worshipful moments happen!

The congregation's song is like an expensive heirloom – handle with care and common sense. It is the pre-eminent song of God's Church – the song of God's people.

it was used written on it. This provides at-a-glance information for the worship planners, and shows which hymns are being over or under-used.

⁷⁹ Carl Schalk, *Key Words in Church Music* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), p. 16-17.

Assumption: Hymns are outdated.

Occasionally, some hymns may require an updating in their language. But, with others, a language update may destroy it. Take *How Great Thou Art* for example. *You Are So Great*⁸⁰ just wouldn't have the same impact. Hymns are works of art that transcend time and space and the great ones will never be outdated. Still, there are ways to help your congregation members see old hymns with new eyes and renewed appreciation.

New Clothes for Classic Hymns

One remedy to making hymns interesting is to wed a hymn text with a new or different tune. Musicians are using classic hymn texts and clothing them in a completely different way. When wedding a hymn text with a new or different tune it is helpful to examine the text carefully. What is the text saying? What is the mood of the text? Does the tune reflect the mood of the text or the purpose of the text? Consider the result of a new tune for *Rock of Ages*⁸¹ or *The Church's One Foundation*⁸². A successful marriage of text and tune can help the hymn text "pop off" the page, making it readily understandable and memorable.

Hymns are the new "modern Christian songs"

Hymnody is not out of fashion. It is alive and well. More than ever, top CCM artists are recording hymn arrangements. A recent check of the top twenty-five songs of the year on Praisecharts.com⁸³ (one of the most popular CCM sheet music websites) reveals that at least seven are settings of hymns or contain portions of hymns, and at least three are based on canticles (Biblical songs). Of these, many are an "expanded hymn" – the original hymn text and tune with newly composed bridges or refrains. While, at the beginning of the CCM movement, praise choruses were serving as a substitution for hymnody, Christian music artists have found people returning to hymns.

Contemporary worship guru Don Chapman deals with the existence of hymnody head on. His first website worshipideas.com, discussed his worship ministry experiences. Following soon after this, Chapman felt the need to launch a new website, hymncharts.com, which offered downloadable arrangements of "classic" hymns. He continues to be an advocate for contemporary worship, having been educated and trained in the Reformed tradition, but recognizes that hymnody is not going away any time soon. He writes,

I grew up in a Baptist church and attended a Christian school where I think I heard and played almost every hymn that's ever been written! However, as I've morphed out of the traditional...I've found that some hymns...are timeless, and will probably withstand any style that will be invented in the future.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ In his article Uwe Seimon-Netto discussed how millenials accept Elizabethan language as part of their appreciation for tradition in worship.

⁸¹ The new tune for Rock of Ages was composed by James Ward.

⁸² www.igracemusic.com

⁸³ As of May 31, 2008.

⁸⁴ Don Chapman, "The Top 25 Hymns to Use With Contemporary Worship" worshipmax.com © 2003.

Yes, *A Mighty Fortress* made Chapman's list of top 25. His thoughts on hymnody continues in an article, "Using Hymns in Contemporary Worship,"

Hot-rockin' worship leaders in hot-rockin' churches may be exempt for now, but sooner or later your crowd will marry, have kids, and suddenly wax nostalgic for "In the Garden." If I had a dollar for every time I heard, "I want my children to know the hymns..."⁸⁵

Why is this? Parents want only the best for their children. Hymns give us something that we can't always explain. They are the *people's* song of faith, because they come from ordinary people, and usually not recording artists.

Enter one of the exceptions. Keith and Kristin Getty are not your typical Christian recording artists. They, along with their gifted poet-friend, Stuart Townend, have rejuvenated the love for hymnody in many places around the world, including WELS. The Gettys have put their finger on the desire in many Christians to gather and sing simple, stirring, and well-written songs of faith. Their hymn (and they call them hymns!) *In Christ Alone* has captured the imagination of many Christian hearts, and been arranged for almost any worship group. In our area alone, I have heard this hymn arranged in four different ways: for handbells and solo voice, for women's choir, for SATB choir, and for worship team and congregation with instruments. It is also on the list of the year's top twenty-five "praise songs" at praisecharts.com.

Keith Getty writes about this hymn,

Of all the hymns we have written, this hymn is the most popular wherever we go. Ironically, it is the first hymn we ever penned together. One particularly moving story was a letter we received from a soldier at war... "I wanted to share a song that has been a real inspiration to me...it has the feel of the traditional hymns. I have listened to it almost every night and even tend to sing... as I drive down the highway with my M-16 pointed out the window and my 9MM pistol tucked in my flak jacket pocket. I can tell you that I feel more secure in claiming the promise "No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand till he returns or calls me home" than I do with that rifle and pistol."⁸⁶

The Gettys' hymns aren't your typical hymns, though. They are very melodic, with a substantial vocal range (usually more than an octave), interesting and sometimes challenging rhythmic patterns, and lengthy verses. Many times their hymns have refrains, which may be a first step for congregation participation. The challenge with these hymns will be, for some, picking out a harmony that fits in their voice range. It can be done. On the other hand, there is always the option of singing the melody line even though one has a preference for singing in parts.

⁸⁵ Don Chapman, "Using Hymns in Contemporary Worship" worshipideas.com © 2002.

⁸⁶ www.gettymusic.com Story Behind: In Christ Alone

Assumption: Psalmody – we can take or leave it.

Prayer, praise, preaching, proclamation and prophecy are found in the Psalms. It's is the Bible's songbook, and prayer book, but also the Bible's catechism because the Psalms "1) speak of Christ, and 2) they teach us to fear, love, and trust in God above all things."⁸⁷ Prof. Emeritus Bruce Backer says,

The use of the psalms is a great blessing to the church. However, as Luther himself asserts, use of the psalms must be a regular discipline. One cannot taste of them once in a while. They are tough; they need to be mastered by daily discipline, a discipline that should endure a lifetime...It is possible to become addicted to the psalms. A regular user feels the lack if he neglects the Psalter too long, and in a short time he has returned to his "daily David." Would that the holy Christian Church were a congregation of such addicts!⁸⁸

The Psalter is the prayer book of the Bible

The Disciples implored Jesus, "Lord, teach us how to pray." Jesus gave them the Lord's Prayer. In its petitions the Lord's Prayer captures the themes of the entire Psalter, so it is really the Psalter condensed. Often we Christians get stuck on the fourth petition, and forget to pray the rest of the petitions. Using both the Lord's Prayer and the Psalter in our personal and public worship life teaches us to pray as God would have us pray.

An interesting view that advocates of contemporary worship use to differentiate between liturgical worship and praise worship could be summed up in the following way:

Traditional worship is often described as being "horizontal," meaning that we're talking ABOUT God instead of TO God. For instance, many hymns speak of God's attributes ("I Sing the Mighty Power of God.") Many old-time Gospel songs speak of our personal testimony ("Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine.") Of course, there's nothing wrong with this. But contemporary worship music usually directs our thoughts directly To God – "Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord," "Lord, I Lift Your Name On High." This is an important distinction. Praise songs aren't Shakespeare, they're prayers!⁸⁹

If praise songs can be declared prayers, then, that begs the question, "On which petition are these prayers based?" "What is being prayed for?" If there is a desire for more prayer-like songs in contemporary worship, why is the prayer book that God gave us in the Bible not a part of contemporary worship? Where is the Psalter in contemporary worship? Has the request, "Lord, teach us how to pray." been made? We know that many of these songs simply get stuck on informing God of how great he is or what we are going to do for God. Certainly, God is great, but is that all he wants to hear from us?

In personal correspondence Prof. Backer sheds light on the value of the Psalter:

⁸⁷ Backer, *Lutheran Worship*, p. 89.

⁸⁸ Backer, *Lutheran Worship*, p. 89.

⁸⁹ Don Chapman, "The Top Three Mistakes In Contemporary Worship" www.worshipideas.com.

Beyond Contemporary Worship is a very interesting topic. It suggests to me that there may just be something beyond Today. Our computer-driven life suggests that whatever is beyond today really doesn't matter. But if we take the time to look beyond the present, we find warmth and light and strength and power on the horizon of yesterday. There, beyond today, beyond contemporary, lie the Holy Scriptures, with their Book of Prayers, the Psalter. There lie a goodly number of other songs, such as the Song of Mary and the Song of Simeon.

Why should we use these songs of yesterday? We should use them because God gave them to us to use. Think of it! In an inspired collection of books, the Bible, that speaks to us of God's great blessings, there is a book that shows us how we may speak with God. In Hebrew this book is called TeHiLLiM YiSraEL, 'The Praises of Israel.' 'Tehillim' really means 'thanks-and-praise.' So, first and foremost, the Psalter teaches us to thank and praise God day after day for all the wonderful things he has done for us in terms of the three articles of faith. In the rush and ruin of daily life believers come to the throne of God and ask and ask and ask and ask. That is how it should be. But they need a helper. They need the Psalter to show them how good and kind and gracious the Lord God has been to them, so that they cannot help but rise above rush and ruin and sing with joy:

*Praise the Lord, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits –
who forgives all your sins,
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. Ps 103*

There is warmth and light and strength and power. It is so, because the words come from God. He gave them to us to stop the rush, to lift us from self-described ruin, and to place us graciously on a high place so that we can eat and digest the goodness and kindness and mercy and patience of God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, - and then be strengthened to move on to another day. But the Psalter is broad, like the mighty Mississippi at its widest. It teaches believers not only to thank-and-praise, not only to ask, but also to confess sin and every weakness, to lament their lot in life, and yes, even to complain to the Lord God, Maker of heaven and earth. The Psalter, then, is an exercise in the First Command.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Bruce Backer, Email to Grace Hennig, dated June 11, 12 and 13, New Ulm, Minnesota.

