



Worship the Lord

No. 43, July 2010

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Articles on key worship concepts may be valuable for analysis in a pastors' study group, board of elders, or worship committee. As WELS parishes work with these concepts, our worship will be enriched for the sake of both members and guests. It will be faithful to Scripture, to our Lutheran heritage, and to our challenges and opportunities as 21st century followers of Jesus. Pastor Michael Schultz has served parishes in Flagstaff, AZ, and Lawrenceville, GA. He is a member of the Commission on Worship and chaired the hymns subcommittee for *Christian Worship Supplement* for which he also compiled the guitar edition.

Contemporary: "What Does This Mean?"

By Michael Schultz

For pastors, it can be such an intensely *personal* thing – this whole thing about the way we worship. It is the pastor, after all, who presides over worship, who primarily charts the course for congregational worship, who spends many hours planning worship and preparing worship. Realistically, the personal aspect of what a pastor brings to a congregation's worship ought not and need not be set aside. He is, after all, one whom God has called to this task. *Something is amiss, however, when the pastor's personal preference is both the starting and ending point for congregational worship.* Our work in the parish is shepherding (1 Peter 5:2). We approach worship as shepherds. We want our worship planning, preparing, and presiding to be more *pastoral* than personal.

As we wrestle with the potentially powder keg term *contemporary*, much of the explosive nature of the discussion can be diffused if we remember to adopt a predominantly pastoral rather than personal approach. It's not merely about your experience or my experience, your survey or my statistic which can either prove or disprove that the unchurched are drawn more toward one worship style or another – *there are too many variables.* It's not about determining which branded generation of current society prefers which genre of music or manner of presentation – *there are too many exceptions.* It's first about that which has neither variable nor exception. How will we approach this rather loaded term *contemporary* in a pastoral way, in a way which unquestionably and consistently brings people the gospel and which simultaneously fosters fraternal and synodical unity?

The Term

It would be good to land on one understanding of what we mean with the term contemporary. Our use of the term liturgical has mostly to do with the texts – lectionary readings aligned with an observance of the Christian church year, along with canticles or scripture songs which for centuries have been a part of what many refer to as the historic or Western rite. Used in varying degrees of adornment, paraments and vestments complement a church year emphasis.

It would appear many who are pondering a move toward contemporary worship don't typically have in mind the setting aside of the lectionary, the church year, and the basic flow of the historic service. In such cases, there seems to be a common desire for more recent or "upbeat" music. This, of itself, has little if anything to do with a clear articulation of the term contemporary. For our purposes, contemporary worship is corporate worship where an order of service with ordinary, proper, and the ancient texts of specific canticles (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo,

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WORSHIP WORDS TO WRESTLE WITH

Purpose

Sacraments

Tradition

Variety

Catholicity

Accuracy

Excellence

Contemporary

Time

Love

Evangelism

Culture

Contemporary

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Sanctus, Agnus Dei – or variants of these) is not utilized and where a lectionary based on the church year is not followed. It's a definition in the negative because such worship doesn't come in one standard form.

That's why it's good to wrestle with the term contemporary. It invites us to ask pastoral questions rather than to pit one form against another, or one brother's or congregation's choices against another's. In our pastoral care of God's people, are we convinced that what we have come up with or might come up with as alternatives to these liturgical/lectionary texts will present to people the whole will of God (Acts 20:27)? If so, marvelous! If the recently published supplemental lectionary took four men (and others) four years to assemble, are we willing to invest that kind of time and effort to make sure that what we might produce individually is as comprehensive and balanced as it ought to be, and rather than going it alone, are we willing to have such efforts reviewed by circuit or district brothers who walk together with us confessionally? Will we study and openly discuss whether consistent national worship is best addressed by having congregations walk in lockstep when it comes to orders of worship or by ramping up worship education so that our mobile members are well-versed in Christian liberty as they motor about the country? There may be no stock answers for questions such as these, but from a pastoral point of view, we do well to conscientiously wrestle with them all.

Style of Worship

In evaluating the relative "effectiveness" of either traditional or contemporary or blended worship, there are conversations among us which say that moving completely to contemporary worship or offering it as one of two or three weekend options has in mind the young, or boomers, or the unchurched, or the first-time visitor, or

whoever it is we feel may be more attuned to such a worship style. No one is saying that we haven't, but must we not continue to wrestle with the matter of worship that unites rather than parcels up the family of God in a particular locale? Taken to an extreme, we could custom tailor worship for widows, worship for singles, worship for addicts, but in every context, wouldn't we want to be sensitive to that Word of God (Hebrews 10:25) which describes worship as the assembling of ourselves *together*?

Lutherans who are wise and welcome to check out [the CCLI top ten list] will still have to first ask, "What does it say?" before considering, "How does it sing?"

