



Worship the Lord

No. 29, March 2008

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Christian Worship: Supplement will be published this summer. Grace Hennig, a musician and member of the Supplement Hymns Committee, offers some background on the hymns that were chosen, as well as some practical help for introducing them to congregations.

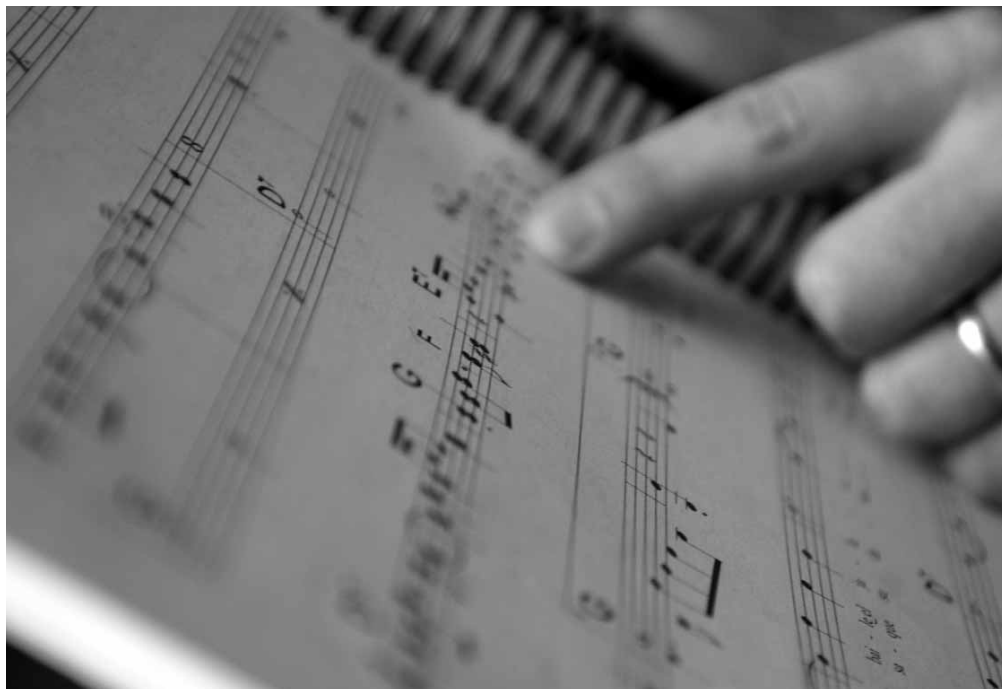
Christian Worship Supplement: Eighty-Four New Hymns!

By Grace Hennig

It is likely that one person composed most of the hymn accompaniments in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) of 1941. Such a person deserves applause for finishing such a daunting task which served God's people well for many years. On the other hand, because one person did the majority of the harmonizations there was little stylistic variety in the hymns. Worshipers became so accustomed to this TLH style that it was a bit of an adjustment for some when the committee for 1993's *Christian Worship* (CW) introduced some careful variety. Even so, CW has successfully transitioned WELS worshipers into the 21st century and enjoys about a 99% usage rate in WELS, the highest usage rate of any American hymnal published in the late 20th century.

Since the publication of CW fifteen years ago, a wealth of worship resources is newly available. Hymnal supplements have cropped up as a way to share the blessing of new and "new again" songs of faith with the people in the pew. The time has come for WELS to produce a supplement to CW. We began our work in 2003 with the hope of publishing in 2008, a date estimated to be about halfway through the life of our present hymnal.

The *Christian Worship: Supplement* (CWS) Committee gave much thought to the past, present, and future of congregational song. The subcommittee appointed to choose hymns began by reviewing every hymnal and hymnal supplement published by any major Christian denomination in America since the publication of CW in 1993. We found many songs of faith that would serve well in our churches. Some looked and sounded like hymns; others expanded the idea of what



most WELS churchgoers would consider a typical hymn. Melodies that were memorable, beautiful, singable, and supportive of an excellent text rose to the top. In all, 84 of them were included in the supplement. For purposes of discussion, we can divide the types of hymns included in CWS into three general categories: 1) four-part, 2) verse/refrain, and 3) melodic. Some are a combination of types.

The four-part hymn (one melody plus three voices of harmony) fits into the same category as many of the hymns in CW. People sing them in unison or harmony from beginning to end with a breath at the end of each stanza. These hymns are fairly easy to introduce. Usually, a soloist or choir can "teach" the assembly the hymn by singing the first two or three stanzas and by continuing to support the congregation as

they join in for the rest of the stanzas. With a little help, the congregation won't have much trouble singing the familiar text of the Easter hymn, *Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands* (CW 161) to a newly-composed tune, *Northridge*. You'll also find some familiar tunes in CWS paired with fresh new texts. *Rest, O Christ, from All Your Labor* will be easy for anyone who has ever sung *Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted*. The recognizable tune *Brother James' Air* offers both a familiar and fresh musical setting for *The Lord's My Shepherd*.

