

The Quest for New Treasure Can Be Treacherous

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In Memory of My Lois, Florence Lee

Jesus!

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Professor Tiefel has taken us on a two thousand year tour of the Church’s worship treasures in a mere sixty minutes. (His brevity has demonstrated that old dogs do, periodically, learn new tricks.) Would that we had weeks to unpack these treasures, study them, and display them! But we don’t. Our Palms and planners are relentless in their clicking off the hours. Pastors, teachers, and parish leaders have too few hours and too many duties, too few helping hands and too many hands reaching out for help. Our ministries are often reminiscent of Moses in the early days of the Exodus, faithful but often feeling fruitless. Then along comes a Professor from the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line, speaking of a different time, encouraging us to take the collective wisdom of generations long-dead and apply it to the living. Meanwhile, we just hope that there won’t be another marital blowup or discipline headache waiting for us when we return home.

Our pondering of the past is only half of the worship issue. The other half confronts us in the present. Impassioned voices are quick to point out WELS is in decline. We never were big, but are we now dying little by little? Parishes are in need of spiritual revitalization and renewal. Figures for church attendance and adult Bible study are obstinately flat in most areas. The LES is an endangered species in many quarters of WELS. Assaulted by secularism, panned by consumerism, antiquated by modernity, made irrelevant by relativism, it is a wonder WELS is alive at all. A busy, beleaguered pastor or teacher can hardly hold back the sigh: “When the Son of Man comes... will he find faith on the earth?”

That is the pity pool that the devil would love to drown us in! Away with such thoughts! Elijah’s time under the broom tree was a self-guided detour from the real work the Lord had called him to do. And so it is with us. Do the Means of Grace still echo from pulpit and classroom? Are they still poured out in Holy Baptism and eaten in the Supper? Is our confession of Christ clear? If so, we have what the world desperately needs. In a sea of secularism, we are still administrators of God’s sacred mysteries. In a culture rotting with consumerism, we still hold out the one thing needful. In a world enamored by change, method, process, and progress, we confess doctrine that endures forever. Let the world make truth a moving target! We will be content to confess, “Your Word is truth.”

Why begin a keynote on *Worship Treasures New* by exploring the spectrum of opinion on the synod’s health? Because our view of the present state of WELS will likely have a direct bearing on how earnestly we are searching for *treasures new*. Is our Synod relevant any longer? Are many of our worship practices relevant any longer? Os Guinness explores a caffeinated preoccupation with being relevant: “Further compounded by accelerating change, which itself is compounded by the fashion-driven dictates of consumerism, relevance becomes overheated and vaporizes into trendiness... ‘Under the aspect of eternity’ (*sub specie aeternitatis*) becomes ‘under the aspect of fifteen minutes.’ Instead of ‘the contentment of a tree in its roots, the happiness of knowing that one is not wholly accidental and arbitrary but grown out of a past as its heir, flower, and fruit,’ feverishness is the condition of an institution that has ceased to be faithful to its origins. It is then caught up in ‘a restless, cosmopolitan hunting after new and ever newer things.’”¹

¹ Guinness, Os. *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993. p. 63.

The last Guinness quote can help us discover something about ourselves and our personal motivation as we consider *worship treasures old and new*. If the search for worship treasures new flows from an infatuation with finding just the right silver bullet to make God's Kingdom come in power - at least by the publication of the next statistical report - it will be difficult to not become addicted to the hunt. If the search for worship treasures new flows from good, biblical stewardship - finding and using the best that the Church of Christ has to offer - then prepare to be rewarded. In sum: we hunt for *treasures new* because of our theology of the Church, not because we hope to save our church by using just the right style, rite, or method. The one flows from the Gospel and its fruits. The other is well-intended manipulation.

All Is Not Gold That Glisters....

I have titled this keynote *The Quest for New Treasure Can Be Treacherous*. It can be treacherous in several different ways. Some would like to dismiss the entire conversation about worship treasures new. They would love to turn back the clock and listen only to the oldies: the Western Rite, the Daily Office, the Lutheran Chorale. Those were the good old days! Such notions, however, dismiss the fact the life has never been all that great for the Bride of Christ this side of eternity. Secondly, such repristinational longings are subjective at their core. How far back do you want to take the Western Rite's music? Mozart? Palestrina? Why not rewind all the way back to Gallican Chant? Shall we opt for the Lutheran Chorale of the 16th century and then leave Franzmann and Vajada standing on the curb as we pass by? Longing for the good old days can only ossify the worship life of a congregation. *A preoccupation with the old is not necessarily good.*

Others will eagerly welcome the new into their congregations. We are faced with a non-stop parade of the new: new translations, hymnals, song books, methods of music making, orders of service, viewpoints on the purpose of worship, architecture, and technology. All of these items will come with warm recommendations and glowing reports of success attached. Then suddenly a mid-level manager at Motorola blurts out "PowerPoint? If I see another PowerPoint presentation, I'll gag." There are potential landmines hidden beneath much that is new. *A preoccupation with the new is not necessarily good.*

Finally, the quest for *worship treasures new* can be treacherous, because from our "up close" vantage point it is sometimes difficult to discern what is treasure and what is trash. "All is not gold that glisters." The opposite is also true: Sometimes genuine treasures are overlooked or undervalued. Back in 1946, Darryl Zanuck, the head of 20th Century-Fox, said "Television won't be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night."² A world-changing goldmine was once dismissed as a late 1940's fad. History is our friend when it comes to discerning treasure from trash. There is a reason, for instance, why we all know the name Johann Sebastian Bach and not Franz Tunder. 275 years of musical picking and panning have helped us see that Tunder was no Bach. But what about the newer treasures like Marty Haugen, John Fergusson, or Keith Getty? Will their names be around in fifty years? The Western Rite has made the cut. But what about the new *Gathering Rite* concept? We need to be evangelical, confessional, brotherly, and scholarly if we intend to successfully sift for today's treasures. Make no mistake about it: there is a mother lode of new worship treasures buried in warehouses, bookshelves, and music benches around the world.

"Nothing New Under the Sun"

It is pretty common to hear these days that the world is changing at a breathtaking pace. The church, if it is to survive, must change along with it. Change, in the opinion of some, is a pressing imperative. Timothy Wright puts it bluntly "The generations born after 1946 have forever changed the way people choose churches.

² (Darryl F. Zanuck, head of 20th Century-Fox, 1946) Quoted in *Newsweek Magazine*.

The values, motivations, and ambitions of these young to middle-age adults differ from those of previous generations. What worked in the past will not work today. Churches can no longer do business as usual.”³

I know the world is changing. My Grandma Christie rode a horse and buggy to church. I worshiped according to TLH page 5 or 15 every Sunday until college. Notebooks at Seminary have been replaced by notebook computers. Things do change, sometimes with breath-taking speed. But is the world *essentially* changing? Would the boomers’ insistence on having it their way be at odds with the free-wheeling days of the Judges when everyone did what was right in his own eyes? Would Pontius Pilate not be pleased with today’s skepticism? Did the boomers invent rampant immorality? Let Lot’s daughters teach you something about family planning (Genesis 19:30-38). Perhaps, just perhaps, Solomon was wiser than our modern minds give him credit for: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, ‘Look! This is something new’? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time” (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10).

