



# Worship the Lord

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Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

## IF THE LITURGY ISN'T PROCLAMATION...

But the liturgy is proclamation of the gospel, as noted in previous articles in *Worship the Lord*. So what's the point?

Here's the point. The liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, used in most Eastern Orthodox churches, shares some history and Bible-based texts with the Western rite. But the objective of worship in Orthodox churches is more about *sensation* than *proclamation*. Aiming otherworldly music and ambiance directly at human emotions, the Eastern rite transports worshipers to an ethereal realm of the divine. This worship objective matches Orthodox teaching perfectly; salvation in the Orthodox system is "deification" (*theosis*).

Despite theological differences, many American Evangelicals share with Eastern Orthodoxy the viewpoint that worship is not primarily proclamation. In Evangelical models, the preacher proclaims, but the people praise. Liturgical worship sees all elements as proclamation; contemporary Evangelical worship sees praise as pure praise.

Rick Warren is among many who define worship as praise. In *The Purpose Driven Church*, Warren is sure that the purpose of worship is to love God. "How do we love God with all our heart?" he asks. "When we express our love to God, we're worshipping" (p. 103). Warren applies this principle to worship songs: "Today's most effective worship songs are love songs sung directly to God" (p. 289). He speaks disparagingly of songs that sing about God or about the Christian experience.

Warren's viewpoint has roots in Pietism, Methodism, and Fundamentalism. All of these have a different understanding of worship than Lutherans do. Evangelical preachers proclaim a message similar to Lutherans and agree that the gospel teaches

salvation. Evangelicals do not agree, however, that the gospel empowers faith and the Christian life. Evangelicals look for that power in each individual's personal decision. What Evangelicals need to support their presuppositions, therefore, is not more gospel. (This is one reason why liturgical worship doesn't appeal to them.) They need more experiences that move people to accept Christ and live the Christian life. Many Evangelicals are convinced that exuberant and emotional praise is the critical catalyst for enabling this experience. George Barna reports that twenty minutes of praise and worship songs are essential for leading worshipers into the presence of God. (See sidebar.) Warren insists, "More people are won to Christ by feeling God's presence than by all our apologetic arguments combined. It is the sense of God's presence that melts hearts and explodes mental barriers" (p. 242)

Well, what if worship's primary role is praise?

### IF WORSHIP IS PRAISE

#### Are we really reflecting biblical priorities?

Rick Warren is convinced that he is, as are most who encourage the praise and worship format. Warren writes, "Throughout Scripture we're commanded to celebrate God's presence by magnifying the Lord and exalting his name" (p. 103). He adds, "This is biblical worship" and invokes Psalm 34:3 as his proof text: "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." Warren misses that the remaining 19 verses of Psalm 34 **proclaim** the great things God has done. David concludes: "The Lord redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him." Warren insists that the Bible wants us to sing to the Lord, not **about** him, but then misses the proclamatory content of the *Cantate Domino* psalms!

To defend their emphasis on praise, Evangelicals use faulty exegesis that overlooks how the Bible joins praise and proclamation. Luther saw the relationship clearly. His view can be summarized this way: "We praise God best when we proclaim his Word, not when we say 'he is an awesome God.' When the redemptive note is at the core, we praise him best. We praise him for his redeeming acts by telling others and ourselves about his redeeming acts."

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#### Will proclamation be critical and clear?

Praise and worship advocates insist it will be, although proclamation by an Arminian and a Lutheran are hardly the same. Note Warren's confusion of justification and sanctification: "Jesus said, 'I have come that you might have life.' He didn't say, 'I've come that you might have religion.' Christianity is a life, not a religion, and Jesus was a life-application preacher. When he finished his teaching to the crowd, he always wanted them to 'go and do likewise.' Christ-like preaching is life-related and produces a changed lifestyle. Sermons that teach people how to live will never lack an audience" (page 230). One might expect more from Lutheran pastor Walter Kallestad at the Community of Joy in Glendale, AZ. Here is a critique of a Kallestad sermon from a retired ELCA seminary professor: "Although you were leading us in worship on the theme 'Battling the Enemies of Joy,' I think you succumbed to the enemies. Your words did not bring joy to Christ. If he were listening..., he may

have wept as he did over Jerusalem.... Christ's cross and resurrection were never mentioned in your sermon...and then at the end you urged us to take Christ into our hearts."