Singing hymns in the verse/refrain style of the second category is not a new idea. The hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, which has been in use since the 12th century, consists of a number of verses and a repeated refrain. The supplement will feature several hymns of this type, many of which lend

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themselves better to piano rather than organ accompaniment. The refrains of these hymns are easy to learn. The verses take a bit more practice. The first few or even several times this type of hymn is used in worship, you might ask a soloist or a rehearsed choir to introduce the refrain and to sing the verses, and invite the congregation to join in repeating the refrains. In time, the congregation will learn the whole song. Some of the wonderful verse/refrain hymns in CWS are *Take and Eat* by Michael Joncas, *Where Your Treasure Is* by Marty Haugen, and *Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled* by David Haas.

The final category of hymns could be classified as “melodic.” These hymns may have more melodic and rhythmic movement than a four-part hymn and lend themselves to mostly unison singing. An example of this type is the CW hymn *Sing a New Song to the Lord* (CW 245). CWS hymns in this category will range from hymns by Lutheran composers and authors to modern Christian songs that have gained wide use around the nation and world. Also included are a few hymns from other cultures. Among others in this category, you’ll find *The Lamb*, by Gerald Coleman, a brand new Lenten hymn called *What Grace is This?*, an excellent hymn based on Genesis 3:15 called *The Tree of Life*, and four hymns by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend (*There Is a Higher Throne; Speak, O Lord; May the Peace of God; In Christ Alone*). You can introduce this type of hymn in a number of ways. Ask an organist or pianist to play it as pre-service music, use it as an anthem by the adult or children’s choir or a soloist, invite some gifted singers to sing the first few stanzas, ask a solo instrumentalist to play it as an offertory on a wind instrument, or play a recording of the hymn before or after church. A multi-pronged approach may work best. This will give the congregation the opportunity to hear the hymn a few times before they try it themselves.

A hymn is nothing without the text. The music is simply the wrapping for the gift of the words.

What else will CWS offer for congregational song? There will be majestic organ arrangements, quiet harmonizations, and engaging piano accompaniments. In the CWS accompaniment and electronic editions you’ll find parts for guitar, flute, brass, hand bells, and percussion, as well as background information and musical suggestions for using the hymns in worship.

Of course, a Christian hymn is nothing without the text. When it comes to hymns, the music is simply the wrapping for the gift of the words. It is a weighty task to choose texts that will shape the faith of God’s people. Of the many texts our committee considered, comparatively few passed the test. We looked for texts both old and new that were doctrinally clear, Christ-centered, artful and beautiful, confessional, corporately singable, and understandable.

We pray that CW will continue to serve many congregations in WELS as it has in the past. Soon *Christian Worship: Supplement* will join the older publication to help it through the rest of its journey. Tucked in the pew rack alongside CW, or possibly stacked four or five high in the corner of the pew, CWS will both hearken back to the old and call ahead to the new. It will feature the grandeur of the organ and trumpet or the simplicity of an acoustic guitar and flute. It will be a bridge from one hymnal to the next and will give those who use it an opportunity to sing a new song (or an old song sung in a new way) to the Lord.



WORSHIP AND BIBLE CLASS

Are you looking for ways to invigorate your Bible classes? Would you like an easy way to enrich your worship? Here’s one idea that can accomplish both goals. When’s the last time you taught a Bible class based on hymns? Think about it. *Christian Worship* is more than a songbook. It’s a treasury of gospel content numbered 1 to 623. The means of grace. The theology of the cross. The mystery of the incarnation. The great commission. These are just some of the themes that find vivid illustration in our hymnal.

When you’re teaching a hymn, you might start by talking about the author. *Christian Worship: Handbook* is an excellent resource. As comforting as it is to sing “If God himself be for me, I may a host defy” (CW 419), it can be even more encouraging to know what kind of crosses were resting on the heart and life of the author, Paul Gerhardt.

Help your people understand some of the more difficult words. It’s not just about expanding their vocabulary. You can spin an entire Bible class off of hymn words like “paschal” and “Zion.”

A typical Bible class theme tends to be either doctrinal (e.g., A Study of Baptism) or devotional (*Dealing with Stress*). One of the beautiful things about Lutheran hymns is that they tend to be both. (See hymn 419.) And if you’re too short on time to write your own class, take note: a free Bible class on select hymns from the supplement is scheduled to be available online by the time the book is published this summer.

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