I am weary of hearing how different we all are in the modern world. We are no more different from today’s world than the apostles were as they looked out upon the world with Jesus’ Word in their mouth and his “Go” in their ears. My brotherly, pastoral encouragement for this conference is this: let us not do things new because a new generation demands it from us! Let us resolve to do new things because a new generation has produced that which is excellent and praiseworthy!

I would like to think that Solomon would be comfortable with the content of this conference. An essay on *Treasures New*, desperately needs to be paired with one on *Treasures Old*. The two need to work in constant companionship. Why? Certainly not to give both Tiefel and Christie a soapbox at the same conference! Treasures old and new are constant companions because of what the Scriptures teach about the Church and tradition: “The doctrine of the church includes more than just the contemporary generation. It includes all the previous generations of the redeemed people of God... present-tense or future-tense theologies cannot be permitted to stake out a monopoly on the doctrine of the Spirit. We belong to an ongoing tradition and therefore the music of our worship should reflect this continuity.”⁴

The Quest for a New Purpose

Ask your Bible classes, your confirmation students, or the members of your choir “what is worship?” Invariably, you will hear several answers along the lines of “praising God, giving thanks, singing, gathering together with fellow believers,” etc. All of these do happen, but worship that clearly confesses Christ is worship that enables God’s people to receive the riches of Christ. Lutherans know, however, that “they cannot by their own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ their Lord or come to him.” Faith, forgiveness, the sacraments – all are received. This is most certainly true: Worship is primarily God serving his people with Word and Sacrament. The Apology states: “This is how God wants to become known and worshiped, namely, that we receive blessings from him, and indeed, that we receive them on account of his mercy and not on account of our merits. This is the richest consolation in all afflictions, which the opponents destroy when they trivialize and disparage faith and only teach people to deal with God through works and merits.”⁵

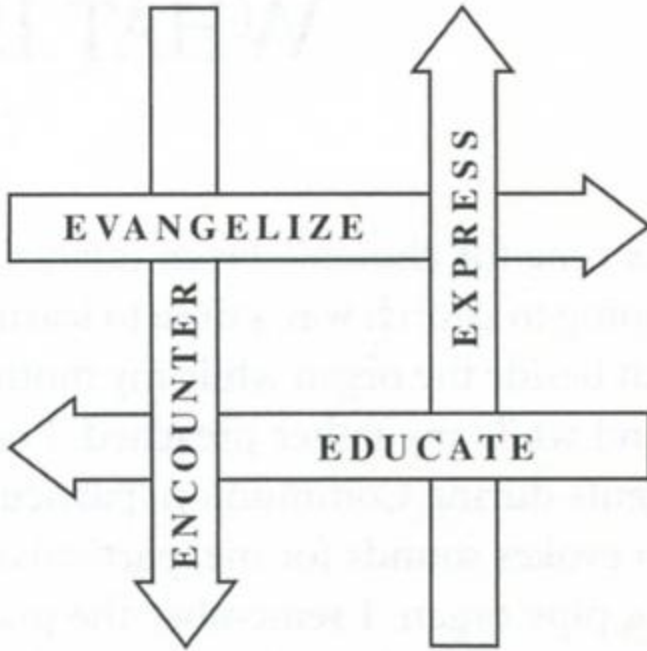
A biblical view of sin and grace, faith and works, Word and Sacraments, Spirit and his Means leads us to view worship as a *receiving from God*. This is not to say, however, that the singular direction of Lutheran worship is from God to us. If it were, prayers and hymns of praise would be out of place. Instead, what we receive from God is expressed by several different dimensions in worship. Timothy Maschke in *Gathered Guests* provides this helpful chart:⁶

³ Wright, Timothy. *A Community of Joy: How to Create Contemporary Worship*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994. p. 16.

⁴ Leaver, Robin. *The Theological Character of Music in Worship*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1989. p. 17.

⁵ Apology IV, 60 (K-W, 130).

⁶ Maschke, Timothy H. *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2003. p. 20.



There is an “encounter” that happens in worship. The transcendent Creator of heaven and earth comes to his creatures through Word and Sacrament. God graciously approaches his wayward sons and daughters through the work of his perfect Son.

There is a dimension of “expression” in worship. We who have received God’s grace in Christ yearn to praise God for his grace in Christ. General prayers and hymns of praise are, of course, appropriate. Distinctively Christian expression, however, pulses with Christ. “Let the *word of Christ* dwell in your richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

There is an “evangelism” dimension to worship. Baptizing and teaching – Word and Sacrament – are the heart of the Great Commission. They are precisely the things that we receive in worship. Lutheran Worship is just as much a fulfilling of the Great Commission as

presenting the great exchange at a prospect’s kitchen table. They are the same, just different.

Finally, there is an “educational” element in worship. The Word is taught through lessons and sermon and song. Maschke writes that he never had to teach his children the Lord’s Prayer or the Apostle’s Creed. These worship treasures were imparted through learning’s mother – repetition.⁷

Confessional Lutherans appreciate each of these dimensions in worship. We strive to remain in the biblical center, keeping them in balance. Purpose driven problems will begin when any one of these dimensions is pushed too far. Consider the following:

If worship is all about an *encounter* with the transcendent God, I have just purchased a plane ticket to Constantinople and Eastern Orthodoxy. If worship is all about my personal *expression*, I have purchased a bus ticket to Azousa Street, Los Angeles the birthplace of modern Pentecostalism. If worship is all about *evangelism*, I am driving in my BMW towards the mega church model, large churches with names that usually end in –creeks or -backs. If worship is all about *education*, I am flirting with the Reformed and rationalists.

I see little danger of WELS taking a hard right towards Eastern Orthodoxy. I don’t think we are as didactic in worship as we were a generation ago. I do sense that we are tempted at times to overplay the cards of expression and evangelism in worship. These two are in the very air we breathe as Christians living in America. There is no doubt that mainstream worship has shifted dramatically towards an evangelistic purpose in the last few decades. A few quotes will illustrate the point:

- “We’ve all heard discussions among church leaders involving questions such as, “Can nonbelievers really worship God?” or “Should our worship be seeker-sensitive or seeker-driven?” as though worship is not a powerful evangelistic tool to express the church’s mission in the world! Nonbelievers are already worshipping, because people are built to worship something. Our challenge is to upgrade their worship to worship of the true God.”⁸

⁷ Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 25.

⁸ McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2003. p.

