

# Our Lutheran Heritage in Worship

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We've become acquainted with the *Sampler*; another sampler of liturgies lies in the near future. It is important that we evaluate these efforts not only on the basis of "do I like them" but also "how do they meet the Lutheran understanding of worship." Thus the timing of this essay is valuable.

Last February some San Francisco Bay area WELS members met for a workshop on the *Sampler* at Apostles' Church in San Jose. A question under discussion was what makes worship liturgical? The comments of the group were all important observations, but none of them really touched the core of the issue. Each comment could just as well have applied to structuring a worship hour in a non-liturgical church. Hearing the discussion that day also highlights the need for a conference essay on the distinctiveness of Lutheran worship.

I have not avoided all musical or theological technical terms. If you don't understand something, please ask. So that voices from the past and present can speak directly for themselves I quote extensively. The sections "Lutheran Worship Today" are not in any order of importance, nor are they all the issues that deserve discussion. I give little attention to the sermon except as part of the liturgy itself.

Worship, by its most important definition, is far more than what happens in a structured hour on Sunday morning. It is not a ritual, but the entire faith, life and attitude of the Christian. Romans chapter 12 begins: "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship." And Hebrews 13:15,16 "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

Worship as an activity of a group of believers is a topic secondary to and flowing from worship as the entire life of a believer. Indeed, if the life of the believer is not worship, then participation in a worship service is the kind of hypocrisy God condemns through the prophet Amos (5:21,ff): "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies... Away with the noise of your songs... But let justice roll on like a river..." Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 to condemn such hypocrisy in the Pharisees: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught my men." Recall also John 4:24, "God is a spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Most of the New Testament references to worship speak of the believer's heart, faith and life. But our attention today will be on worship as the activity of a congregation. Even here we will not discuss all possible worship activities of a congregation; our focus is the Sunday morning worship highpoint.

## **WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND EARLY CHURCH**

Acts 2:42,46,47 "They (the believers) devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people..."

1 Corinthians 14:26, 40 “When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church... But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way (decently and in order, KJV).”

Colossians 3:15,16 “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you 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.”

From these passages we conclude that New Testament worship was somewhat informal. It showed a continuity with Jewish synagogue tradition. It made use of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; prayer; readings/sermons; the sacraments. These features would not at all seem foreign to us. But these features are largely common to all Christian worship. As we look into our Lutheran heritage in worship we see a great deal of emphasis on ritual and liturgy. What picture of these do we see in the New Testament?

The New Testament does not give us well-delineated liturgical forms which we might borrow or use as patterns. So any attempt to structure the form of liturgy on scriptural guidelines will not be successful.

One contemporary scholar writes: “There is no one New Testament view of early Christian worship. The liturgical picture of the early church is one of diversity rather than uniformity. The free operation of the Spirit within the church manifested itself in a variety of ways: preaching, prophecy, speaking in tongues, baptism, and intercessory prayer.” 1

While we don’t know much about worship among the apostles, we can gain a clearer picture of practices near the beginning of the second century. The *Didache* (*Instruction*, c. A.D. 100) states: “On the Lord’s Day meet and break bread and offer the Eucharist, after having first confessed your offences, so that your sacrifice [of praise?] may be pure.” 2

Justin’s *Apologia* (c. A.D. 150) describes worship in the church at Rome as gathering on Sunday, led by a “president” (as yet there seems to be no status distinction between *cleros* and *laos*), which begins with readings from the apostles or the writings of the prophets “as long as time permits” followed by a sermon by the president “urgently admonishing his hearers to practice these beautiful teachings in their lives.” “Then all stand up together and recite prayers.” Then bread and wine mixed with water are brought, the president offers prayers of thanksgiving “as much as in him lies,” and the people respond with “Amen.” The Eucharist is then eaten, and leftovers are gathered by the deacons to take to orphans, widows, and others who are not present.’ 3

When we look to the New Testament for guidance on structuring our worship today, we look also at the many passages that speak of Christian liberty. Because we are not an infant church, a persecuted church, or a church of the apostolic age, the concept of Christian liberty is more decisive for us than any possible reconstruction of what a worship service in Corinth may have been like.

With the above thoughts in mind we can conclude that the major worship practices found in the New Testament do not necessarily determine our worship practices. New Testament principles, yes; practices, no. Only the most general—and also thus most obvious—guidelines have an immediately useful application. (We will have scripture readings, sermons, prayers, hymns, and the sacraments.) While the distinction between practices and principles may seem unnecessary, it isn’t at all—both in our current context and throughout history. This spring I noticed a sermon topic advertisement in the Sacramento Bee: “First Century Church is Possible.”

I question not only if it is possible but also if it is desirable! Two explanations might account for an emphasis on the first century. One: some descendants of Zwingli and Calvin may still feel that Christian liberty only allows us worship resources (styles, instruments, etc.) which the Bible specifically endorses. Recall the destruction of organs in Zurich and the banning of singing—in church, but not home—of harmonized and contrapuntal music. Zwingli’s reform principles labeled practices not mentioned in the New Testament not as adiaphora but as impermissible. Two: in the face of theological liberalism many perceive simplicity—the way it was in Bible times—as evidence of theological conservatism.