Using the Psalter in Worship

One “prays with Christ” and “in the name of “Christ” when the psalms are used. The words of the psalms were spoken by the Word before he became flesh, and when Jesus walked on the earth, he quoted and used the psalms. We pray with Christ, because they are Christ’s words.

The entire structure of the Divine Office was developed specifically for praying and meditating on the psalms. The most popular remnants of the Divine Office still appearing in our hymnals are the service of Matins or Morning Praise, Vespers or Evening Prayer, and the welcome return of Compline in the *New Service Settings*.⁹¹

How can believers present these powerful prayers to God? In any way that they please, and at any time. But God has given them another gift that will clothe these praises in a way that makes the heart rejoice. Look at the young man with the crisp shirt and tie, and newly pressed Dockers! Isn’t he handsome? Look at the young woman clothed modestly in a new dress, purchased only a few hours ago! Isn’t she beautiful? Such is the delight that a group of small services offer the praying of the Psalter. Among them are Morning Praise (Matins) and Evening Prayer (Vespers), found in CHRISTIAN WORSHIP. They are brief, crisp, and clean; and they do not weary the worshiper. The union of one of these brief services with the Psalter lifts the worshiper above the changes and chances of life to a place where he can offer thanks and praise, petition and confession to the God of all grace and mercy.⁹²

Blessings await the individual and congregation that makes use of the Psalter. One of the most significant changes in WELS worship resulting from the introduction of *Christian Worship, 1993* was the more extensive use of Psalmody in worship. Backer says,

The Lord of the church always supplies believers with the weapons they need to fight the devil. Continuing encouragement has led many Christians to the Psalter for weapons to fight Satan, for refuge from his attacks, and for meditation on their life in Christ toward God.⁹³

Now the *Supplement* will add new Psalmody to the worship repertoire and different settings of current Psalmody in *Christian Worship*. It will be interesting to find if congregations will not only adjust more quickly to the new Psalmody of the *Supplement* because of the experience they have gained in the last fifteen years through *Christian Worship*, but if they will welcome the new Psalms and cry “Give us more!”

There are many musical and beautiful Psalm settings that a choir or soloist can lead the congregation in singing. There is potential for extensive variety in using the Psalms in worship. Psalms can be used in the usual place between the scripture readings, but psalms can also be used in the place of hymns, or as an opening hymn or gathering rite at the

⁹¹ Northwestern Publishing House © 2002.

⁹² Backer, Email, June 11, 12, 13.

⁹³ Backer, *Lutheran Worship*, p. 91.

beginning of the service. Psalms can be used as anthems after the prayer of the day, as a response to the gospel reading, during the offering and also during communion distribution. Many psalm settings encourage the participation of the congregation in the form of a simple antiphon or refrain. Even pre-school aged children can learn these refrains and participate in the singing of the psalm.

Assumption: Hymns and psalms do not relate to people in worship.

You will not find much psalmody or hymnody in contemporary megachurches. Hymnals were simply not present in the worship spaces I saw. One possible reason that Christians don't embrace psalmody or hymnody is that they simply do not understand it or don't use them enough to see their value. As Prof. Backer said, one cannot make a casual use of psalmody – one has to dive into it and study it to absorb it. But God has given it to us as the ultimate example of Christian praise and prayer. Why would we not use it and work through it together? The Psalms are the most quoted book in the Bible by the other books of the Bible. Even the Bible itself recognizes the power, strength, light and relevance of the Psalter.

The Psalms related intimately to Christians of long ago and to Jesus himself. In its regular use the Psalter will grow to be something that relates intimately to us in worship, something that we would miss if it were left out. Often, in updating, modernizing, streamlining, and making worship appear relevant, hymnody and psalmody, especially, are the first things to go.

Another reason hymnody and psalmody may be left out of contemporary worship is that churches don't want to deal with the "tough stuff" of Christianity on a Sunday morning. Our hymnals reflect our confession as a church body. Especially in the modern megachurch, doctrine and confession take a back seat so no one goes away from church offended or put off. As Paul Westermeyer puts it:

The church at twentieth century's end...has tended to define everything, including its music, like the market-driven world around it rather than respond to its best instincts and treat people well. In place of the *Te Deum* and the long strand of the church's song which it represents, the temptation has been to substitute superficial praise choruses or poorly crafted attempts to tell God how we feel. That the church might have a message and a schooling responsibility has often escaped its recent gaze.⁹⁴

Imagine my surprise in a recent visit to a megachurch in our area which served communion at one point in the service. It took place at the end of the worship portion (usually the first 15-20 minutes) of the service. It was worked into the worship in about the same casual way the announcements were. "The ushers are going to pass out communion now," was the preparation for communion. A song, Chris Tomlin's popular *Amazing Grace: My Chains Are Gone* was sung while the ushers passed it out to anyone who wanted it (we didn't move

⁹⁴ Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, p. 318.

from our seats and I waved the usher by). And then there was a break in the song and the worship leader said, “OK, you guys can eat and drink together now.” No explanation, no Thanksgiving, no Words of Institution – that was it. I don’t think our communion hymn *Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior* (CW 313) would have been welcomed in this church, especially the text of the third stanza,

*Jesus here himself is sharing;
Take heed how you are preparing,
For if you do not believe,
Judgment instead you shall receive.*

We have seen that hymns and psalmody can relate on a very deep level to children, teens and adults. We have so many from which to choose. There is bound to be a favorite for everyone somewhere. Poll your congregation to see what the favorites are and then sing them. Work in the new gems gradually and carefully. Find appealing psalm settings and sing them unapologetically.

Resources

52 Hymn Stories

www.hymncharts.com some are “over the top” – choose wisely

www.gettymusic.com

www.liturgysolutions.com - LCMS

Hymn Settings for the Contemporary Ensemble, Vol. 1 & 2 (#3 to come) by Phil Magness, CPH
Worship and Rejoice Hope Publishing, Carol Stream, IL, 2001

Lead Me, Guide Me - GIA

Christian Worship

Christian Worship Supplement

Hymns for Praise and Worship Word Publishing

Psalm Songs 3 by D. Ogden and A. Smith, ed. Augsburg

Sharing the Road, R. Bruxvoort-Colligan, Augsburg Fortress – watch texts

Everyone Who Is Thirsty, Come! by Jay Beech, www.baytone.com

Psalms for Worship Vol. 1 by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

Celebration Series, GIA, ten volumes

Various other octavo psalm settings from GIA

www.igracemusic.com – downloadable hymns set to different tunes, psalm settings

www.hymnsite.com – the entire Psalter in Isaac Watt’s metrical verses.

Beyond Rejection of the Western Rite

This section deserves an entire presentation in itself. The richness and history of the Western Rite and how it has been used in Christian worship is more than I can cover today, even more than most lengthy books can cover. The discussion provided here is a mere surface one and certainly not very scholarly. However, I hope the following thoughts draw you into a deeper study of the Rite.

The order of the Western Rite has been used for the Holy Communion Service for centuries. From Europe it crossed the ocean to America and the Rite survived despite the rebellious nature of the immigrant and pioneer spirit, and the revivalist and reformed traditions of worship which didn't include it.

When Europeans came to America, they brought their religious customs with them. Roman Catholics still used Gregorian Chant and various other styles of music to sing the Ordinary and Propers of the Mass. Protestant denominations brought with them the many hymns that had been written by the time they emigrated. This music was satisfactory as long as America had not come of age and had not developed its own profile. German chorales, Norwegian hymns, Reformed psalm-hymns were more than adequate...However, by the middle of the 20th century a generation of Americans represented the culture who had lost their ancestral language and most of the customs of their fathers.⁹⁵

Misunderstanding about the Western Rite, a search for a new American identity, and a desire for alternate worship orders have led to its rejection. Also many churches which have used the Rite have not musically adorned it as it deserves. So, it has come to be seen as too bland, instead of the treasure that it is. Christians may also associate the Rite too strongly with Europe, or even Germany, and fail to see that it is the most culturally-diverse and global Christian pattern of worship that has been used since the Middle Ages.

But following the Western Rite in Christian worship is not one of the Ten Commandments. It is not necessary to gain salvation. What a wise God we have that gives his church wonderful treasures to use and the freedom to use them wisely.

Assumption: The Western Rite is old-fashioned.

One of my favorite words is in this title – fashion. My appreciation and interest in the art of making clothes was something I brought into this world, finding every possibly silk or satin item to play with as a toddler, begging relentlessly for blue jeans as a Kindergartener. And that was just the beginning...