- “They need to understand the contagious nature of worship and the critical role it plays in missional renewal of the church. There is hardly anything more evangelistically powerful than a group of worshipping believers.”⁹
- “People generally find it easier to decide for Christ when there are multiple relationships supporting that decision... For this reason, the larger your seeker service grows, the greater an evangelistic tool it will become.”¹⁰
- “Creative, contemporary styles of worship are essential if we want to reach new generations for Jesus Christ. The decision to offer new, contemporary services is not so much a worship issue as an evangelistic issue.”¹¹

As for the tendency to over-stress personal expression in worship:

- "I believe that worship is saying that God is worthy. It is our service to Him. We give Him our time, our attention, our adoration, whatever we can do to lift up His name. It is what He gets from us, not what we get from Him. In fact, I believe that when we gather to worship Him but concentrate on what we are getting from Him, it is like giving a gift for the sake of making self feel good, nor for the sake of the receiver. In fact, gathering to get something out of it for self, yet calling it worship of God, becomes a lie, is self worship, a form of gross idolatry."¹²

Modern mega-church services often see worship as a “mood setting” mechanism that encourages people to make their decision for Christ. This well-meant view of worship is manipulation – not reception. Their view of worship meshes very well with the evangelical world’s denial of original sin and synergistic¹³ doctrine of conversion.

Why the sudden shift in worship’s purpose in the last few decades? Marva Dawn gives three highly probable answers: “One, is the panic about declining numbers... Another is the intensifying passivity of our cultural milieu, which causes some Christians to want to be entertained, rather than to do the work of worship. A third is related, for worship services are turned into a congregation’s primary evangelistic tool because *the people* are not engaged in the practice of witnessing to their neighbors or in the difficulties of loving them.”¹⁴

Here we face a few ironies:

When the purpose of worship is shifted from reception of God’s gifts to evangelism, we run a serious risk of eventually damaging a person-to-person evangelism practice. Conversely, if the purpose of worship is shifted from reception of God’s gifts to evangelism, we run the serious risk of eventually damaging the very worship that yearn for the non-believer to join us in.

Let me offer one example that I have encountered more than once in our circles: *celebrating communion too often is bad for outreach*. I understand that no one wants to see visitors leave in a huff. I understand the frustration of evangelical practice being interpreted as “shunning.” I understand that we all want to “live to

⁹ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 81.

¹⁰ Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995. p. 246.

¹¹ Wright, *A Community of Joy*, 56.

¹² This quotation is from an e-mail off the Church and Change (WELS) Listserve. The e-mail was never retracted and did receive some warm kudos from others in our fellowship.

¹³ Synergists teach that people have some inherent spiritual capacity to assist in their conversion. They thereby deny the biblical teaching that we are *dead, blind, and hostile* to God. See FC II, 77 (K-W, 559) for a fuller description.

¹⁴ Dawn, Marva. *How Shall We Worship?* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2003. p.39.

teach another day.” But what is the Sacrament? 100% Gospel. Is the Gospel bad for outreach? Is the confessional principle that underlies close communion bad for outreach? In the entire New Testament, is there a single passage that gives us a hint that the Lord’s Supper is bad for the Great Commission? Did the early church – the mission church par excellence - suffer because of its weekly communion practice? Or was it strengthened through the Sacrament to endure horrible persecution and prevail? Playing the devil’s advocate, I would ask the next logical question: if communion is bad for outreach, then is outreach bad for worship?

And then Satan wins. He wins by successfully driving a devilish wedge between the imperative “GO” and the very things that we are to *go with!* May we, pastors and teachers, missionaries and musicians – all together – tell the devil to take his worship wedge and go play elsewhere. Instead of a purpose driven church, or a mission-minded church, or Gottesdienst driven church, let us be a Gospel-focused church!

Key Challenges:

- Are we willing to “teach the devil to death” in the areas of worship and outreach? Are we willing to continue the brotherly conversation on these critical issues? What have I read recently on the theology and practice of worship – the place where we touch more lives with Christ than any other ministry activity?
- If the primary purpose of worship is evangelism or expression, then we are in desperate need of a major study on the worship history, theology, and practice of American Evangelicalism!

The Quest for New Patterns

We really don’t speak of patterns of worship in the area of private worship. My morning and evening prayer routines are pretty predictable. My routines are not your routines. There is no problem there. When we step into the realm of public worship, however, worship patterns are critically important. One gets the impression that Paul was not impressed with the personal liberties that were being passed off as public proclamation in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14). Public worship, by definition, needs patterns if it is going to avoid a rapid descent into chaos. All except the most die-hard Pentecostal are guided by patterns in worship.

It used to be that the matter of worship patterns was simple. Rome was content to worship according to the Tridentine Mass from the Counter Reformation until the mid 1960’s. WELS was content to follow the page 5/15 pattern for the vast majority of its services. Suddenly things began to change. With its “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” in 1963, Vatican II began to peel away some of the medieval additions to the liturgy. Worship in the vernacular made a reappearance. The pericopal system was enriched. Rome’s worship reformation soon rippled out into worship “renewal” movements in many denominations. If any of you have sung Haugen’s *Morning Praise*, you are reaping some of the benefits of this “traditional” worship renewal.

Another profound change in worship patterns took place concurrently in the Pentecostal-Evangelical wing of Christianity. The praise and worship pattern was finely tuned.¹⁵ Webber notes the primary concern was “to recover the more subjective and experiential side of worship... The praise and worship movement generated a new genre of music: the contemporary chorus...”¹⁶ The classic fourfold pattern of worship – gathering, Word, Supper, and sending – is usually maintained to a greater or lesser degree. Music, rather than the liturgy’s structure, takes on a primary role. For example, the *Gathering* section of a contemporary, “praise and worship” service will likely follow a pattern as follows: “high praise” Gathering songs; followed by songs about coming to worship, followed by songs about God (transcendence); and finally songs of confession and relationship.¹⁷

A third strand of worship patterns has been offered primarily by Robert Webber of Wheaton College, IL. This is the *blended worship* approach. Webber lists three hallmarks of the blended approach: “first, to be rooted in the biblical and early church tradition; second, to draw from the resources of the entire church; and third, a

¹⁵ See J. Johnold Strey’s *Proclaiming the Gospel in Worship* for an excellent overview of this format.

¹⁶ Webber, Robert. *Planning Blended Worship*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998. p. 15

¹⁷ Webber, *Planning Blended Worship*, 58.

radical commitment to contemporary relevance.”¹⁸ I appreciate Webber’s appreciation for the historical roots of our faith. I also appreciate his drawing from all the Church’s resources. Dawn also sounds a blended note “...it still seems strange to me that churches fight over styles and hastily reject the Church’s heritage without investigating its riches or refuse to use global music and new songs without exploring their possibilities.”¹⁹ As for Webber’s third point on a “radical commitment to contemporary relevance,” one must be careful. The proverb “He who marries the spirit of the age is quickly divorced” comes to mind.

Where will we fall on the traditional – blended – contemporary spectrum? This is not an easy question, since “traditional” does not equal page 26 plus four hymns. Traditional worship that observes the Church Year, the great songs of the Western Rite (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Te Deum, Sanctus, Agnus Dei), and features vestments, liturgical furnishings, etc. can be done with a “contemporary ensemble.” At Antioch, we have done “traditional worship” with piano, guitar, flute, bass guitar, congas, bongos, and cymbals.