It is distinctly unLutheran to expect or demand that our worship be “as close as possible” to early Christian worship.

Horace Hummel, professor at Concordia Seminary, calls this a “major attitudinal difference between Lutheranism and most of the rest of Protestantism.” “In Protestant circles there runs deep the myth of the ‘primitive simplicity’ of early Christian worship, which we should somehow feel obligated to maintain. Not only, however, does historical research indicate that such was not the case in the early church, but we insist that it would be beside the point, even if it were true. Very easily among these liturgical minimalists, one meets a legalism just as great as can also be possible, on the other end of the spectrum, on the part of liturgical maximalists. The Lutheran principle is not the legalistic one of ‘Whatever is not prescribed in the New Testament is proscribed,’ but the evangelical one of ‘Whatever is not explicitly proscribed is permitted.’ ” 4

Even though many of the New Testament specifics will not help us worship as Lutherans (Christians) today, two towering themes still stand out: justification by faith, and the twin emphases of Word and sacrament.

Hummel writes regarding justification by faith: “We like to call that doctrine ‘the article by which the church stands or falls,’ or that ‘when you say justification, you say just about everything about faith and worship.’ That is, in both teaching and practice of worship, we must strive to relate and to help others relate every facet to that pivotal doctrine.” 5

In spite of all the freedom we have regarding our worship a proper emphasis on Word and sacrament will be the hallmark of Lutheran worship. Since God is the active party in Word and sacrament much of true Christian worship (not just Lutheran worship) is God’s activity, not ours. He strengthens our faith and assures us of forgiveness through his Word and sacraments. We are rightly “passive” in this aspect of worship; we only receive from God. We become the active party in the other “half” of worship—our thanks and praise to God for what he does for us, and our prayer for his continued blessings.

Since one of the towering themes of Christian worship is Word and sacrament, the sermon cannot be **the** chief attraction in worship. God chooses to come to us through both Word and sacrament. Hummel has offered an interesting criticism: “We have tended to pit Word **against** sacrament... The evidence is plain in both our preaching and our piety. Just note how infrequently the sacraments are even mentioned in the sermon—and if at all, probably only in a few clichés... Even on Sundays when Communion is celebrated or a baptism is performed, chances are nothing will be made of it sermonically. They’re just there!... Not surprisingly the congregation tends sometimes almost to begrudge the few extra moments of its time demanded by the sacraments or to be motivated to participation in them by little more than a sense of obedience or tradition.” 6

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century this was an active concern too, due in part to the anti-sacramental feelings of the Pietists. The dogmatician Grossgebauer criticized people's way of saying that "they have been present **at the sermon.**" 7

### **WORSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM THE REFORMATION**

In the *Formula Missae... (An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg, 1523)* Luther wrote regarding worship innovations: "I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one, and more so because of the fickle and fastidious spirits who rush in like unclean swine without faith or reason, and who delight only in novelty and tire of it as quickly, when it has worn off... But since there is hope now that the hearts of many have been enlightened and strengthened by the grace of God, and since the cause of the kingdom of Christ demands that at long last offenses should be removed from it, we must dare something in the name of Christ..." 8

We've been working with the *Sampler* for almost half a year now. Have we shown a similar spirit, although under vastly different pastoral, doctrinal, ecclesiastical circumstances? I think yes. There has been patience with those who desire no change; hymnal revision in our synod has been under discussion since 1953—and authorized since 1983. Our pastors and worship leaders also tend to avoid "novelty" which seems only faddish.

Luther's *Formula Missae* discusses in detail the parts of the liturgy and his suggestions for a cleansed, Lutheran use. During Lent, "tracts" consisting of as many as thirteen verses had taken the place of the shorter gradual. Luther: "But the Quadragesima graduals and others like them that exceed two verses may be sung at home by whoever wants them. In church we do not want to quench the spirit of the faithful with tedium." 9

New Testament principles stress Christian liberty; so did Luther. "Even if other people make use of different rites, let no one despise the other, but every man think the same... And let us approve each other's rites lest schisms and sects should result from this diversity in rites..." 10

Luther's preface to his German Mass (*Deutsche Messe und ordnung Gottis diensts, 1525*) also contains a caveat regarding Christian liberty. "In the first place, I would kindly and for God's sake request all those who see this order of service or desire to follow it: Do not make it a rigid law to bind or entangle anyone's conscience, but use it in Christian liberty as long, when, where, and how you find it to be practical and useful." 11

In *A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians Concerning Public Worship and Concord, 1525*, he wrote: "Now even though external rites and orders — such as masses, singing, reading, baptizing—add nothing to salvation, yet it is unchristian to quarrel over such things and thereby to confuse the common people. We should consider the edification of the lay folk more important than our own ideas and opinions. Therefore, I pray all of you, my dear sirs, let each one surrender his own opinions and get together in a friendly way and come to a common decision about these external matters, so that there will be one uniform practice throughout your district instead of disorder—one thing being done here and another there—lest the common people get confused and discouraged... When you hold mass, sing and read uniformly, according to a common order—the same in one place as in another—because you see that the people want and need it and you wish to edify rather than confuse them... If you yourselves have no need of such uniformity, thank God. But the people need it." 12 While Luther values Christian liberty, he also wants to avoid confusion. Lest we apply these words too automatically to our situation, remember that worship for the people of his day had been deadeningly uniform. Recall modern Catholics' consternation when the mass was no longer in Latin (the 1960s) and you will

understand Luther's pastoral concern. Nevertheless, you cannot read his writings and miss his emphasis on the value of a common liturgy.