If we can speak of a spectrum of worship styles which range from high church on one end to non-liturgical on the other end, along with everything in the middle, where do we want to stand and why do we want to stand there? Operating on the premises that, to a degree, we already have this diversity in our church body, that those in the middle have mixed feelings about what they see at either end, and that those at either end may end up frustrated about feeling they have to defend themselves before those in the middle, there are some scriptural truths we need to remember. Reverence for the Lord in worship cannot be defined by the orders of service we utilize or the worship attire we or the worshipers in our services wear. So-called contemporary worship among us, of itself, is in no way to be viewed as an automatic departure from orthodoxy. The use of the so-called Western rite is and will ever remain an adiaphoron. We can't validate worship based solely on the presence or absence of that rite. The Lord serves his people in

worship through the means of grace; through those same means, the Lord will provide for worshipers who worship him in spirit and in truth.

Remembering that it is never so much about us and our preferences and various forms as it is about people and anchoring them in Christ and preparing them for entrance into their heavenly home, what about a worship goal that is in line with being all things to all people, that above all else they might be saved? With such a goal, the only reason people would have for squirming during the service is not that it was so high church or low church that they just couldn't be comfortable with it but that the incriminating law of God nailed them to the wall. With such a goal, the only reason for people to thrill is not that they found the service so enjoyable and easy to follow or the music so to their liking that they could never think of going elsewhere but that the gospel of Christ, in Word and song and symbol and sacrament, set them free from the horrible prison-house of sin and hell. With a worship goal of having the Lord serve his people in line with the indispensable truths of sin and grace, how beneficial would it be for God's people to come into God's house and to take part in worship services where the style of worship was unnoticeable, if not imperceptible, where *how* the service was conducted disappeared beneath *what* the service delivered: God's pardon, God's peace, and God's power for God's people!

Music

Sweeping generalizations have no place when characterizing worship music which is commonly called contemporary. It is uncharitable and inaccurate to castigate all of it as being shallow and without substance. There are countless "praise songs" in that genre of music which, partially or completely, are nothing more than scripture passages set to music.² It shouldn't be surprising that a good number of people will embrace fresh, singable music with a scriptural text.

There are, however, pastoral reasons that confessional Lutherans have not been inclined to publish certain songs in hymnals or to generate approved lists of Christian contemporary music which Lutherans, too, can properly utilize. A "music first" approach,³ where music is given the place of "doing its thing" ahead of the text doing its thing, would be an approach opposite of the psalmist for whom the text was "everything," and who then tagged that text "for the director of music." "Text first" is a pastoral principle to follow in hymn or song selection. When thousands of non-denominational or other-denominational Christians, by their use of it, push a contemporary Christian song to the top of the CCLI top ten list, Lutherans who are wise and welcome to check out that list will still have to first ask, "What does it say?" before considering, "How does it sing?"

Incorporating the likeable, singable contemporary worship song into the service is undeniably a marvelous part of what we, in Christian freedom, can do. Let's not judge each other for doing so. As in every matter of Christian liberty, however, maintaining that it is permissible (1 Corinthians 10:23) is followed by asking if it is constructive. As we evaluate, we ask not only, "Does it edify?" but also, on the basis of the text, "How much does it edify?" and, "How much can it edify?" Songs which every Christian *can* sing differ from songs which, by virtue of their content, confessional Lutherans will choose to sing or publish or memorize. In this area

of pastoral work, we want to wrestle with the matter of selecting hymns and songs with texts which allow people to sip and sing that the Lord is good as compared with hymns and songs with texts which allow people to drink deeply and to taste and see that the Lord is good.

A pastoral approach to that music which seems to be so attractive to so many is to ask, "Will it edify all the gathered guests in the house of God, allowing them all to participate without polarizing these precious saints?" If not, the best pastoral practice may be to recognize that it and a host of other doctrinally acceptable songs may well be better left to personal, private worship on the computer screen or iPod. When we become convinced that there is music that both we and the people we serve are no longer inclined to use, a pastoral approach is to remember that it is not necessarily time to search through the worship music of all of Christendom to locate whatever might appear to be better than what we are ready to discard. It is time to consider and to work on and to implement a solid, sensible, confessional, creative expansion of what is best for Lutheran worship.

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Encouragement

As a band of confessional brothers, intent on preserving the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, we are well advised and perhaps are in need of admonition to be done with labels. So-and-so is not a contemporary guy or a high church guy or a traditional guy. He is a brother in Christ. Personal worship preferences and practices can easily divide. Hearts beating pastorally toward members entrusted to our care and toward fellow brothers will be hearts which strive for unity under him whose pastoral heart beats with perfect love for us all. If you tell me about the kind of services you lead or you ask me about the kind of services I lead, I wouldn't want to converse about high church or low church. I wouldn't want to call it traditional or contemporary or blended. I would want to call it worship.

An expanded online version of this article on Connect offers a fuller discussion.