Conversely, many in WELS who are doing “contemporary” services really might not be. “Contemporary” doesn’t mean playing a few songs out of *Let All the People Praise You* on the piano. Contemporary worship generally does not follow the pattern of the Church Year, avoids vestments, liturgical furnishings, and does not highlight the great songs of the Western Rite.²⁰

Let me speak clearly: we have sworn an oath to uphold Christian freedom – even in matters of worship pattern. If one calls contemporary worship sinful, then his judgment needs to be tempered with truth. The confessions of our church are clear:

Our side also retains many ceremonies and traditions, such as the order of the Mass and other singing, festivals, and the like, which serve to preserve order in the church. At the same time, however, the people are taught that such external worship of God does not make them righteous before God and that it is to be observed without burdening consciences, that is, no one sins by omitting it without causing offense. The ancient Fathers also maintained such liberty with respect to external ceremonies. For in the East the festival of Easter was celebrated at a date different from that in Rome. When some wanted to divide the church over this difference, others admonished them that there was no need to have uniformity in such customs. As Irenaeus says: “Diversity in fasting does not dissolve unity in faith.”²¹

¹⁸ Webber, *Planning Blended Worship*, 16.

¹⁹ Dawn, *How Shall We Worship?*, 1.

²⁰ Schroeder’s definitions in “Rite Worship for North American Outreach” (See CoW website) are helpful for the layman:

Before we get started, let’s remind ourselves again of the differences between liturgical worship and contemporary worship. Let’s start with what liturgical worship is not: Liturgical worship does not mean slavishly doing page 15 and page 26 out of CW. Liturgical worship does not mean music at least 150 years old. It does not mean simply having an order of service or following a pattern of Word then music, Word then music.

Simply put, liturgical worship uses the ancient songs of the Church, the seasons and readings of the Church Year, the vestments and patterns of worship inherited from our Christian forefathers. Liturgical worship uses the great texts of the Church (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Te Deum, Sanctus, Angus Dei, etc.) as the basis for its praise, and uses the Life of Christ and the Teachings of Christ as expressed in the liturgical calendar as the basis for its proclamation. It is the product of twenty centuries of Christian worship.

Let’s also start with what contemporary worship is not. Contemporary worship does not mean using songs written recently. It does not mean using melodies that sound like pop music on the radio. It is not a matter of musical style or instruments. It is a matter of texts.

Contemporary worship does not follow the pattern of those songs and rites of the Church. It does not bind itself to the Christian calendar. It avoids vestments. It is a product of the Evangelical movement in Christianity, and in its present form it is a few decades in the making.²⁰

²¹ AC XXVI, 40-44 (K-W, 80).

WELS is using this freedom in worship patterns. I am not convinced, however, that everyone is comfortable with the current spectrum of patterns in our fellowship. I have heard dear brothers long for the old days when “WELS was like MacDonald’s. You knew what you were going to get when you walked into one of our churches.” There are other voices that have expressed the desire for some “worship police” action. There is a degree of discomfort with “Romanizing tendencies” on the one hand and “contemporary services” on the other. (As one who chants the Words of Institution on high festivals AND regularly has guitars play, I feel the pinch!)

Dawn’s book *How Shall We Worship?* seeks to lead people to ask better questions. I like her method. WELS will be blessed as she asks better and better worship questions! Rather than “freedom” as the starting point, let’s ask the questions about WHY we proposing a change in worship pattern. Am I doing something with my worship patterns simply because I can? That’s the Corinthian spirit! We need to have better reasons; reasons tempered with love and responsibility toward our fellow worshipers.

Rick Warren et al. certainly have reasons for doing what they are doing. “It is even possible for them (unbelievers) to sense when God is supernaturally moving in a service, although they won’t be able to explain it... Why were those 3,000 people converted? Because they felt God’s presence, and they understood the message. Both of these elements are essential in order for worship to be a witness.”²² “... the larger your seeker service grows, the greater an evangelistic tool it will become.”²³ “Instead of driving guests away with unintelligible services, outreach-oriented churches turn to alternative worship experiences by designing and implementing innovative services that cater to the needs of their guests.”²⁴

As much as I disagree with the answers that Warren and Wright have arrived at, I do appreciate their clarity. They have changed their patterns on purpose. Their revivalist approach to worship fits hand-in-glove with their synergistic doctrine of conversion. Their theology is driving their pattern of worship. Would that we were so clear on why we choose to do what we do with our patterns! The Wrights and Warrens of the world have good motives. They seek to free the Gospel from any and all ecclesiastical trappings in an effort to reach the unbeliever. They seek to “pack light,” leave the unnecessary baggage behind and run out with the Gospel. Their motives I leave to God. The ramifications of their teaching, I leave to you for careful testing. Frankly, removing albs for polos and khakis, candlesticks for plexi-glass, and the liturgy for a progression of praise songs simply removes one set of forms and replaces them with another. Instead of packing light, they are simply packing something else. That is the ultimate irony: Warren really does worship as he believes and his people believe as they worship!

Here is what I have experienced in many climes of WELS. We know that we can’t, except in rare cases, keep doing page 15 as usual. But when it comes to changing these worship patterns, we sometimes do so out of pragmatism instead of principle. Our liturgical roots were never very deep. We have always talked more about the style of music rather than the theology and structure of the liturgy. It is, therefore, an easy thing to change our patterns - but rarely for the better.

One recent example comes to mind. A brother recently showed me an excellently produced service folder from an area New Year’s Eve service. The service began with the Service of Light. Yet instead of observing the ancient practice of singing of Psalm 141 “the lifting of my hands as the EVENING sacrifice,” inexplicably the service downshifted into Haugen’s Venite from Morning Praise. No sin was committed. I doubt any consciences were scandalized. But what was gained by downloading a Morning Praise hymn into an evening Service of Light? Was there a genuine worship insight that our brother had that previously escaped the collective worship knowledge of 1,400 years of Christians? Or was he just free to do it, so he did?

We can do better. Together we need to do some exegesis – or at least isagogics – on the traditional patterns of service. We need to understand the theological and thematic flow of the various orders. We need to acquire a sense of worship history and put it to good use. (Otherwise, why take a liberal arts approach to training pastors?) We need to draw from the riches of the present and put the shocking array of good liturgical

²² Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 241-242.

²³ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 246.

²⁴ Wright, *A Community of Joy*, 54.

resources to work. For instance, in two minutes of searching I was able to find eighteen different modern settings of Psalm 141 and another three pages worth of materials under the keyword “Evening Prayer.” Why then the morning hymn instead of the evening psalm?

I see the matter of patterns in terms of what we were taught to do at the seminary. We were taught the “theme and parts” method of presenting a sermon. We were taught the “waltz step” method of questing in education. It makes good sense to master one method before you begin to experiment with another. So too with the patterns of worship! Once we master the theology, history, and rites of the liturgy, we will be in good shape to begin purposeful blending. We will also be in a good position to consider the best of contemporary worship’s treasures. I will bet, however, that if you put the liturgy to optimal use – your people will soon stop looking for other patterns of praise. In 10+ years at a white-collar church of 1,100, I have had one person raise the question of contemporary services with me privately or in public. In my opinion, a liturgical/blended pattern of worship positions us well to make the greatest use of treasures new while keeping the best of treasures old.

