



Worship the Lord

No.2, July 2003

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

IF THE LITURGY IS PROCLAMATION...

The liturgy is an order of service with roots in the history of the western Christian Church. The liturgy usually includes five texts (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei) that retell the plan of salvation Sunday by Sunday. The liturgy includes lessons, psalms, prayers, and hymns that retell the story of the life and ministry of Jesus in coordination with the Church Year. The liturgy includes the meal that Jesus instituted the night before he was betrayed. When Christians use the liturgy for public worship, their worship is said to be liturgical.

This definition of **liturgical** was proposed in the initial issue of *Worship the Lord*. We proposed it in an attempt to bring clarity to pastoral discussions concerning new worship forms and styles. From this perspective, the liturgy has little to do with contemporary or traditional, high church or low church, formal or informal. This definition views the texts of the liturgy as gospel proclamation by universal priests and called ministers to edify the saints and evangelize the lost.

Every WELS pastor worth his rugged individualism knows, of course, that use of the liturgy is adiaphora. But when we see the liturgy primarily as gospel proclamation, the question is not as simple as, "Shall we use the liturgy in this parish or not?" If we lift liturgical proclamation out of a specific historical setting (e.g., the *TLH* Common Service), all kinds of questions present themselves:

Can we place liturgical proclamation into a style of language that communicates clearly in 21st century America?

The language of *The Lutheran Hymnal* was KJV and the *Book of Common Prayer*. The language of *Christian Worship* is NIV and ELLC (English Language Liturgical



Something very important is happening here.

Consultation). CW anticipated inclusive language issues that *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) and *Lutheran Worship* (1982) did not.

The search for appropriate worship language—language that communicates to people and enables people to communicate with one another—is an ongoing challenge. Scripture lessons, psalms, and hymns are filled with theological terms, word pictures, and Bible references that are foreign to many, especially new Christians. We often find ourselves standing between two poles: one sees the necessity of leading people into the "culture of Christianity" (understanding the Bible's shepherd language, for instance), and another recognizes that people will usually not understand what is not part of their experience. The language question is a challenge wherever there is gospel proclamation, in evangelism and education as well as in worship.

There are other issues related to language. Some question the contemporary relevance of liturgical worship's dialogue. Some are convinced that propositional preaching is passé in a post-modern age. And these issues may be minor compared to the reality of a

visual society where people assimilate information through their eyes as often as through their ears.

Can we find a musical style for liturgical proclamation that is relevant for today's worshippers?

Which worshippers? That's the bigger question. The liturgy isn't nearly as concerned with musical style as it is with getting its message to the heart. The problem is that worshippers have different kinds of hearts. A musical style that touches one may turn off another. WELS baby boomers may groove to the Peter, Paul, and Mary style of the *Chicago Folk Service*, but generations on either side of the boomers tend to consider that style silly, especially for worship. Add to this the reality that many worshippers refuse to be categorized. Many teens are appalled by gospel rock, and some middle class African Americans are put off by high-energy gospel music.

Hymnals have tended to accompany the liturgy's sung texts with a fairly neutral musical style some call *ritual music*. Ritual music isn't meant to be anyone's personal

favorite (you wouldn't dance to it), but it is able to make gospel proclamation practical: with such music a wide variety of worshipers can hear and proclaim the gospel.

The ritual music of *Christian Worship* may not be the right ritual music for every WELS congregation, however. There are many other possibilities. (See sidebar.)

Liturgical worship doesn't require gloom and doom, but the presence of Jesus in Word and Meal does call for an ambiance more serious than a county fair.

Can a more casual worship ambiance enable liturgical proclamation to reflect the joy of the gospel?

Informal or formal? Alb and stole, or slacks and sport jacket? In the pulpit or out? Worshipers cheered (and sometimes jeered) during Augustine's very liturgical sermons, but one can't imagine that kind of free-for-all when Luther preached at the Hauptgottesdienst in Wittenberg. In his keynote address at the 1996 National Worship Conference, Prof. David Valleskey noted that the mood of a liturgical service he attended in India was strikingly different from the mood of the conference's opening service. But the gospel proclamation was exactly the same, even word for word.