I would like to construct an argument for using the Western Rite based on a philosophy of fashion, just for a change of pace.

⁹⁵ Backer, *Lutheran Worship*, p. 179

In the modern world there are certain classics of fashion that will seem to never go out of style. The button-down shirt, the black pencil skirt, jeans, the khaki trench coat, black pump-style shoes, a 1940's style dress, a V-neck sweater. For men, a suit, a tie, wing-tip shoes, a dress-shirt, trousers. Fashion editors call these clothes "investment pieces" because, if you buy quality, they will never let you down. You can always look good wearing them. To update and remain current, all that is needed is a bit of of-the-moment accessories and color.

In the worship world, the Western Rite could be considered the all-time "classic" pattern of worship. We add our "of-the-moment accessories" by using new compositions of the same texts, by changing the instrumentation or cultural flavor of the musical seasonings. We include other elements that change alongside the classics in the propers and the seasons of the liturgical year. These changing things keep the classics current and timeless at the same time.

Why is the Western Rite a classic? Classic fashions are a quality cut of fabric. The texts of the Western Rite are quality cuts of the Bible. Throughout this order are the Biblical texts that crystallize the faith of Christians through the use of God's words himself. The texts tell us who and what our faith is all about – Christ and his work. They focus on the subject and object of our faith.

In the fashion world there are times when all classics are abandoned and the designers simply go wild with their artistic ideas – on the runway, for instance. But these ideas are always tamed for application in the light of the classics for the work-a-day world.

Worship music can be expressed in a very musically or textually unconventional way, such as in Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. While this may also be an acceptable offering to the Lord, for the average Sunday service the musical ideas are tamed to fit the context, so the people can be edified, proclaim, praise, and participate.

The icons in the fashion world have a great sense of personal style. No one that tries to be something that they are not has an influence in the fashion world. The influential fashionistas have a great sense of their own fashion identity.

In the worship world, if we perceive ourselves as out-of-fashion or looking for a worship-fashion identity, how influential does that make us? Are we simply trying to be something that we are not?

The more I observed contemporary megachurch worship, the more I was convinced that the contemporary order has not much to do with Lutheranism at all. I fear that Lutherans who are trying to adopt this model are trying to be something they aren't, or at best, pouring a lot of time and effort into reinventing themselves continually to be current. I fear that in the process they will not be influential over the long-term, relevant only to the limited area that they serve, unable to reflect the depth and breadth of Christendom in their worship.

One of the strengths of the church has been that it does not follow every musical trend or whim that blows its way. It carefully tests and waits for new genres, mediums, and styles to

prove themselves as worthy before assimilating them into its midst. Think of how long it takes to put a hymnal together and for a church to get used to using it. Proof is that after 15 years of use *Christian Worship* is still known by many as “the *new* hymnal!” As Carl Schalk states, this has usually been the case in church history.

Generally speaking, the incorporation of elements of the new baroque style into the music of early Lutheran composers was gradual and incremental. This is true of the adoption of most of the new styles the church has encountered throughout its history. Such a “cultural lag,” waiting to see and test newer stylistic innovations as to their musical and liturgical appropriateness for worship, is seen by some today as a missed opportunity for immediate cultural relevance, a failure to be on the cutting edge in the use of new musical ideas, styles, and approaches. It is perhaps better seen as a tendency on the part of the church not to adopt too quickly every passing cultural and musical fad.⁹⁶

Will there be new classics? Undoubtedly, there will be sacred music currently in use which will be gradually assimilated into the church’s body of artistic or folk sacred music. Over the past three decades, some of the better music from the praise song genre has even worked its way into new hymnals. (Take, for example, the use of Twila Paris’ *Lamb of God* as an occasional substitute for the *Agnus Dei*.) Of the many, many recently written sacred songs available, however, few will make the cut over time.

The Western Rite continues to be yes, old, but also very much in fashion as a true classic of Christian worship.

Assumption: The Western Rite is too repetitive.

Have you heard this argument that we shouldn’t do anything in worship that causes our mind to wander? People load a heap of guilt on themselves when they think they didn’t worship because they didn’t think through every word of the Lord’s Prayer. Some even believe that this is a reason we shouldn’t do the Western Rite every week. The fear is that if we repeat texts too often our worship becomes a matter of form instead of the heart. Unfortunately, this can reach the point where other Christians actually accuse their Christian brothers who use the Western Rite of heartless or dead worship.

There is another side to this argument. Our worship on this side of heaven will never be perfect. We don’t need to feel guilty every time we pass over a few words without intensely thinking about them. God’s grace covers that, too. And part of this worship is Spirit-led muscle memory.

Athletes, musicians and dancers depend on this function of the brain for their optimum performances. They know that if they practice something often enough they’ll be able to do it without having to think about what they are doing.

⁹⁶ Schalk, “Learning from the Past,” p. 9.

Using the words of the Western Rite and the Lord's Prayer can have this beneficial effect, too. In part, singing these words is an act of faith muscle-memory. We repeat and repeat so that, at the time we need it, we are able to access those clear words of faith. It may be on a Sunday in church when we are in a troubled state and we sing those words with more comfort and meaning than we ever did on the Sundays we weren't particularly concentrating and were feeling fine.

Ask any pastor what the Spirit-led muscle-memory of repeating texts does for those who approach the end of their time of grace – how a spontaneous recitation of the Lord's Prayer may come from the lips of a person awaiting death.

Repetition of the texts of the Western Rite benefit many different groups at worship: the very old who can't see well, the very young who can't read, the young or old who can read but are in the first stages of forming their faith, the mentally challenged, and the mother or father hanging onto children who don't have the luxury of hands-free worship.

Assumption: The Western Rite is inflexible.

It may serve us well at this point to compare the order of the contemporary service and the order of the Western Rite.

Contemporary Worship

Pre-service music
 2-3 upbeat songs
 1 slower song
 *Opening Prayer/reading
 Worship Time
 More upbeat songs
 1 slower song
 Prayer
 Announcements
Offering – songs during
 (Possibly **communion**)
 Song to close worship portion
 *Sermon (35-45 minutes)
 Exit (music or no music)

Common Lutheran Service

Pre-service music
Opening Hymn
***Invocation**
Confession
***Kyrie**
Absolution
***Gloria in Excelsis**
 Prayer of the Day

 The Word
 *Scripture reading (OT)
***Psalm**
 *Scripture reading (NT)
***Verse**
 *Gospel and **responses**
Nicene Creed
Hymn of the Day
 *Sermon
 *Votum
***Create in Me**
Offering
 Prayer of the Church
***Lord's Prayer**

 Service of Holy Communion
Preface
 Proper Prefaces
***Sanctus**
 *Words of Institution
***Agnus Dei**
Distribution
Distribution Hymns

 Thanksgiving
Song of Simeon
 Prayer
 *Benediction and **response**
Closing Hymn

*Those portions of the worship which use words from the Bible. In bold print are the portions that rely on participation from the people.

Because there is more going on in the Common Service there is more potential for variety. It is based squarely on the shoulders of the Bible. It relies on active participation from the people.

While there exists a perception that there is more variety in contemporary worship, there is actually less room for variety since there is simply less to do in a form that doesn't change, in a worship order in which the people are passive.

The Western Rite may appear inflexible to some who are lack understanding of the order and how it came to be. There are some helpful tools that educate a congregation on why they worship the way they do. Most of these tools take the form of a Bible class or as a topic discussed in an adult or youth confirmation instruction class. However, some churches have set aside one Sunday a year to re-educate the congregation on our orders of worship. This day might be termed "Liturgy Sunday." The pastor and choir take the congregation through the liturgy step by step,⁹⁷ explaining the purpose or history of each part.

The Rites Committee for *Christian Worship Supplement* also recognized this need to educate both visitors and members on the different parts of the liturgy. In *Divine Service II* footnotes have been included at many points in the service to offer insight into the order's origins.

The following order of service for Holy Communion was written by Phil Magness, cantor at Bethany Lutheran Church in Naperville, Illinois. It demonstrates the flexibility within in the Western Rite, or Common Service, for Lutheran worship. Of special note is the flexibility within the entrance rite. Phil's notes follow in italics.

⁹⁷ Two forms for walking through the liturgy are included in the resource packet. One is for the Service of Word and Sacrament in *CW*, the other for the Service of the Word in *CW*.

An Evangelical Lutheran Order of Service

+Preparatory Liturgy+

Pre-service music

***Invocation**

Confession and Absolution

A song of praise is fitting, (see notes)

with a **Psalm** or **Canticle** desirable either before or after the song or hymn.

Kyrie used during Lent; Kyrie recommended during Advent as well.

Prayer (Collect or Ex Corde Pastoral Prayer)

+Liturgy of the Word+

*Scripture readings - (with responses)

With **psalmody** or hymnody interspersed.