In a word: make sure you take the effort to count the treasures you have before you assume you’re broke!

Key Point:

Doctrine and practice are a single working concept in WELS psyche. There is no doubt that Evangelical worship patterns are being embraced, at least in part, by some in our synod. In an effort to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, we are in need of serious studies of Evangelical worship’s theology and practice. No one debates our Christian freedom. We need to work on its mutual love and understanding so that our freedom is used to build each other up. Dawn takes the middle road: “Liberty prevents liturgy from becoming stuck in ruts, but liturgy prevents liberty from being abused or from becoming abusive.”²⁵

The Quest for New Sounds

It was my first year in the ministry. The job of directing the senior choir had fallen to me. In an effort to broaden the musical language of my parish, I decided that we were going to sing “Soon and Very Soon” for Christ the King Sunday. I tried my best to improvise a gospel accompaniment on the piano. The choir even sang with a bit of a lilt. A few were even moving to the beat. My member’s comments afterwards got me thinking: “Pastor, I almost felt like clapping.” Then Janet had something to say: “Pastor, if you do more music like that, you’ll really get things going around here!” The Lutheran in me recoiled: it is the Word that builds the church! Why not clap for “A Mighty Fortress?” Welcome to the difficult and unforgiving world of musical styles!

There has always been a wide spectrum of attitudes toward music in the church. In the primitive church, there were those who outright rejected it; those who sought to control it (Augustine); and those who warmly embraced it (Ambrose). In the era of the Reformation, Zwingli rejected church music; Calvin sought to control it; Luther warmly embraced it. It is interesting to note that the Council of Laodicea (363-364) forbade the use of privately composed hymns and psalms. In addition, it gave the task of singing the psalms to only trained singers. Canon fifteen stated that “other people in church should not sing.” Why such a severe curtailing of church music? The hymn had become the entry point of Gnosticism into the church.²⁶ Throughout church history, music has been the Gospel’s best friend and it’s worst enemy!

There are many times when worship planners would like to wish away the entire topic of musical style. Sadly, worship’s purpose and patterns are rarely discussed. Invariably, people are interested in musical style. My experience with Janet and her identification of a Gospel beat as the musical cure for all that ailed Faith,

²⁵ Dawn, *How Shall We Worship?*, 75.

²⁶ Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000. p. 144.

Antioch has made me keenly aware of the power of music. Janet’s story really gets to the heart of church music’s purpose.

It didn’t escape Janet’s notice that music can be a powerful mover of people. Rick Warren knows it: “It (the style of music you choose for worship) may also *the* most influential factor in determining who your church reaches for Christ and whether or not your church grows. You must match your music to the kind of people God wants your church to reach.”²⁷ Wright knows it too: “No other communication tool has more impact on these new church shoppers. Because the goal of visitor-oriented worship is to impress unchurched guests, high-quality musical presentations are essential.”²⁸ One Willow Creek catalogue on my desk contains a description of an Easter service that features an “opening blast of worship.” How sad it is that the Pope has a better grasp on church music than American mega-church Evangelicalism: “The Holy Spirit leads us to the Logos, and he leads us to a music that serves the Logos as a sign of the *sursum corda*, the lifting up of the human heart. Does it [music] integrate man by drawing him to what is above, or does it cause his disintegration into formless intoxication or mere sensuality?”²⁹

To provide a little balance, I wonder if contemporary music is really THE primary issue in reaching the unchurched. Pastor Jon Schroeder quoted a Barna study for this very area asking the question “What ministry approaches appeal to the unchurched?” Contemporary Worship received 6%. Children’s programs were first at 44%.³⁰ In polling the *formerly unchurched* on “What factors led you to choose this church?” Rainer found that Worship Style/Music style ranked second from the bottom at 11% The most important factor? Pastor/Preaching 90%³¹

I do agree with Warren on one thing: “There is no such thing as “Christian music,” only Christian lyrics.”³² What does Christian music sound like? It sounds like Buxtehude, like the choirs from our African mission fields, like modern Christian Contemporary choruses, like Taize chants, like Gregorian Chant. The Gospel has produced so many lovely sounds through God’s people over the years. The Holy Ghost is no monotone!

As an individual, I agree that the discussion of musical style is extremely subjective. As a trained musician, I also know that there is a degree of objectivity in what makes for good music and bad. Let history be our friend in the area of musical style. Do a setting of the Polka Mass for deer camp if you must. I have a musician’s instinct, however, that that one might not make the cut. How sad too. Instead of being exposed to a lovely new setting of the service, worshipers are instead afflicted with a “Roll Out the Barrel” rendition of “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Somehow that just doesn’t seem right.

What is not open to debate, however, is the matter of the TEXTS that the music carries. Musical style must marry textual meaning. Content is key; and for confessional Lutherans, Christ is the key to content! Christ, not music nor musical style, is the center of Christian worship. “If church music claims the centre of the sanctuary it has displaced the centrality of Christ and has lost its distinctive mission within the life of the Church.”³³ Music doesn’t build the Church. The Gospel builds the Church. Music isn’t the Gospel. Music proclaims the Gospel. “Music in worship is the language of faith, the response of the redeemed to the grace of God. If, as St. Paul says in Romans 10:17, ‘faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ,’ then music in worship must have a proclamatory function.”³⁴

Spend some time perusing the hymns of the New Testament. (Philippians 2:5-11; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Revelation’s hymns, etc.) You will immediately notice two things: they are Christological and they are proclamatory. The best church music - regardless of style – sings of Christ and his saving doctrine.

²⁷ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 280.

²⁸ Wright, *A Community of Joy*, 71.

²⁹ Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 151.

³⁰ Schroeder, *Rite Worship for North American Outreach*, 4.

³¹ Rainer, Thom S. *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001. p. 56

³² Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 281.

³³ Leaver, *Music in Lutheran Worship*, 13.

³⁴ Leaver, *Music in Lutheran Worship*, 10.

“Melancton once said, parenthetically, that when the Church’s music ceases to sound, doctrine will disintegrate; Bucer held that the Church is built around the hymn; and a Jesuit complained that Luther’s hymns had damned more souls than all Luther’s sermons put together! In fact, a study of the Church’s liturgical music often provides a truer understanding of the Church’s mind than a study of the formal writings of her theologians.”³⁵ What a marvelous musical insight Lutherans have to share! Proclaiming the Gospel is praising God. Praising God is proclaiming the Gospel. Our people sing: “God loved the world so that he gave His only Son the lost to save That all who would in him believe Should everlasting life receive.” (CW 391 s.1)

This still leaves an open question, however. How well does CCM proclaim the Gospel? Some of it does exceedingly well. Keith Getty’s “On Christ Alone” is an excellent example. I am sure there are plenty of others. Problems begin to surface, however, in a comment from Warren: “Many of the gospel songs of the first half of this century tend to glorify the Christian experience rather than Christ. In contrast, today’s most effective worship songs are love songs sung directly to God. This is biblical worship.”³⁶ Love songs to God have their time and place. I would rather spend the majority of my time singing of God’s love for me. Warren’s music goes from earth to heaven. Luther’s music goes from heaven to earth. Warren’s music tells God what I know. Luther’s music tells me what God reveals. I know this is simplistic and exceedingly general, but bear with with me.