There has never been a setting of the liturgy with a rubric to be somber. But there is in the liturgy—as there is whenever people gather around Word and Sacrament—an implicit sense that something very important is happening. There is joy wherever the gospel is, but generally, worshipers and visitors sense that this joy isn't quite the same as the joy that explodes after the home team scores the winning touchdown. Liturgical worship doesn't require gloom and doom, but the presence of Jesus in Word and Meal does call for an ambiance more serious than a county fair.

If not liturgical proclamation, then what?

Gospel proclamation certainly takes place even when the liturgy isn't used in public worship. Consider the special services many of us compose for Christmas or Easter. If we don't use the standard liturgical rites on these festivals, the psalms, lessons, festival dialogues, and hymns (and, of course, sermon) certainly proclaim the gospel.

A non-liturgical service exciting a significant number of Lutheran congregations these days is what we'll call, for lack of a better term, a worship and praise service. Some might call such a service contemporary, but that title is going to be confusing since contemporary music and ambiance can also accompany the liturgy. Some call this kind of service entertainment, although that term is pejorative and probably best avoided.

The next issue of *Worship the Lord* will take a look at the worship and praise phenomenon. We'll trace its roots, analyze its presuppositions and concepts, and see how its non-liturgical form compares with liturgical worship.

James Tiefel



16th century blended worship?

JESUS, THE COMPASSION OF GOD

This last school year seminary students became familiar with a new musical setting of the liturgy: "Jesus, the Compassion of God." This music introduced them to a more contemporary style of ritual music and many appreciated it. Published in 1999, this setting was composed by well-known liturgical composer David Haas.

We used six of Haas' settings: We Are God's People (Gathering Rite); Kyrie; Glory to God; Holy, Holy; Lamb of God (identified as "The Breaking of the Bread"); Sing Alleluia: Gospel Acclamation (replacing what we know as the Verse of the Day.) Excerpts may be heard at <www.wels.net/worship>

The texts are a compilation of Roman Catholic mass texts. Since we use some of the same translations of liturgical texts, I didn't need to adjust the texts. I added the *CW* confession and absolution before and after the Kyrie. The Agnus Dei has additional stanzas that I didn't use because they are not part of the standard text. Haas' setting of the Gospel Acclamation (Verse of Day) includes verses that match the themes for various Sundays and festivals of the festival half of the church year.

The musical style is upbeat and different from anything in *CW*. Glory to God and Sing Alleluia have lively, finger-snapping rhythms. This is not Bon Jovi, but it isn't Kurt Eggert either. In my judgment, Holy, Holy is the weakest setting; it doesn't quite have the exuberance we're used to for the Sanctus.

We used a piano, guitars, electric bass (to simulate a string bass preferable with acoustic guitars), and a tambourine. There are instrumental parts for a C instrument (flute, recorder), trumpet, and handbells. The settings require a rehearsing group, either a cantor or small choir. Most of the music is written for unison or two-parts. In four-part sections our chapel choir sang in unison. The congregation sings tuneful and memorable refrains.

Besides using the setting for several services on campus, I included the Kyrie and Gloria on the Seminary Chorus' spring concert program. These were very well received in several dozen WELS congregations.

For our use I ordered the CD *We Give You Thanks* (CD-436) and enough *Choir/Guitar Editions* (G-4990) for our 20 chapel choir members and the guitars. A *Full Score* (G-4990FS) is helpful for the pianist and director. Our GIA license enables us to paste melody lines from the *Assembly Edition* (G-610-F) into worship folders. If you're looking for a new style of ritual music, purchase the CD and *Choir/Guitar Edition* and check the service out. Contact GIA at 800-442-1358 or www.giamusic.com. You may also want to talk with Pastor Fred Schleg who uses Haas' setting at his congregation in Pinehurst, TX.