Is there an essential link between unclear preaching and the praise and worship format? Probably not. But a quick perusal of church websites reveals that the burden to retain a distinctively Lutheran proclamation lays heavy on those who imitate Evangelical worship styles. LCMS author David Luecke wrote a book insisting that Lutherans could copy Evangelical style and retain Lutheran substance (*Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*, CPH, 1988), and only succeeded in proving that at least he could not.

**Will preaching be able to carry the weight of proclamation?** In the praise and worship format preaching is often the only proclamation, and most advocates suggest a 30 to 45 minute sermon. Of course, no one suggests that every preacher can hold people's attention for that long, and everyone suggests that a wide variety of communication tools are needed. In a praise and worship format, the preacher carries the weight; he must succeed. He can't have a bad day, leave the pulpit, and say to himself, "Thank God for good hymns."

**Will other areas of ministry take up the slack when worship is not primarily proclamation?** This is a critical question for Lutherans who substitute the praise and worship format for the proclamation inherent in the liturgy. If the Spirit works only through the means of grace, where does the believer go when he needs more than what the sermon gives? Warren's solution is small groups and a midweek "believers" service. Lutherans might encourage attendance at Bible classes. One wonders if Lutherans are as willing as Warren to insure that members participate: "If you do not fulfill the membership covenant, you are dropped from our membership. We remove hundreds of names from our roll every year" (p. 54).

### ALL THINGS ARE PERMISSIBLE

For some Lutherans, praise and worship seems to be an attractive alternative to liturgical worship. Without doubt the concept stands with other worship forms and styles that the Scripture considers free. But while "all things are permissible" in Christian freedom, Scripture also cautions that "not all things are beneficial." One can't help but worry that praise and worship can't really do what God wants to do for both the lost and the found: to share with sinners again and again the means of grace.

Can the Christian liturgy do what Lutherans want to do for the lost and the found? We believe it can, but that's the subject in the next issue of *Worship the Lord*.

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Quoted in the article

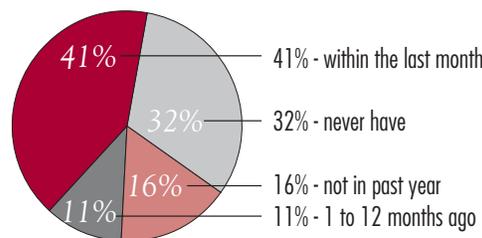
Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

Further analysis of Warren on worship is at <http://worship.lcms.org/Plenaries/Plenary-Zager.htm>

Edward Schroeder to Walter Kallestad, March 16 -27, 2003. Full correspondence is at [www.crossings.org/thursday/](http://www.crossings.org/thursday/)

## EXPERIENCING THE "PRESENCE OF GOD"

In 1999 George Barna wrote, "Most people who attend worship services in any given week do not experience the presence of God during worship." People who regularly attend church were asked how long it had been since they "experienced the presence of God" in worship. Here are the results:



At a conference in Houston, TX, Barna said, "Studies show that in order to get the worshipers to feel as if they are in the presence of God, you have to begin the service with about twenty minutes of music."

Lutherans have something more certain than music on which to rely. Lutherans gather for worship knowing that the Lord will be present in the means of grace. Jesus has promised that he comes to us with his power when the gospel is proclaimed. In his Supper he comes to us in person, in the flesh, giving us his real body and blood to eat and to drink.

How wonderful it is to know and feel that I am in the presence of God, not because musicians' talents have made me feel that way, but because of God's promises to me in his Word.

My feelings are a result of what I know and believe, not merely a result of what I experience. Maybe worship leaders need to remind worshipers why we gather: to commune with God who is present in Word and Sacrament. Maybe before the service begins we should announce this truth to those in the assembly who have never heard the promises of our Savior. "We have gathered here because our Lord has promised to come to us in the gospel in Word and Sacrament." Can you think of anything more exciting and awe-inspiring than that?

Let's continue to work at offering the Lord excellent efforts in Word and song. But let's always remind ourselves and our people that God promises his presence in Word and Sacrament. Finally, it's his promises that affect how we feel, not merely music and song.

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