In an effort to demonstrate the Gospel in song, or lack thereof, I’ve compared CCLI’s (Christian Copyright License International) top five Christian contemporary songs for the second half of 2007 with the last five Hymns of the Day from Christian Worship. (I am assuming the Hymns of the Day are some of the more widely sung hymns in our circles.) This non-scientific comparison can be found in the appendix.

Spend some time later perusing the lyrics on pp. 21ff. You will find that the CCLI top five didn’t contain much that was wrong. The difficulty for WELS worship planners is far greater because the danger is far more subtle: they really didn’t contain much at all. Had I chosen these top five for last Sunday 98% of the burden of proclaiming the Gospel would shift from song to sermon. When it comes to the pulpit, I’ve had my off days...

Remember: the content of our texts – not musical style – is key. If the heathen are truly driving past our churches because we sing CW #41 to the tune *Lobt Gott ihr Christen*, then we ought to change the music straight away. It has not been my experience, however, that the unchurched have formed opinions on what worship should sound like. If the tunes (after a little practice) are truly a stumbling block, then the musicians of our generation must step up and produce tunes that are *better*. Why? Not because musical style is the number one issue in attracting the unchurched, but because stewardship of musical talents and textual truth demands it.

Random Thoughts about Things Musical:

Instead of becoming entrenched in a traditional/contemporary dichotomy, we need to experience quality music across a wide variety of musical genre. We need to talk about music that is a reflection of the true *catholicity* of the Church. WELS fellowship practices are consistent with Scriptural principles. If we are not careful, however, it is easy to become isolated from the rest of Christianity as we practice them. A solid commitment to historic worship forms and a commitment to musical excellence - past, present, Lutheran, Catholic, Evangelical, local, and international - will help keep the Holy Christian Church from becoming a doctrinal abstraction for us while we continue to practice confessional fellowship without apology!

What about training the next generation? Last year, we had 52 students at our school taking some form of private music lessons. What release time is given for music during your school days? When is the last time your Junior Choir directors have had a voice lesson? Are young people that are capable regularly playing a role in the music life of your parish? I was a state finalist in piano for two years while at MLS, but I have no

³⁵ Leaver, *Music in Lutheran Worship*, 9.

³⁶ Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 289.

recollection of playing for any church services in our area. What about an “organ scholar” program at your church for a budding young musician? We’ll pay for all lessons and books. Go get some quality instruction!

What about parish staffing? A fulltime music director for most of our churches, even in the heartland, will remain a dream. I currently am aware of one such position in WELS. What about staffing a mission with an outreach man and a worship man? We evangelize to make worshipers. We would have the two majors thoroughly covered in our mission plants. Bach was the music supervisor of several parishes in Leipzig. What about an *area music director* for a group of parishes? We have mission counselors. To what degree are they worship counselors?

What about the current state of MIDI or other instruments in your sanctuary? Are they the best you can give Jesus or a compromise? I frankly don’t know much about MIDI. I do know, however, that I have played dozens of songs into MIDI over the years – some just for an excuse to go salmon fishing for a few days. “But we don’t have the keyboard people.” Yes we do. We just don’t bring them to where they are needed. If synod could pay for me to go to Arkansas and Colorado during college to hang Easter invitations, could it have paid for me to go and record Easter music? Are door hangings a fulfilling the Great Commission but a better quality Easter service not?

Key Point:

Style is always going to be a moving target. The appropriateness of various styles will always be a question mark. Keep on digging for good texts that are married to good music and then stop sweating style. Excellence in worship/music is where we need to invest our time, attention, and resources.

Before we turn third base and head for home, I would like to share some observations about WELS contemporary services that I have gleaned from consulting at our Schools of Worship Enrichment. One case in particular comes to mind that can help us watch out for worship pitfalls in purpose, patterns, and style. I was consulting with a large church to remain nameless. The new pastor had not been on sight for more than a few months. The parish had a better than average worship life, but I noticed some questions about contemporary services swirling in their surveys. A few of the extremely pro-contemporary members were in attendance at the School of Worship. They wanted to make a new contemporary service priority-one when they returned home.

I asked them why they wanted to begin the contemporary service (purpose). They said it was to “reach out to the unchurched.” When I asked them how many pro-contemporary unchurched people their outreach efforts had uncovered, the answer was zero. Outreach, in fact, was dead on arrival. When I asked them what they had in mind for the contemporary service, they said “not much liturgy” and “we would probably do it in the gathering area” (pattern). When I asked them why this should be a ministry priority with a brand new pastor and a decent worship team already in place, they said that they just “wanted to be able to sing some songs that they liked” (style). This wonderful parish was floundering into a new worship direction with an unclear purpose, no understanding of patterns, and a consumerist attitude towards style. Their service would have been something but not contemporary! It would have been a pandering to the preferences of the *already churched*, masquerading as an outreach effort. Worship would have suffered. Real evangelism would still be dead on arrival. We must do better.

The Quest for Worship That Engages All the Senses

By Architecture

I had the privilege of preaching for the German Service in Huntsville, AL this past December. Unfortunately, I was unable to experience the wall to wall aqua shag that lined the sanctuary of Huntsville’s original chapel. I was once in a large Midwestern parish checking out their newer building. My brother pastor quipped “It’s not like the church needs concert hall acoustics or anything like that.” His thick red carpet with

heavy padding continuously insure that the Milwaukee Symphony will never play at his church. I remember back in my home church when the baptismal font would be “put away” in the deacon’s room after a baptism was completed. At my church in Antioch, the original baptismal font was hidden underneath the lectern top. Put the top on; it’s a lectern. Take the top off; it’s a font! I know of one of our churches that is well-hidden on the far side of an industrial park.

I understand that the Word is the Word whether it is preached in Notre Dame Cathedral or under the open stars in India. I really see buildings, however, as a visible witness to our understanding of biblical stewardship and the human creature. Was the aqua shag in Pastor Turriff’s church so beautiful that it made stealing the sound of the Church’s song a worthwhile trade? What was being said by “putting away” a tiny baptismal font in a large Midwestern church? Were the people in Antioch so destitute in the 1950’s that the 2-for-1 special on the lectern/baptismal font was the best they could do? As human creatures we live in space and time. Is there a stewardship sermon being preached as they drive through industrial space to get to sacred space? Intentions were good, but decisions were often not made on the basis of principle or in line with good architectural practice.

On the practical side, I’m not sure that German über-frugality did us any favors in building many of our buildings. On the theological side, I think we were tempted to be sloppy with our building designs while taking refuge in the doctrine of the Word. (It doesn’t matter that it looks like a bank. We have the Word in its truth and purity!) Needless to say, I am thrilled by what I am currently seeing in the area of building in WELS. Sanctuaries of many sizes have been built in the last five years that take a *theology driven* approach toward building design. We are called to serve people – people with eyes, ears, and members. Our newer chapels are being built with good sight lines, good acoustics, good lighting, good heating and cooling, handicap accessibility, etc. Worship is “popping” in many of these newer, liturgically sensitive buildings. I hope this quest for architectural excellence continues! The Commission on Worship’s *Worship the Lord Newsletter* recently did a series on architecture. I commend them to you for a wealth of ideas.