*Sermon

Nicene Creed

Offering

Offertory Song or *Psalm

Prayer of the Church (may be said after Creed)

(if there is no communion, a Benediction would be given here,
after which a **closing song** or **hymn** may be sung)

+Liturgy of the Lord's Supper+

Preface Dialog (Proper Preface optional)

***Sanctus**

Prayer of Thanksgiving

***Lord's Prayer**

*Words of Institution

***Pax Domini**

Distribution

Distribution Hymns and/or Songs

(an **Agnus Dei** may be sung first)

Post-Communion Prayer

Blessing and **response**

Closing Hymn or Song

Notes

Underlined are places where psalmody, canticles, and other songs may replace hymns. Hymns may readily be led by a liturgical ensemble or worship team.

Pre-service music may be gathering music with congregational participation, led by worship team.

Combinations for the entrance rite (response to Absolution and Confession) could be:

psalmody + canticle
 psalmody + kyrie
 psalmody + hymn or song
 hymn + kyrie
 hymn + canticle
 kyrie + Advent hymn or song
 kyrie + Lenten hymn or song
 kyrie + song

Time of year, theme, and, above all, texts, are determinative.

It is not essential that the people sing while the offerings received and/or gathered. The Offertory could simply be replaced by an anthem. Local historic practice should inform whatever decisions are made where such options present themselves.

A closing song or hymn is optional, but tends to be the norm in American congregations.

A worship team could sing three or four songs of special music (pre-service, theme song before or after readings, attendant music during the offering or during the distribution of the Lord's Supper) in this order, yet the Lutheran character of the service is not replaced by entertainment evangelism. The order also allows for 3-4 songs to be sung by the congregation.

For other variety in the entrance rite, we need look no further than *CW* and *CWS*. The Service of the Word and Sacrament (p.26) provides an alternate text for the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the Service of the Word (p. 38) provides an alternate text for the *Gloria Patri*, Psalm 34, "O Taste and See." Various other possibilities exist for a substitute for the *Gloria* and other parts of the Ordinary (Biblical songs). In *CWS*, two gathering rites are available for use during the entrance rite: a gathering rite on the Word of God, "Blessed Jesus At Your Word," and a gathering rite on Holy Baptism, "Baptized Into Your Name Most Holy." Other published gathering rites used during the seasons of Advent and Lent can "set apart" these seasons of the church year in a memorable way.

Also, simply dropping the use of the *Gloria in Excelsis* during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent also add variety to the beginning of the service⁹⁸.

Anytime a substitute song is used for one of the Biblical songs of the Ordinary the thoughtful musician will strive to have it tie in thematically with the season of the church year, and the propers for the day. Also, even though it is hard to improve on the proclamatory content of the Biblical songs, a worthy substitute will enable the congregation to proclaim Christ clearly in their worship.

⁹⁸ Some have used a "Farewell to Alleluia" rite on the last Sunday of the Epiphany season.

Before making too many changes to the order of service worship leaders need to have the conversation about which elements of the service are, for reasons theological, pastoral, and practical, usually not optional. Finally, the placement of certain parts of the service needs to be discussed as well. For instance, some made have the practice of putting the Confession of Sins after the sermon, just before the liturgy of Holy Communion. While there are no rules that say this is not allowed, one could view the putting off of confession as a denial of the gulf of sin that exists between God and man, which needs to be set right as he enters God's house at the beginning of worship.

Assumption: The Western Rite isn't contemporary.

Does the Western Rite fit in a megachurch contemporary service? Not really. A contemporary service is not about proclamation - it is largely about self. In that sense, an entire pattern of worship that points to Christ doesn't pass in this context. The Western Rite is confessional. In that sense, it doesn't pass in contemporary worship, either. Creeds and confession is usually absent from these services. The Western Rite is repeated. In this sense, the Western Rite doesn't pass in a megachurch contemporary service because repetition is seen as either boring, or too automatic, or insincere. The Western Rite uses biblical songs. In this sense, it wouldn't pass in a contemporary service. Most of the songs are praise songs that focus more on the people's praise and less on revealed truth.

Pastor Jon Zabell discusses the positive side of the "anti-contemporariness" of the Western Rite:

We make it harder for ourselves to train true disciples of the cross when we make our worship more appealing to postmodernists in Christian clothing. Worship needs to be relevant, but worship that is too accessible becomes redundant. Might there be more to gain than to lose in championing a form of worship that runs counter-culture?

However you answer that, the first answer to perceived dullness in liturgical worship must be to give greater attention to law and gospel, through careful preparation and patient instruction...Ironically, many within evangelicalism are discovering this just as many within confessional Lutheranism are adopting the evangelical version of "contemporary worship."

...to those who, after our best gospel effort still ask, "Where's the joy in your worship?" we can detect a soul more interested in taste buds than nutrition. We can say, "Let me tell you the story of sin and grace."⁹⁹

Carl Schalk reinforces the concept that our Lutheran identity makes us stand out as a unique voice of the Church. He states that too many churches are willing to give up that voice which is a unique liturgical expression in the cacophony of generic Christianity.

That *the liturgy of the church is the foundational context and discipline for church music* seems self-evident, yet today it is honored by its absence in too many

⁹⁹Jon Zabell, "Being Faithful with Law and Gospel in Contemporary Worship" March 2002. Article available at www.wels.net.

Lutheran congregations. In many churches “the liturgy” is whatever order worship leaders have pasted together from a variety of “resources.” The hymnal, the church year, the appointed lessons are optional “possibilities” from which pastors and other worship leaders may choose or not, as they see fit...When that is the direction that congregations take, and many are being encouraged to do just that, what you have is generic American Protestantism, no matter what the sign on the front lawn says. What is lost is the richness and depth of a liturgical and musical heritage that both nurtures the Christian community and also reaches out to the world; what is left is a sectarianism that pretends to look out, but is ultimately centered in the self.¹⁰⁰

The Western Rite *is* contemporary in the sense that it has great relevance for us at worship today. We start by humbling ourselves before God in confession and ask God to have mercy on us. We hear strong words of the Bible that clearly state what we believe and teach. We receive comfort from words of the Bible that speak God’s grace to us. We respond by proclaiming the Word of God. We receive the Sacrament to add the exclamation point to God’s love for us and to build our faith.

The Western Rite *is* contemporary in that it relates to children - providing for their participation in singing the songs of the Bible that they learn through repetition at worship. It also relates to children in that it builds and shapes their faith at worship.

The Western Rite *is* contemporary in the sense that it is continually receiving new musical clothing, making it simultaneously timeless and current.

The Western Rite *is* contemporary in the sense that, in this contemporary world which is obsessed with self and feelings, felt-needs, and choices, it provides welcome relief from self, pointing to Christ and his work. It frees us from the fruitlessness, anxiety, and insanity of living in a hall of mirrors, and leads us to see the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Resources

Everyone Who Is Thirsty by Come!, Jay Beech, www.baytone.com

Do This in Memory of Me by David Haas, GIA

Jesus, the Compassion of God by David Haas, GIA

Stay with Us, Lord: Liturgies for Evening by D. Cherwien, Augsburg

Hymnal Supplement, 1991 GIA:

Marty Haugen’s *Now the Feast and Celebration*

Other portions of the Western Rite

The Chicago Folk Service, by Art Gorman, Neil A. Kjos Music Co.

Lead Me, Guide Me, An African Hymnal, GIA

Missa Pacem, L. Randolph Babin, GIA

Mass of the Angels and Saints, Steven R. Janco, GIA

Mass of the Creator Spirit, Ed Nowak, GIA

¹⁰⁰ Schalk, “Learning From the Past,” p. 11.

Beyond the senior choir

Choirs have been functioning in worship since the early church. The size and commitment of the choir members vary from church to church. Choir members and directors have many colorful stories that rise out of this particular fellowship.

One of my favorite stories involves my father while he directed senior choir in my home church. He was vigorously directing an anthem when all of a sudden his watch flew off his wrist and followed a trajectory out of the balcony, landing on the lower level in the aisle right next to the owner of the jewelry store in town.

Some stories have to do with “we’ve always done it that way,” right down to “this is the seat I’ve sat in for the last thirty years and I’m not moving!”

Assumption: The choir is a democracy.

Very often choir directors are so grateful for anyone showing up to sing that they bend over backwards to accommodate them. There is a great opportunity for growth in understanding the choir’s role in worship, however, and an enthusiastic director can stimulate a desire to reach beyond the comfort zones and familiar anthems. While questions often times center on robes or no robes, up front or in the balcony, piano or organ, 8:00 or 10:30 service, directors can encourage more thoughtful questions about texts, history, musical style, and participation in the service.

You want us to sing what?

For music in the service, typically, the mixed choir sings an anthem. Somehow, if a choir does not sing an anthem but participates in other ways in the worship, the members don’t feel like they have contributed adequately to the service.

But this anthem-only choir is robbed of the dynamic fellowship of participating with the congregation in worship. Hearing an anthem, while beautiful and edifying, is a passive act for the person in the pew. But when the choir helps out in the singing of the service music with the congregation, they are actually serving in a role that is more of a Lutheran idea. It involves actively participating in the “work (or expression) of the people” (liturgy).

Yes, it takes work to listen, and listening is an act, but it is not the same as *taking part*. Think of it this way. If a group of three people is at a social gathering and two of those people carry the conversation, but the third is silent, the fellowship experienced is different than if the third party would have participated in the conversation. The two that chatted would have come away with more of an indifferent feeling for the one who remained completely silent.

