



Worship the Lord

No.1, May 2003

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Something New from the Commission on Worship

With this short newsletter we will bring you a variety of theoretical, theological, and practical worship ideas. Each issue will not always contain all areas, but the content will eventually be balanced among all three. This first issue sets an important foundation by defining liturgy.

While the liturgy is usually the setting for our preaching, this little insert is not part of *Preach the Word*. It comes to you—the same audience that receives PTW—in the same envelope simply to reduce postage costs.

Preach the Word and *Worship the Lord*. These two central activities of the church fit well together. We hope that you find useful ideas in these brief pages. God bless your preaching and your leading of worship.

Bryan Gerlach

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY LITURGICAL?

Most of us WELS pastors have never felt constrained by precise liturgical rubrics or definitions. But as we find ourselves in an era of changing worship styles, we might be able to communicate with one another more effectively if we can agree on a working definition of the word *liturgical*. From what I hear from returning vicars and at conferences, the word is being used in our circles in a variety of ways, and occasionally brother pastors end up talking past one another.

We didn't always have trouble with the word *liturgical*. Over the years WELS pastors could refer to "our liturgical service" or "our liturgical heritage" and the meaning seemed clear enough. We all had a course at the Seminary called Liturgics, and we knew what the class was about before we picked up the course notes.

The last half-century hasn't been kind to that sturdy old word. In the 1940s the Lutheran liturgical movement attached a high church odor to it, and liturgical worship came to be identified with vestments, chanting, and processions. Vatican II inundated the Christian world with liturgical studies, and brother pastors thought to be perhaps too interested in such studies were often said to be "liturgical."

Then came the dawn of the Church Growth movement and the awakening of modern Evangelicalism. The *de facto* marriage of the two movements gave birth to a worship style that was very different from traditional Lutheran worship. When conservative Lutherans (especially those in the LCMS) began to sense that proponents of Evangelical worship styles also seemed to espouse elements of Evangelical or CGM theology, the Lutheran worship wars began. In our day, the strength or weakness of a congregation's (or a pastor's) commitment to Lutheran doctrine has come to be gauged in some circles by the congregation's worship style, whether liturgical or non-liturgical. In much of the literature that comes out of the confessional Lutheran Church these days, liturgical almost comes to mean confessional.

So what is it? If a brother pastor defends liturgical worship, is he inclined to be high church? If he offers a non-liturgical alternative service, ought we to wonder about his theology? Is liturgical worship the same as traditional worship? Is non-liturgical worship the same as contemporary worship? Is contemporary worship usually more upbeat and liturgical worship usually more formal? Without a decent definition of



liturgical, those questions are impossible to answer with precision.

Liturgy isn't a word the Scriptures use to denote the event that takes place on the Lord's Day. In fact, the Scriptures aren't nearly as interested in what Christians call this event as in what they do at this event. The pattern and purpose of the early Christian assemblies is pretty clear: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Luther took from this description the perspective that "among Christians, the whole service should center in the Word and Sacrament" (LW, Vol. 53, p. 90).

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In the centuries that followed the apostolic age, the church in the east came to exaggerate mystical ideas in worship. The church in the west, however, was determined to give the teachings of the apostles a high and visible priority at its gatherings. As we watch the formation of the so-called western rite, we see the Word of God—and especially the gospel—remaining in central focus. By the fifth century we notice that worship on the Lord's Day usually included four song texts (*Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*) that repeated essential truths of the Christian faith. A fifth text was added later, *Credo* (Nicene Creed). These five texts came to be known as up the *Ordinary* of the liturgy.

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the Ordinary, the Proper, and the Meal.*

Already in the synagogue believers had the custom of reading specific Scripture lessons on specific days, and this practice continued in the early church. The formation of the church calendar added to the pericopal concept an emphasis on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Prayers, psalms, hymns, and sermons that accented the lessons were natural inclusions and became known as the *Proper* of the liturgy. The *Proper* offered an every-year review of the Savior's work and ministry. With this proclamation of the gospel in the Word, the western church included the proclamation of the gospel in the Sacrament.

This pattern of public worship—Ordinary, Proper, and Meal—is known among pastoral professionals as the *liturgy*. Essentially, the liturgy combines the texts of five great songs that review the plan of salvation and a set of lessons, prayers, psalms, and hymns that review the life of Christ with the meal instituted by Christ in a pattern that has been consistently the same for fifteen centuries.

It may be arbitrary, but in this day and age it may be easiest to define liturgy in this way: The liturgy is an order of service formed in the Christian church of the West that consists of the Ordinary, the Proper, and the Meal. Liturgical worship, therefore, is worship that employs the liturgy. Non-liturgical worship is worship that doesn't employ the liturgy. It can be as simple as that.

This definition of liturgical implies nothing as far as musical style is concerned. The song texts of the Ordinary and Proper can be sung to traditional or contemporary tunes and be supported by a praise band as easily as by an organ and brass ensemble. This definition of liturgical doesn't imply a rigid use of only the five historic songs. The liturgy has long been comfortable with occasional and fitting substitutes. The elements of ambiance and ceremony aren't included in this definition, either. Liturgical worship can be formal or casual, high church or low church. And, at least among us in WELS, liturgical worship ought not be a test of orthodoxy. Plenty of heresy has crept into liturgical churches through the pulpit, and many pulpits proclaim the truths of the gospel even when the order of service is decidedly non-liturgical.

So we have a definition. We'll look at several more facets of this liturgical thing in coming issues.

James Tiefel



VARIETY IN THE SONGS OF THE LITURGY

Historic records indicate that over 150 Latin settings of the liturgy (mostly *missa brevis*: *Kyrie* and *Gloria*) were published for use by German Lutheran choirs during the 17th century. This is in addition to German settings, hymnic settings, music from other countries, and older music still in use. That's a lot of variety! The choir usually sang the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, especially in the cities.

At least fifty different settings of the *Gloria* are available from one United States publisher alone: GIA. Musical styles represent a wide variety from ancient chant to contemporary and gospel. Multiple settings of the *Gloria* in one parish are practical when soloist or choir sings the bulk of the text, with everyone singing a refrain. Many WELS parishes have made occasional use of GIA's "Melodic *Gloria*" with or without optional brass and timpani. Some mission parishes have used MIDI files to lead this song. Hear a sample at www.wels.net/worship/cms-index.html

NPH has recently published *Christian Worship: New Service Settings*, making available new musical options for the songs of the Common Service, Morning Praise, and Prayer at the Close of Day. These settings allow the kind of flexibility many congregations desire ranging from a basic organ accompaniment to optional piano, guitar, and instrumental accompaniments that give a more contemporary or festive feel. CW:NSS comes in three editions: pew, accompaniment, and electronic. Especially noteworthy are various electronic resources including TIF music graphics for customized worship folders and MIDI files. For more information, sample pages, and audio files, see www.nph.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?servicingMusicNSS

Summer is a great time to evaluate CW:NSS and plan with your musicians for using some songs in fall.

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