By Rites and Ceremonies

I know that in post-magpie WELS the word *ceremonia* is a dirty word. It shouldn’t be. Everyone does ceremonia. “Let’s bow our heads and pray” is really a ceremony. Kneeling down for communion is a ceremony. Lighting candles at a Christmas candlelight service is a ceremony. We do ceremonies, but we are at the same time suspicious of them. WELS needs to do some work here. Could it be that we were once so good at not being Catholic that we forgot that we are BODY and soul? Did not the God who created the ears create the eyes? Did not the God who created the sense of hearing also create the sense of touch? Why then are we suspicious of things that are intended to communicate with the eyes or the nose or the sense of touch? Read through the sections of Scripture that deal with the worship of the tabernacle and temple. Ask yourself what was designed by God to preach to the ears, the eyes, the nose, or the sense of touch. God communicated to his Old Covenant creatures in so many ways!

Do any of the following strike you as interesting? We sing “Lift High the Cross” – a processional hymn – but don’t actually lift a cross high or process. We celebrate an ash-less Ash Wednesday. We will sing “let my prayer rise before you as incense” but won’t actually burn any of this visual/olfactory symbol of prayer. “Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose...” but do we do any of them? I have been told, by called workers even, that a crucifix is a graven image. Is Jesus in a crib under the Christmas tree a graven image too? Could it be that a crucifix might actually help us preach, along with St. Paul, Christ *crucified* (1 Cor. 1:23)? Can our worship become more sensual without become overly emotional? I believe so. A reclamation of some of the Church’s long-standing ceremonia would be something quite new for many in WELS. A thoughtful, evangelical enrichment of ceremonies can help keep worship from becoming overly didactic and give us new ways to express our praises to God.

Are these things Catholic? No, they are Christian. There is a big difference. Placing a statue of Mary on your front yard because you seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother is Catholic. Ashes as a sign of

repentance is at least as old as Job. I find it fascinating that there is a life-sized crucifix on the altar at St. John, Vliet Street where both Presidents Bading and Brenner served. Bading and Brenner were no closet papists!

I would encourage you to read a book like Maschke's *Gathered Guests* which gives a superb overview of Lutheran worship, both theoretical and practical. Spend some time reading the rubrics in the *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*. You will be rewarded with many worship treasures. Be pastoral in your approach towards ceremony. 250 years of pietism and rationalism dare not be turned back in one swing through the Church Year! Understand, too, that good pastoral practice does not propagate worship myths. "We don't have Jesus on the cross because he was raised again" is pure revisionist history. How many WELS pastors and teachers would be surprised to learn that in Luther's church stands an altar painting of Luther in the pulpit – pointing at a crucifix.

All things are free! In freedom, take some time to make some of the Church's ancient worship actions and make them your own. Your people, after patient teaching, will thank you for it. At the dedication of our new sanctuary, we sang "Lift High the Cross" for the recessional hymn. Brass blared, the organ opened up, the choir sang, and for the first time at Faith a cross was carried. There wasn't a dry eye in the place...

By the Arts and Technology

It was my first Easter morning at Faith, Antioch. I proclaimed the words "Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" The lights of the sanctuary were quickly turned on. The congregation began to sing Gerhardt's Easter classic "Awake, My Heart with Gladness." With pure joy on my face, I turned to face the altar. Then it caught my eye. Prominently displayed in the upper right hand corner of the chancel wall was a felt "Precious Moments" banner. The little felt precious moments girl with her pet lamb were looking at the empty tomb. The text on the banner said "FOR ME?" My joy lessened just a bit as I learned my first lesson about Christian art in the parish. All that hangs on a church wall is not art. (I was able to begin the purchase of some updated paraments that fall. The precious moments banner then took a late night walk to a forgotten storage closet in the school basement where it found a final resting place next to the velvet Lord's Supper painting that had taken said late night walk a few months earlier.)

Art is in the eye of the beholder. Lutherans, however, ask what art is preaching to the beholder's eye. Christian art is not art for art's sake. Good Christian art allows the Gospel to subtly "sink in" over time. A new Slabbinck tapestry of the risen Christ woven with white wool and gold thread proclaims something different, subtly perhaps, from the Precious Moments girl and her sheep with the pink bow. An oil painting of Christ and doubting Thomas forms the center of our new triptych. The painting proclaims, "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe." All were made with tender loving care. Precious Moments, however, is more appropriate in the realm of private piety. A tapestry of the risen Christ or a painting of a scene from the Gospels is more appropriate for public worship.

I was a School of Worship counselor for another church whose name is not important. The pastor was animated in the pulpit. Honestly, I have forgotten most of his sermon. What I remember is the Powerpoint picture that his sermon began with. It was a picture of dozens of emaciated, dead bodies piled up in a Nazi concentration camp. This shocking image was left up on the wall behind the pulpit for several minutes. The Word was lost in the image. The image did not serve the Word. Presentational technology can be an extremely *hot* medium.

I saw another example of technology in worship being used at one of our churches. The entire text of the entire service was beamed up into the upper left-hand corner of the chancel. (It reminded me of a dearly-loved religion and art teacher from my college days.) The steady flow of text, text, and more text had its own center of gravity – away from altar, away from cross, away from an absolving, reading, proclaiming pastor. What was gained by this use of technology? The technology was leading this service in a heavily educational direction. Too much technology used in a didactic way can turn congregations into passive receptors of information.

Technology, used well, promises to become a worship treasure. It's the "used well" part that is difficult. Dawn proposes a question that could help us avoid technological pitfalls: "...let's ask about every device we

use in worship whether it causes worshipers to become more engaged in the actual physical/mental/spiritual work of worshipping God. Even more important, do our technological spectacles display the LORD's 'splendor and majesty' or our own idolatry of contemporaneity or technology? Do we trust the Holy Spirit's power to change the hearts and lives of worship participants, or do we trust our own leadership skills and ardor or our dazzling multimedia techniques to convince?''³⁷

I would love to see technology create a new appreciation for all the visual arts. The Lutheran Church is ready for it. When Albrecht Dürer died in the early years of the Reformation, Lutheranism lost her one great artist who could have painted the arts into Lutheranism's piety. Great Lutheran musicians have always been in good supply. The list of great Lutheran artists is short! Use technology to expose people to beauty and images that underline a Gospel truth, or subtly touch people on an emotional level. Leave the text-iness and – if possible – the slideshow of parish announcements for the fellowship hall. I am excited to see newer churches taking a good look at integrating the arts and technology into their buildings!

Amen

There are so many *worship treasures new* to consider! We have really only scratched the surface. Let contemporary worship treasures and trends be a regular item on conference agendas. Take the time to promote and experience good examples of *treasures new*. Embrace the new, but be sure you know who you are hugging.