The fellowship of the choir participating with the congregation in worship brings the choir and congregation together in a way that benefits both groups, and enhances the unity of the Body of Christ. Members live the experience of singing along rather than being sung at.

The choir director can slowly, in a winning way, as that of a benevolent monarch move the choir towards more participation in the service music and the work of the people. Participation in the hymns, especially the *de tempore* hymn, the psalm, the verse, and even the

service music itself, such as a descant on the *Gloria* or *Hosanna* can lift the worship to an other-worldly level and tie together the congregation.

Using the choir in a different way – the Worship Team

The term “worship team” can conjure up thoughts of megachurch contemporary worship. Certainly, much of the worship in megachurches centers around the “band.” But we can apply this idea in a Lutheran way.

Churches have people in them that can sing. These soloists may or may not be a part of the mixed choir, for one reason or another. Yet they are there amongst the worshipers, some reluctant, some waiting to be found. For some it is a matter of getting their feet wet in a less threatening way than public worship. Once a one-time commitment goes well, they may be ready to try more.

Some of the soloists used in our worship teams were discovered in these two ways: through working with the Sunday school children and through planning our Advent by Candlelight events. I found that these adults were more ready to commit to singing to a one-time event than to joining a choir for an entire year.

One year on Saints’ Triumphant Sunday a soloist sang the verses to Getty’s *There Is A Higher Throne* with the Sunday School Choir, which sang the refrain. Her son was in the Sunday School Choir, and her husband played along with the bass guitar, so it was a family affair. Because this soloist received encouragement for her good work and beautiful voice she was ready to commit to something more involved. So she joined the worship team. Now she enjoys the role of singing with a small choir (2-3) and participates confidently in that role.

More and more congregations are adding an Advent by Candlelight service for women to their yearly worship calendars.¹⁰¹ For many women, this is a highly anticipated event, an opportunity to invite neighbors to our church, and reflect on and prepare for Jesus’ birth. I like working with this program because it highlights the Advent season, which so many times is skipped over in our preparations for Christmas.

Each year I try to add a new soloist to our Advent by Candlelight program. I find these soloists through the weddings and funerals that take place in church, through word of mouth, and through the Time and Talents survey which our members fill out every 3-5 years.

Using the soloists in Advent by Candlelight is a nice opportunity to find out their range, the quality of their voices, their music reading ability, the type of music they like to sing, and their level of commitment to more participation in worship. I also try to find a keyboard player to pair-up with a soloist. When I find a pair that works well together I find more for them to do in worship, working up to one or two worship dates a semester. Once they have gained enough confidence in working together successfully, scheduling them to sing in church can be as simple as a phone call, dropping off a piece of music and finding a date.

¹⁰¹ For some helpful guidance in starting up an Advent by Candlelight worship, see the WELS webpage. Type in jumpword “Advent by Candlelight.”

They have grown into being capable of edifying our worship without hand-holding – I trust them and they know they can do it.

This process of nurturing soloists and accompanists into worship may take up to two-three years depending on schedules, opportunities, and their busy lives. Over-commitment can lead to burn-out, so I make sure they don't feel pressured to do a minimum number of worship dates.

Being selective

When it is time to choose a worship team, I already am confident in the musicians and vocalists that I'm going to ask to be on the team. I do recommend, as was recommended to me, that, if you are going to put a microphone in a vocalist's hand, they need to know how to sing well. Not everyone can do this. You need to be selective. That is how a worship team or solo/accompanist team is different from a choir, where voices are more blended. This may sound elitist, to be so choosy, but the ramifications of not being selective may set you back years.

Being selective in worship is also a matter of future recruitment and not setting someone up for failure. If you want people to participate on your team or in your choir obviously, they have to want to be a part of it. If they are not impressed with the sound of the team or choir or are even embarrassed for the individuals who participate in it, will they put themselves through it? Chances are they won't, unless they are so confident in their own ability that they believe they could turn the whole choir around by being in it. Those individuals are rare. So, good sound is important to build and recruit.

The Worship Team in Worship

I have enjoyed working with our worship teams for many reasons. Because these are capable musicians they have been thoughtful in their discussion of the music, cooperative in their spirit, reliable in their attendance at rehearsal, and helpful with their suggestions. Because they read music well I have had to rarely drill parts. As adult musicians, they know what they need to do and they can hear and analyze their own sound. Very often they are more critical of themselves than I am with them. And, I thank the Lord for this, they enjoy each other's company and sound good together.

In our church we have the Small Team and a Large Team. The small team is made up of a soprano, alto and male lead singer. We lead with the piano and sometimes have a violin with us or a trumpet. I have found the most flexibility with this team. The bigger the team, the less flexible it becomes, especially if you start adding a lot of instrumentalists. I know one church whose worship team equals whoever shows up for practice the Tuesday before weekend worship. This keeps the worship team flexible. Once a "band" is put together, rehearses together for a whole year and bonds into a certain "sound," someone has to do the difficult work of "breaking up the band" if more flexibility is desired. Starting with the vision of a flexible worship team will avoid this trauma.

The Large team consists of three women vocalists (one can sing tenor), an instrumentalist that is very versatile (flute, sax, percussion), a bass guitar player, a lead guitar player, and a drummer. The purchasing of the drum set was in the works before I agreed to lead the band, so I knew it would be something I had to work with. It is a quality electronic set,

which is very important for controlling volume in church. But adding a drumset in the front of church can be a complicated issue, as was said earlier. There may be better options.

In worship this past year we sang both a communion order and a Service of the Word order. By late fall we had decided to do the Service of the Word order every other week, each team taking its turn once a month. For the first part of the service we did a pre-service song, the opening hymn, and a response to the confession and absolution, (the opening hymn and response to the confession and absolution stayed the same for the entire semester. People learned to sing them well.) The psalm was read antiphonally with the pastor. After the readings and children's sermon we lead the congregation in the Hymn of the Day. After the sermon we sometimes sang a song during the offering. After the prayers, announcements and benediction we ended the service with a "Sending Song" (which was usually a hymn), and then our exit song, which was played as the people walked out.

A word of caution is appropriate at this point. At no time should the worship itself become about the worship team. Singing too much throughout the service could give worshipers the impression that the worship is concert-like or a worship team show. Also, the type of music that is played has much to do with how the worship team is seen. Music that seems to find its identity or roots in entertainment can confuse the purpose of worship. Entertainment-rooted music seeks to elevate the performers rather than the One who gave the person that musical ability. This may be a hard area to evaluate. Where is the line between a well-done hymn setting and a show of the musical talent? Sometimes it is not obvious. We continually seek this balance so that the worship remains about God and the people's response to him. The people's song trumps the worship teams' song, and the team serves to build up the song of the people.

Through participation on the people's song, our worship teams functioned like a Lutheran choir of early Lutheran practice. We assisted people in the singing of the service music and hymns. We did have some anthems, but only in places where the people usually didn't sing.

We had power point presentations with every service in which the worship teams were involved. But the service was also printed out for them in a worship folder. This was so that those who did read music could help lead the song, those who wanted to know what was coming next could see what was coming next, and so that people could participate even if the media couldn't be seen well or would happen to malfunction.

Doing a full power point presentation for a worship service, while it can be edifying and beautiful, is very time-consuming. I have to admit that I enjoy singing while looking up. But if I had to choose one over the other I would always choose the bulletin, because I am a music reader, I like to know what is coming next, and for the obvious – we could still worship if the power-point failed or if the electricity failed.

Someone had to do the work of putting together the team, choosing the music, getting the parts to the musicians and vocalists, burning the rehearsal CDs, putting together the worship bulletin and the power point, setting up the equipment for rehearsal and worship, and leading the rehearsals. That is why the worship team is not a democracy, although I welcomed the constructive criticism of the musicians and vocalists. I functioned in the role

of benevolent monarch, and thankfully, the people I worked with recognized that and supported me in my choices and ideas.

Locking into a certain style

The problem of locking into a certain style arises when instruments associated with a particular style are used. This is not a problem on the Small Team, but it will be on the Large Team. This relates to what was mentioned before about flexibility in the worship team.

A drumset and lead guitar and bass guitar function mostly in a pre-conceived notion of a “band.” The challenge for me in the years to come will be to creatively use these instruments so that they are not only associated with a pop-rock style. I will have to get my drummer out from behind his drums. I need to get my lead guitarist to lead a hymn by himself so that he learns how to cradle the congregation’s song and not try to play over it. And maybe I’ll throw in an organ accompaniment for one of the hymns just so members can see how the organ can coexist with other instruments.

The fear of locking into a certain style haunts me because it begs the questions, “Now what? More of the same? How long can I keep this up? How do we remain interesting?” Locking into a pop style is really no different than locking into a traditional organ style. We have already seen that the creative middle is where most people fall.

I have heard what it sounds like when a praise team “locks in.” Every song starts sounding the same - same tempo, same style, similar forces used each time. This can be like listening to a “Hooked-On Praise Songs” CD.