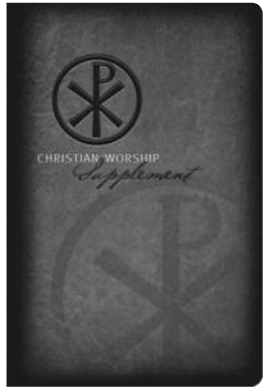
¹ Comments from Schools of Worship Enrichment.

² "Jesus Messiah" by Chris Tomlin is an example.

³ See the song writing process of a different Chris Tomlin song: "How Great Is Our God" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpfKli_4LQ0

CWS Ideas and Instruments: August and September 2010

By Bryan Gerlach



Yes, longer range planning is good. But some of the simple ideas below from *Christian Worship: Supplement* (CWS) can be easily implemented in the time available.

Michael Schultz writes in the expanded online version of the article above: "Two years after its release, how many worship leaders and members involved in worship planning realize that there are 140 pages of alternate settings, descants, handbell scores, guitar chords, and scores

for C, B-flat, E-flat, and F instruments for the 85 hymns in CWS?" Guitar accompaniment might be used for a middle stanza with choir or soloist even when the congregation sings to piano or organ accompaniment. Suggestions below found on the CWS hymn sampler double CD are noted with an asterisk (*).

It is quite easy to find opportunities like those below. Use *Planning Christian Worship* (PCW; available online at Connect) to identify CWS hymn suggestions. Then check the file "CWS PDFs" from the Accompaniment Edition CD to find instrumental resources available for the hymns suggested.

August 8: 762 "Consider How the Birds Above." PCW states regarding the supplemental second lesson from James 5: "Here is warning for us as we recognize in ourselves the same epicurean aptitude so prevalent in our hedonistic society." The hymn echoes the warning: "Be on your guard against all greed..." The theme is also in the First Lesson (Solomon's lament over meaningless life) and in the Gospel (Parable of the Rich Young Fool). Select stanzas of the hymn may serve as responses to lessons and sermon. Descant parts are available for C and B-flat instruments. Consider a soft melody instrument doubling the melody while a soloist sings a stanza before the congregation. Add the descant to a final stanza.

August 15: PCW suggests seven CWS hymns to fit the day's lessons. At Judah's return from exile (supplemental First Lesson) the people's "first priority was to rebuild personal wealth rather than rebuild the house of the Lord for the coming of the Messiah" (PCW). We face a similar temptation: rebuilding personal finances after a recession more energetically than supporting the Lord's work. 755 "Your Kingdom, O God, Is My Glorious Treasure" is a "two-pager" that is easier to learn since part of the melody repeats – an AABA structure. Point this out if an informal teaching time precedes the service. It's always best to use a soloist or choir to sing the first stanza of a new hymn, even if taught before worship.

757 "Where Your Treasure Is" quotes the day's Gospel. For both 755 and 757 no additional instrumental parts are available, but a solo

instrument can assist in introducing the hymn and doubling the melody when the congregation sings. If one of these hymns occurs after the offering, use solo instrument and keyboard to play the hymn during the offering.

Another option for August 15: "St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord" falls on a Sunday this year. The Proper is in *CW:Manual*, page 460. Most hymns that mention Mary are from Advent/Christmas. Some others include: 79:2, 270:2, 317:1, 361:2, 552, 557. For sermon ideas, see Richard Lauersdorf's *With Our Eyes on Jesus* (NPH, out of print; pages 81-84 are posted on Connect) or Luther's sermons that reference Mary. From CWS, *776 "Sing with All the Saints in Glory": Melody for C, B-flat, and F instruments.

August 22: PCW suggests five CWS hymns to fit the day's lessons. Those with resources on the CD are:

710 "Jesus, Once with Sinners Numbered": Melody for C, B-flat, and F instruments.

746 "You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd": Alternate tune and setting.

771 *"I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light": Handbell score in key of C; accompaniment and handbell score in key of D-flat. The Accompaniment Edition notes (available online and in the organist's copy) state: "This accompaniment may be used alone to accompany the congregation, or it could be used in addition to the keyboard accompaniment."

September 19: PCW suggests six CWS hymns. Those with resources on the CD follow. If your choir season begins after Labor Day, some of the ideas below might be easy to prepare in two rehearsals.

748 "Lamb of God": Melody for C, B-flat, and E-flat instruments.

766 "The Lord's My Shepherd; I'll Not Want": Melody for C and B-flat instruments; handbell score. The handbell part is very simple: only five bells, playing one at a time. Choir members or two to three other volunteers could play the part with little practice. See the note in the Accompaniment Edition.

September 26: PCW suggests four CWS hymns. Those with resources on the CD are:

762 "Consider How the Birds Above": Descant for C and B-flat instruments.

785 *"O Lord of Nations, Hear Our Prayer": Melody and descant for C and B-flat instruments.

Share these ideas with musicians!



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2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398
Phone: 414/256-3265 FAX: 414/256-3899 <www.wels.net/worship>

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Mark your calendar and alert your musicians! The next national worship conference is July 19-22, 2011.