If I have been at all uncharitable in some of my observations, I ask for your forgiveness! This demonstrates a frustration that comes from evaluating treasures new. It is far easier to comment on Luther's revisions of the Mass than to comment on a dear brother's Easter service. My intention is not to criticize, but only to keep the worship discussion going in WELS. This discussion is critical. We – praise God! – have avoided the "worship wars" that have been a scourge on other denominations.

Together, let's reach out like we never have before with the Gospel. The world is dying - for want of hearing it. And when the Gospel invitation is heeded, let us excel – like we never have before – at glorifying God with heart and soul and voice in public worship. Outreach and worship, treasures old and treasures new – all are a gracious God's gifts to us! May you find great joy in serving Jesus by putting his Gospel to work in your corner of his Kingdom!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pastor A. Christie
 South-Atlantic District Conference
 Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sharpsburg, GA
 The Conversion of St. Paul (2008)

³⁷ Dawn, *How Shall We Worship?*, 67.

Appendix: CCLI Top Five and CW Hymns of the Day Compared

1. “How Great Is Our God” vs. “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel” (CW #23)

The splendor of a King,
Clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice,
All the earth rejoice
He wraps himself in light,
And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at his voice,
And trembles at his voice

CHORUS(1):

How great is our God,
sing with me
How great is our God,
and all who sing
How great, How great
Is our God

VERSE(2):

Age to age he stands
And time is in His Hands
Beginning and the End,
Beginning and the End
The Godhead, Three in one
Father, Spirit, Son
The Lion and the Lamb,
The Lion and the Lamb

Comments:

The final stanza is briefly Trinitarian. I also enjoy the paradox of the Lion and the Lamb. Unfortunately, the paradox is never unpacked for the worshippers. The Gospel is left untouched.

Advent IV - “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel” (CW #23)

1. “... ransom captive Israel That mourns in lonely exile here...”
2. “...free Your own from Satan’s tyranny; From depths of hell your people save, and Bring them vict’ry o’er the grave.”
3. “Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death’s dark shadows put to flight...”
4. “...come, And open wide our heav’nly home. Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery.”

Comment:

In rich picture language, Emmanuel’s saving acts for his people are sung by his people.

2. “Here I Am To Worship” vs. “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” (CW #35)

Light of the world
 You stepped down into darkness
 Opened my eyes, let me see
 Beauty that made this heart adore You
 Hope of a life spent with You

Here I am to worship
 Here I am to bow down
 Here I am to say that You're my God
 You're altogether lovely
 Altogether worthy
 Altogether wonderful to me

King of all days
 Oh so highly exalted
 Glorious in Heaven above
 Humbly You came to the earth You created
 All for love's sake became poor

I'll never know how much it cost
 To see my sin upon that cross

Conclusion:

This song proclaims some of the Gospel's acts: the exalted King came to the earth he created. The Gospel particularly comes out in the final two lines: my sin is upon the cross. The cost is beyond my comprehension.

Christmas Day - "Of the Father's Love Begotten" (CW #35)

"Of the Father's love begotten
 Ere the world began to be,
 He is Alpha and Omega,
 He the source, the ending he,
 Of the things that are, that have been,
 And that future years shall see
 Evermore and evermore."

Comment:

The Gospel in this hymn is its magnificent Christology!

3. "Blessed Be Your Name" vs. "Let All Together Praise Our God" (CW #41)

Blessed Be Your Name
 In the land that is plentiful
 Where Your streams of abundance flow
 Blessed be Your name

Blessed Be Your name
 When I'm found in the desert place
 Though I walk through the wilderness

Blessed Be Your name

Every blessing You pour out
I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say

Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name
When the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be'
Blessed be Your name

Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out
I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say

Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Lord, blessed be Your name.

Comment:

Is there anything in this song that a Muslim couldn't sing in good conscience?

Christmas I - "Let All Together Praise Our God" (CW #41)

1. The gift of the Son to us.
2. Christ's humble birth...

3. Taking on the nature of a servant...
4. The incarnation....
5. He serves that I a lord may be
A great exchange indeed!
Could Jesus' love do more for me
To help me in my need,
To help me in my need?
6. He opens Eden's closed door for us.

Comments:

This is one of my favorite hymns in the hymnal. It is an amazing proclamation of "Christ for us." The exuberant tune is excellent, lending itself to a wide variety of musical treatments. A jazz prelude for organ was played on this tune at Faith, Antioch last month. This old Lutheran beauty was still dazzling wearing a jazz dress.

4. "Open The Eyes Of My Heart" vs. "How Lovely Shines the Morning Star" (CW #79)

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see you
I want to see you

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see you
I want to see you

To see You high and lifted up
Shining in the light of Your glory
Pour out Your power and love
As we sing holy, holy, holy
Holy, holy, holy
I want to see you

Comments:

cf. Muslim comment above. Note the yearning to see God in his glory, invoking the experience of Isaiah in his 6th Chapter. Isaiah didn't enjoy the sight of the Lord until "his sin had been atoned for." The Gospel is in Isaiah 6. It isn't in this song. The poet wants his eyes opened. Sadly, there is no recognition on how a sinner's eyes are opened – the Means of Grace.

Epiphany - "How Lovely Shines the Morning Star" (CW #79)

1. Jesus the fulfillment of OT prophecy.
2. Christology and my connection to Christ.
3. O mighty Father, in your Son You loved me ere you had begun This ancient world's foundation. Your Son has made a friend of me, And when in spirit him I see, I joy in tribulation."
4. Christology plus eternal life through him.
5. Praise be to Christ who is with us until the end of the age.

Comments:

Jesus is my Savior, yesterday, today, forever. He is my joy in life in good times and in bad. In my humble opinion, this is the best hymn tune in the hymnal.

5. "Forever" vs. "To Jordan's River Came Our Lord" (CW #89)

Give thanks to the Lord
 Our God and King
 His love endures forever
 For He is good, He is above all things
 His love endures forever
 Sing praise, sing praise
 With a mighty hand
 and outstretched arm
 His love endures forever
 For the life that's been reborn
 His love endures forever
 Sing praise, sing praise
 Sing praise, sing praise

Yeah
 Forever God is faithful
 Forever God is strong
 Forever God is with us
 Forever
 Forever
 From the rising to the setting sun
 His love endures forever
 By the grace of God
 We will carry on
 His love endures forever
 Sing praise, sing praise
 Sing praise, sing praise
 Yeah
 Forever God is faithful
 Forever God is strong
 Forever God is with us
 Forever
 Forever
 Forever God is faithful
 Forever God is strong
 Forever God is with us
 Forever
 Forever
 Forever

Comment:
 cf. Muslim comment above.

Baptism of Our Lord - "To Jordan's River Came Our Lord" (CW #89)

1. Christology.
- 2-4. The events surrounding Jesus' baptism.
5. Christ is anointed to save us from Adam's fall.
6. Praise our saving Substitute. More Christology.

Comment:

This hymn is a powerful proclamation of Christ's person and his work. Once again, the Gospel predominates!