Most church praise bands or worship teams are made up of volunteers, unlike the praise bands of the megachurches where almost always a paid professional musician is involved. When you work with volunteers, time and resources are more limited. You take what you can get, in a way. And what you get is usually the same musical sounds and type of selections from the same individuals because they tend to choose the music they like.

Church bands want to share their enthusiasm for the style of worship they are producing, so they may encourage the people to sing with them and “sing loud!” But it is nearly impossible to hear yourself well or the person next to you above the volume of the band, and it is hard to keep up with the tempo. The rhythm becomes relentless – the tyranny of the bar line.

This is the “new narrow-mindedness” of praise bands or worship teams. We move from the limitation of only the organ in worship to the limitations of only the pop-style of the worship team, where all team members are participating on every song and the sound and tempo doesn’t change much. This is neither creative nor compelling.

Although both of our worship teams served alternatively in our Saturday night service, it is my goal to use them more like a choir would be used, mixing up their service times. I hope that eventually people in our congregation would think of coming to any service instead of to a service associated with a specific style, knowing that there would be enjoyable, edifying worship music for them in that service, whatever the time or day. My reasons for this have

to do with unity (and sanity), but above all, with keeping God as the object and subject of our worship, not style, outreach, or the worship team.

These ideas would probably not be attempted by my worship team if it were a democracy. I will prayerfully pull my musicians out of their comfort zone for the sake of keeping God as the object of our worship, not style. As I keep working with the worship teams in the role of benevolent monarch, I may end up with small protests, but if I am patient and discuss my thoughts with the team I doubt that there will be anarchy.

Resources

Resource Packet:

- Rehearsal schedule
- Worship Map
- Sound booth notes
- Bulletin
- Application
- Lilypond music writing software

Beyond the era of the teacher-musician

Names like Fritz Reuter, Emil Backer and Martin Albrecht are at the very heart of Lutheran elementary school education in WELS, but when is the last time there names were mentioned? Every so often, however, a name reappears in history. Briefly, what each of these three men stood for - Reuter, Backer, and Albrecht - was the preparation of Christian men and women for the teaching ministry and especially the teaching of music in the Lutheran elementary school.

Looking at the music course requirements in the catalog of Dr. Martin Luther College provides a sense of what the curriculum was like for the teacher-musician in Backer's day:

Beside the requirement of the School Music course all students who enrolled in the Normal program (I, II and III – three years of college) were required to take a harmony, or music theory, course... In 1950, the harmony course was moved to the third year of college and was two semesters in length, still a requirement of the curriculum... Backer published his own book, *Advanced Harmony*, in 1943, and he revised it and gave it a copyright in 1950. Studied in harmony class were triads, inversions, seventh chords, cadences, ninth chords, nonharmonic tones, natural sixth chords, the “enharmonic plurisignificance of chords,” modulation, Gregorian modes, arranging music for four, three and two voices, arranging for male choir and female choir, harmonizing chorales, and composing preludes and interludes. By today's standards Backer's course would be intended only for those concentrating in the field of music. It was Backer's view, however, that this “Advanced Harmony” course was only part of the training that a church choir director or organist should have.¹⁰²

Excerpts from the DMLC course catalogs of the 1950's show an intense course of study for organ. Especially worthy of note is that all male students were required to take organ lessons.

In 1952 organ study was changed to accommodate the new four year college course at DMLC. The 1952-1953 catalog states that organ instruction was optional for women, but required of all male students. The following is the organ course as it appears in this catalog. The curriculum remained as such through Backer's last year:

Freshman Year – 1 Credit. Orientation of the organ, acquisition of proper organ touch, pedaling, phrasing, registration and interpretation. Playing of hymns and easy preludes by the end of the first semester. Four to six hymns for the second semester. Easy preludes.

Sophomore Year – 1 Credit. Continuation of technique, pedaling, registration and interpretation. Preludes from Keller's Choralvorspiele, Reuter's Lutheran

¹⁰² Grace Hennig, “The Background, Life's Work, and Influence of Emil D. Backer.” unpublished thesis, July 1999, p. 81-82.

Organist I, II, III, Reger's Chorales, Bach's Orgelbüchlein and the Eight Preludes and Fugues.

Junior Year – 1 Credit. More advanced work in technique, pedaling, registration and interpretation. Bach's Orgelbüchlein, his Preludes and Fugues, Mendelssohn's Easy Sonatas and Reuter's 22 and 30 Preludes to Hymns.

Senior Year – 1 Credit. Advanced course in technique, pedaling and interpretation. Music of the 17th and 18th centuries as practical work for the church service. Playing of the liturgy, wedding, and funeral music. Greater works of Bach, Mendelssohn, Cesar Franck, Widor and others if competency warrants it. Trio playing and transposition.¹⁰³

Perhaps one real-life example can serve as a demonstration for how these teachers were prepared. Recently, in our congregation an elderly man of 98 years passed away. He was graduated from Dr. Martin Luther College in 1929. For over 40 years he served our Lutheran school as head basketball coach, choir director and organist.

“Every teacher - a musician” seems like an impossible goal with all the demands placed on college students today. Certainly, we can argue that not every teacher should be a musician, and that the study of music is very difficult for some. Yet music is an integral part of worship, and therefore, an integral part of our teacher and pastor training. Luther had something to say about the teacher-musician, too:

Luther's well-known remark that “a schoolmaster must know how to sing or I would not allow him to teach” also points to the importance attached to good singing, especially among those in positions of teaching children, and the supporting relationships between the church, school, and community in the newly [at Luther's time] reformed German educational system.¹⁰⁴

Assumption: Our church will always have enough musicians to lead and teach.

If the era of the teacher-musician is over and only a select few graduates are ready to serve as organist and choir director in a parish, from where will our church musicians come?

Future church musicians are in the Lutheran elementary classroom.

Through giving students opportunities to take instrumental or piano lessons during the school day, through opportunities to learn sight-singing, note reading, and part-singing, and through the inclusion of children's choirs in a vital worship life, children can have a broader music background, better singing ability, and greater understanding of the role of music in worship.

¹⁰³ Hennig, “Emil Backer,” p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Messerli, *Thine The Amen*, Resch, p. 173.

WELS high schools and Preparatory Schools build on this musical foundation that children receive in the elementary classroom. Choral and band directors at this level put in truly unrealistic hours to build strong music programs on a limited budget. Faithful piano teachers continue to give instruction at the high school level. Especially at our Prep Schools, students receive instruction on the organ by excellent teachers.

This makes the job of our MLC music faculty easier. As students come into our worker training program with a sound music background the professors that teach them have a better ability to train them for the classroom, and musically speaking, can reach to higher heights in the general and worship music on campus.

Growing an organist in four years from scratch is not easy, but it is also not impossible. The excellent music faculty we have at MLC has turned keyboard-illiterate freshmen into service-playing organists by the end of senior year, but this is the exception, and will get even harder to do if music training is not given priority in the college curriculum and if students come in with minimal music training in their background.

Parish music coordinators

Churches need to face the need for organists, choir directors, choir members and soloists and take up the responsibility for growing them in their midst. When churches see their children in their pews they need to see their future musicians serving in their own church or God's kingdom at large.

This type of vision will motivate churches to place more importance on a cradle-to-grave worship and music education to every possible group it serves, not only the Lutheran school, but also the Sunday school, and the public school instruction class. Multiple choirs or ensembles can serve each of these groups, encouraging them to take a role in the song of the Body of Christ at worship.

Because of rising expectations for variety in worship a full-time or part-time parish music coordinator position can fill the need for the great amount of rehearsing, recruiting, scheduling, and training that is a part of musically enhancing worship.

Singing, although seen as quite extrinsic to society in the 21st century, is always intrinsic to the church and to worship. Worship education and participation need to be seen intrinsically, not as a "here and there" program, depending only on available funding or willing volunteers.

Assumption: Our Lutheran School teachers will teach singing and music in the classroom.

While the teachers in our WELS classrooms may have been given training in music and wonderful tools to use in music, singing and worship curricula, such as *Sing and Make Music*,¹⁰⁵ the assumption that children are learning to sing when they really aren't can have far-reaching implications in the worship life of a congregation.

¹⁰⁵ *Sing and Make Music* curriculum published by Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.

Often times whether or not a student gets good instruction in music depends on how much the teacher likes teaching music or how much time the teacher has allowed to teach music.

While all other areas of the school's curriculum involves a systematic developmental scope and sequence, music, and art, for that matter, often are treated as extras, or even luxuries. The amount of time and attention given to athletic programs that aren't even a part of the school day can often times far outweigh the attention that music and singing is given.

Yet, as Lutheran Elementary Schools, we have the opportunity to focus on very significant part of the children's worship lives – helping them join the eternal song of the church.

Giving priority to singing and music depends on school committees, principals, and individual teachers. A bare-bones scope and sequence chart for singing and music can guide a school in some assessment and accountability in each grade. Children that have difficulty singing can be given short individual voice lessons before it is too late. Simple goals can be stated for each level of learning:

1. At the end of preschool children will learn to sing simple call/response songs by themselves (such as, "My name is _____," to the "Na, na" song.)
2. At the end of Kindergarten children will be able to sing and sight-read (with hand signals) simple sol-feg songs.
3. At the end of First grade children will be able to identify the first ten notes of the treble staff...

Sight-singing at this grade, part-singing at that grade...the list goes on. Is there any reason that our children can't be reading and singing music in 3 or 4 parts by eighth grade?

Occasionally, I attend the local public middle school's concerts. They are very well done. Imagine hearing a four-part German Lied sung *a capella* in German by a small group of eighth graders! Certainly, our schools who value singing and worship can reach the same level of excellence.

These simple goals can exist apart from whatever music curriculum that the school is using. They need to be simple enough so that the whole faculty can understand and remember them without having to refer to a complicated goal sheet.

Assumption: Music in the classroom has nothing to do with contemporary worship.

The correlation I'm making between music training and contemporary music is a theoretical connection without extensive research on my part, but one that deserves some thought and exploration.

Put it this way, if a classroom teacher is insecure about her ability to lead children in song, teach the words of a hymn, teach note-reading, or accompany children in song, what is the

likelihood of her doing it? Isn't it much easier to listen to a CD of Christian music? And to what extent are our teachers promoting Christian radio songs at the expense of our hymns because of the huge availability and convenience of learning these songs? Have we provided the necessary tools for teachers to lead children in hymns and songs?

Less than ideal, but a workable solution may be using CD background tracks to encourage children to sing if there is no one to lead them. Possibly, what we need are CD background tracks for our Lutheran hymns set in appealing ways so that children will be exposed to them and sing them on their own.

Lack of music training together with the expectations of modern education - its red-tape administrative duties, expectations of parents for teachers to have outstanding management and conflict resolution skills, and other such expectations foisted upon our teachers - leave little room for the joy of making music or worshiping in a classroom.

This lack of music making and worshiping could lead to the desire for a more passive participation in worship. The idea that active (typically Lutheran) participatory worship is too much work (and, by the way, "I never learned how to read notes, anyway.") and a little bit on the boring side (because I don't appreciate hymn texts, church music, or the organ) leads worshipers to look for something that "trips their trigger" is "fun" or "easy" ("I just have to show up and sit there.").

Not to be forgotten in this mix is the fact that families and teachers are simply tired out. All the extras that occupy the family free time or the children's school life are making worship one more thing to do on the endless *to do* list. If children and parents come to worship already exhausted, what type of worship will they begin to prefer?

As a teacher of three grades in a two-room Lutheran elementary grade school, I faced the problem of lack of time and energy as well. There were many days that I didn't seem to find the time to teach a formal music or singing class to the students. When that was the case, however, I began to simply open the hymnal and sing. This is an experience like no other for children. It is like a teacher opening up a book and sharing it in a story time - a simple, yet impressionable, enjoyable and memorable group activity. Yet, it goes beyond that and becomes a worship time. The hymnal is there for us simply to use and enjoy. Classroom teachers can develop a time when children can select their favorites to sing in class.

This can be done with youth, too. I remember as a tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary we would occasionally have a hymn sing for evening chapel. Some clever students used this as a time to play "stump the tutor" by picking the most difficult hymns to play as their favorites. Despite this devious plot, I think they still enjoyed and benefited from singing the texts of these hymns.

In the case of our Lutheran schools it is very important that we strive for excellent worship and music education. The more familiar students are with hymnody and the songs of the church the more they will value them and want to sing them. The study and practice of music and worship in our schools has life-long implications.

Resources

How to Start a Fine Arts Academy

How to Start a Piano Program in your school

Background tracks for hymn singing

Beyond the song – unmusical worship ideas

Preoccupation with music, however, may lead us away from thinking about other ways that worship may be adorned creatively. Two are through using visual arts and dramatic arts.

Rehearsed Readers

Using laypeople to read scripture in a reader's theatre style may bring out a completely new appreciation of a psalm or passage of scripture. There is preparation, practice and screening required in this area. Those with the gifts to be in front of people and who can read clearly and effectively are the ones to seek out. For those who are not blessed musically this is a nice option for their participation in worship. Children may be groomed for doing this, especially if they are members of a forensics team. Early on teachers and coaches can recognize children with ability in this area and prepare them for this type of service.

Drama or skits

My only experience with drama in church is when our parish in Garden Grove, California put on a play of the Easter story as a special event at church. It was a memorable fellowship event and brought out speaking and acting skills in members that no one knew existed, helping us see one another in a new light.

Drama is an area that has not received a lot of attention in our congregation, but, if done well, a skit can no doubt add to the focus of worship and give those blessed with ability in the dramatic arts an opportunity to participate in worship and use their talents to edify the congregation. As these elements are added to worship, however, one must plan carefully so that the service is not overly extended from the norm.

This is an area in which megachurches focus, and their staging and lighting is built to accommodate dramas in worship.

Bringing the Church Year to Life

There are many ways to bring life, meaning and interest to the different seasons of the church year. We can make our church festivals an experience that imprints on the minds of the people the meaning of our worship. It can clarify a significant event in the life of the church or in the life of Christ, or a portion of Scripture for our people.

Here are some brief examples of enhancing a church festival taken from the liturgical life of one church:

Advent – put the Christmas trees up but don't decorate them until the 24th to give your people the idea of waiting for Christ's coming.

Christmas – have a crèche in the front of church – let the children come forward to look at it. Have a Christmas candlelight service.

Epiphany – have a procession around the church to reenact the journey of the Magi. Let people dress in Christmas pageant costumes or the traditional dress of countries around the world.

Lent – study the possibility of an imposition of ashes rite. Reflect the cold, barren nature of Lent in the sanctuary – leafless trees, dry thistles, and shattered pottery replace flowers. Farewell to alleluia.

Holy Week – palm procession, Maunday Thursday – bowls and towels display, stripping of the altar on Good Friday. Praying around the cross, leaving Good Friday service in silence.

Easter – symbols of victory and life – white and gold – the sun – abundant flowers – festive music – alleluias.

Ascension – handing out light blue and white balloons before worship and letting them go as the pastor says “God has gone up with a shout!” (The balloons will look like clouds on the ceiling of the church.)

Pentecost – a certain group uses red hand-held banners represent the coming of the Holy Spirit – movement of the banners at certain points in the worship. Line up outside with banners after the service as a send off for the members who take their faith out into the world.¹⁰⁶

Power point

Churches are installing screens to accommodate the power point presentation. This is a significant technological effort and expense to purchase and find a place for the necessary hardware, software, projectors, and screens. When the system is finally ready, operators are needed to run the power point, especially if one is going to also run video clips or DVDs along with the power point. When the worship team participated in worship at least two operators (minimum) were needed.

Over \$80,000 was spent to install a new sound system complete with power point screens and projectors in our church. The screen installation was very well done, so that they could electronically retract into crown molding which blended in with the pre-existing molding. This was a great idea. When the screens are not in use, no one has to look at a big block of white up in the front of church.

The need of operators for the sound booth was so great that our church created the new position of sound booth coordinator. It will be this individual’s job to recruit, train, and schedule sound booth operators for all of our five services each weekend, and all the special services during the year, and to be responsible for setting up the radio broadcast. It was intended to be a funded position, but the church budget wouldn’t allow it.

A good question to ask when considering installing screens and projectors is “Why?” If the only answer to the question is “Because it is the way to go,” some better questions and discussion needs to happen. Who is asking for the powerpoint and why? How long before the big screens in front of church become *passé*?

¹⁰⁶ St. Luke’s Church, Chicago, www.stlukechicago.org

Other worship art

The only limits to what can be done in visual worship art in church are in the minds of the artists who create these ideas. Creating art for worship can be a very intense and time-consuming process, but the effect, of course, can be worth a thousand words. While this may be new territory for a parish, the first step may be to establish a small worship arts committee, headed up by a trusted, discerning individual who is gifted artistically.

Resources

Drama for Worship Year A by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

Drama for Worship Year B by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

There Is a Season: Dramatic Scripts for All Occasions

by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

Psalms for Worship Vol. 1 by John and Audra Parker, www.pinelakemusic.com

52 Hymn Stories

Really Bad Powerpoint article

Brochures from St. Luke's Church, Chicago, www.stlukechicago.org

Beyond ourselves

Did you ever wonder what the “new drug” could be that Huey Lewis sang about in his 1980’s hit song, “I Wanna New Drug?”

I want a new drug
 One that wont make me sick
 One that wont make me crash my car
 Or make me feel three feet thick...¹⁰⁷

We have done our share of looking for the “new drug” as people in a consumer-driven society. We look for that new toy, new car, new diet, new clothing, second property, new self-help book that will give us the fix we need to feel good about ourselves. Some have even looked for the new drug in worship, more interested in what the church service does for us emotionally than in the content of what was offered to us there or the significance of being there together as the Body of Christ around the word and sacraments.

Yet, when people come away feeling good after worship, how do we help them sort through their feelings? Naturally, humans want to feel good and will gravitate toward worship that makes them feel good. But we also know that how one feels is not always an accurate measure of what they just encountered in worship. How do we help them ask the deeper questions?

Certainly, I do not have all the answers. I have tried to come up with illustrations that could help people think about an objective evaluation of worship, especially in the case of *liturgical vs. contemporary*.

One that may shed some light is this:

Contemporary worship, or worship based solely on emotion, is a pep-rally that never gets into the game. We cheer and encourage our teams on to victory, but finally, the teams have to do the work of getting through the game. When the players get tired, they sit down and rest, they drink, they wipe their faces with a towel, their injuries get treated. Here’s where Lutheran worship comes in – it’s the stuff that gets you through the game. It provides the nourishment, the relief, the “get back in there” that we need to complete the game of life. We praise and thank God for the nourishment he supplies. The relief is less flashy than the loud cheering, but it is life-sustaining. No amount of cheering can refresh a parched tongue, or provide support for a weak ankle. A player needs things outside himself to keep him going. At worship the things that are outside of ourselves, the Word and Sacraments, the Biblical texts that we’ve digested, aid us in the game of life. And others around us – the members of the Body of Christ – let us lean on them when we’re limping off the court looking for first aid in Christian love.

Despite our passionate pleas for retaining our Christian-Lutheran identity, God will always find his children in whatever Christian church they attend. Paul Westermeyer says, “Eventually the church has the sense to right itself.” We can prayerfully hope his optimistic words will come true. Indeed, the trend may already be reversing itself. Some megachurches are re-evaluating, seeking God-focus in worship, as the words of an evangelical pastor indicate:

¹⁰⁷ www.lyricsfreak.com

Talk to Carl Anderson, the senior pastor of Trinity Fellowship Church, and you get an idea. “Seven or eight years ago, there was a sense of disconnectedness and loneliness in our church life,” he says. The entrepreneurial model adopted by so many evangelical churches, with its emphasis on seeker-friendly nontraditional services and programs, had been successful in helping Trinity build its congregation, Anderson explains. But it was less successful in holding on to church members and deepening their faith or their ties with fellow congregants. Searching for more rootedness, Anderson sought to reconnect with the historical church.

...Not surprisingly, that move was threatening to church members...But Anderson and others tried to emphasize the power of liturgy to direct worship toward God and “not be all about me,” he says. Anderson also stressed how liturgy “is about us – and not just this church but the connection with other Christians”...Trinity reshaped its worship practices in ways that drove some congregants away. But Anderson remains committed, arguing that traditional practices will help evangelical churches grow beyond the dependence on “celebrity-status pastors.”¹⁰⁸

When I hear about people being bored with worship or when they are preoccupied with what worship “does for them,” a sermon by Pastor Mark Bitter comes to my mind. Bitter vividly expresses why it is important to look beyond ourselves. Here’s a portion of that sermon.

...Now, how do you want to worship this amazing God? Look what the elders did. “The four living creatures said, Amen, and the elders fell down and worshiped.” Spend your life bowing to the Lord. The word for worship here - *proskuneo* - really means to “fall down before God.” If you ever lose your sense of bowing to the Lord, then you’re going to lose the joy of worship. Church will become a real drag for you and your worship life will lose its meaning. Not only that, the Lord will soon get bored with you.

You know for all our concerns about church being boring, for all our opinions about whether we liked this hymn or that hymn or none of the hymns, whether the music is too loud or too soft, whether the church is too hot or too cold, have we ever once considered the possibility that God might be getting bored with us?

I’ve known Christian families that have gotten into arguments in the car on the way home from church. I’ve known Christian husbands and wives who sit together in church and sleep apart at home. I’ve known Christian couples who come home from one cruise and begin to plan the next one in a couple of months, while Mom rots in the nursing home, brother-in-law Steve is paralyzed in a wheelchair, and Aunt Sarah is dying of cancer. I’ve known Christians who spend their wealth on parties, vacations, houses, vehicles,

¹⁰⁸ Tolson, “A Return to Tradition,” www.usnews.com.

recreation, all for pleasure, and the Lord gets the minimum, what's left over. Do you think the Lord just might be bored with us?

If you feel you need to do some repenting, then by all means, do so. And then go to the cross, where God tells you that all of the things you've done and said and thought that aren't righteous were laid upon the Lamb who was slaughtered on the cross. And they are gone from God's sight. It is so cool to be a Christian. Every day, whether I'm awake or asleep God sees me without sin through the holiness of Jesus. My wife doesn't see me that way. My kids don't see me that way. My congregation doesn't see me that way. But my GOD sees me that way. God is not bored with you when you look back at him through faith in Jesus. He is pleased with you.

Doesn't that precious truth from the Bible make you want to worship the Lord in a way that pleases him and doesn't bore him? Then bow down before him. You know, no where in this text do you hear the elders say, "We need to make worship in heaven more fun." And why not? Because they are not so much interested in how their worship is affecting them, as they are interested in how their worship is affecting the Lamb. During the weeks and months and years ahead as you worship the one who is worthy from now until eternity, mimic the attitude and the awe of these heavenly worshipers. Bow down in your heart before the Lord, and you will discover that in your worship you will never be bored again.¹⁰⁹

* * * * *

Closing thoughts

I cannot stay away from worship, and perhaps you can't either. However, we 21st century Lutherans have a long way to go in reaching the potential of our church's worship life. Joseph Herl recalls the rich worship life for Lutherans after the Reformation:

Nearly two hundred liturgical agendas appeared in Lutheran Germany during the sixteenth century alone. They differed from each other in varying degrees of detail, but their schedule of services was remarkably similar. Each day Matins and Vespers were sung in city churches by a choir of schoolboys. Each weekend a set of services was held, beginning with Vespers on Saturday evening. After Vespers private confession was offered to those planning to commune the following day. Early on Sunday, Matins was held in the cities, but was omitted in small villages. The Communion service followed (which was commonly called the Mass, a term Lutherans retained for at least a century after the Reformation). On Sunday afternoon Vespers with sermon was held, usually combined with catechism instruction for children. In larger

¹⁰⁹From the closing sermon for the *School of Worship Enrichment* from the WELS Commission on Worship. Sermon based on Revelation 5:1-14, by Pastor Mark Bitter, pastor of The Woodlands, TX, and Chairman of the WELS Commission on Worship.

towns, sermons were also preached on one or more weekdays, and Mass was held daily when there were people who wished to commune.¹¹⁰

Is this kind of worship life ever going to be possible for us Lutherans in today's society? Herl gives his thoughts:

...It is hard for us to imagine what it must have been like to be constantly reminded of one's Christian faith through the ebb and flow of the liturgical day, week, and year – to be carried, as it were, in the womb of the liturgy. Our society today is simply not attuned to this. We church musicians feel that we have moved a mountain if we can convince our people to wait until Christmas to sing Christmas hymns. Is it possible today to create the kind of liturgical awareness that existed in the sixteenth century?

I believe it is, at least to an extent. Of course most of our employers are not going to give us the morning off for the Beheading of St. John. We cannot control what goes on outside the church, but we can provide better opportunities within the church for our people to worship. A good first step is the determination to hold services on important holy days, such as Epiphany, the Annunciation, and the Ascension, even if few people are present.¹¹¹

And what is the result if our people are not immersed in the worship life of their own church?

...If we never give our people the opportunity for daily corporate worship, is it any surprise that they turn to such substitutes as Christian radio (which is often slanted toward American evangelicalism) or books such as the *Left Behind* series?¹¹²

Perhaps, more than any other debate about any particular worship issue, this is the conversation that needs to happen in our churches. Why not give our pastors more opportunities to do what they were called to do - to preach and teach in the context of worship. Daily services? We could cover most of the Psalter during the year, observe more of the lesser festivals, sing more of the hymns, and the possibilities for musical variety would be endless. But, most importantly, daily services would provide more opportunity to worship God, for the Word to dwell in us richly, and to proclaim God's word, together. It seems a far-fetched goal, but certainly worthy of some thought and discussion.

I pray that you are part of more conversations about worship in your congregations. With God's help and with God in his proper place at worship, we can live in harmony, and in

¹¹⁰ Messerli, *Thine The Amen*, Joseph Herl, "Seven Habits of Highly Effective Liturgies: Insights from the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Century," p. 147.

¹¹¹ Messerli, *Thine The Amen*, Herl, "Seven Habits," p. 148

¹¹² Messerli, *Thine The Amen*, Herl, "Seven Habits," p. 148

unity and peace, as brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, working out the work of worship together.



About the cover

The church is the Kaiser Wilhelm *Gedächtnis Kirche* in Berlin. It stands as an example of embracing the past along with the present, mixing the old with the new, the modern with the traditional. But for those who know this church the mixing of old and new is more than a clever architectural move. Part of the old church has been left damaged by the bombs of World War II that were dropped on Berlin. It remains that way on purpose. Older Germans who look at the church remember the days of the war, Adolf Hilter, the pain, suffering, and sadness, and ultimately, liberation. Children who look at the church are given the opportunity to ask why the church looks “broken.” The story is told and repeated and the lessons learned are discussed.

The visual impact of this church is strong. The story is compelling. May our worship be as vivid and compelling as we share God’s story in worship, music and the arts!

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