The *Augsburg Confession*, Article VII says: "It is not necessary that human traditions, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should everywhere be alike." This is not to say that some continuity is not desirable, only that it ought not be legalistically enforced. It is nice to be able to visit relatives half way across the country and feel at home in the worship, but it is also appropriate for the inner city congregation or mission congregation to vary from the century-old, German, rural congregation.

Article XXIV of the *Augsburg Confession* gives insight into the Reformation concept of hymnody: "German hymns are sung in addition to the Latin responses **for the instruction** and exercise of the people."

A sermon by Johannes Brenz (d. 1570) shows a similar concept. "In accordance with the example given by the Apostle Paul (Eph. 5:19), the singing of hymns has been understood and regarded as a form of preaching, a proclamation of the word of God." 13

The *Formula of Concord*, Article X is "Church Usages, Called Adiaphora or Indifferent Things." It shows that it is wrong to observe adiaphorous ceremonies "when confession and offense are involved," especially when "the enemies of the Gospel" were insisting on the use of certain ceremonies.

The *Apology*, Article XXIV, "The Mass," carefully shows the distinction between eucharistic and propitiatory sacrifice.

Luther often referred to music as a "gift from god." In a recent pamphlet, *Music in Lutheran Worship*, Carl Schalk writes: "In emphasizing music as God's—not man's—creation and as God's gift to man to be used in His praise and proclamation, and in stressing particularly the royal priesthood of all believers, Luther laid the foundation for the involvement of every Christian — congregation, choir, composer, instrumentalists—in corporate praise at the highest level of ability. In seeing all of music as under God's redemptive hand, Luther underscored the freedom of the Christian to use all of music in the proclamation of the Gospel. The music that developed in this tradition is eloquent testimony to the fact that the church's musicians and its people found that Luther's views provided a healthy and wholesome context in which to work, to sing, and to make music in praise of God. Luther encouraged the most sophisticated forms of the music of his day— Gregorian chant and classical polyphony—to be taught to the young and sung in church together with the simple congregational chorales... The Lutheran reformers' understanding of music as a gift of God...encouraged the reciprocal interaction of simple congregational song and art music of the most sophisticated kind. A flourishing tradition of church music was the happy result." 14

The first hymnal published under Luther's guidance, the *Geistliche Gesangbuechlein* (*Spiritual Hymnbooklet*), underscores this emphasis on sophistication. This book was not at all a hymnbook as we think of hymnbooks; it was a collection of polyphonic motets for the choir—music of a complexity far beyond our typical church choirs.

Luther's emphasis on music and the youth can easily be misunderstood. Here is one his oft quoted statements: "I greatly desire that youth, which, after all, should and must be trained in music and other proper arts, might have something whereby it might be weaned from the love ballads and the sex songs and, instead of these, learn something beneficial..." 15 Too often the challenge we face is getting the youth to sing at all—to sing anything for worship. For Luther the challenge wasn't getting them to sing; it was getting them to sing good, **artistic**, sacred music. The words quoted above are from Luther's preface to that 1524 collection of difficult five-part

choir motets. The sopranos and altos who sang that music were boys. The same paragraph in that preface also states: “I would like to see all the **arts**, especially music, used in the service of Him who gave and made them.” 16

We turn our attention now to applying some of the Reformation insights to our situation.

### **LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY—ARTISTIC, SOPHISTICATED**

Thinking especially about this emphasis on sophistication, how do we compare today? VBS may be the proper place for simple children’s songs. The choral program of an established parochial school can do better. (But obviously not overnight.) Does an effort to choose music that is “fun” for the children neglect music of quality? It doesn’t have to. Can Bach be fun for children? Absolutely!

For an opposite conclusion, consider this from a LC-MS publication, *Evangelism*. Quoting Luther from his *German Mass*, the author writes: “Luther says public worship should be geared to the young Christian and potential Christian.” 17 If our current understanding of “geared toward the young” means “what most readily appeals,” Luther would not agree. In the same *German Mass* Luther argues for the retention of Latin “for the sake of the youth.” Why? I wasn’t particularly excited about Latin as a teenager. Luther’s goal for youth, in part, was to provide them with a broad education linguistically and to pass on the artistic musical heritage which clothed sacred Latin texts.

Latin was still in use in Leipzig in Bach’s day, 1750. In 1628 a dogmatician’s defense of this practice stated: “If anyone objects to the custom of our churches, where sometimes, especially on solemn festivals, collects and public prayers and hymns are heard in the Latin idiom, he must know that this does not happen everywhere, much less in the country, but only in the larger cities, where our youth study languages...” 18

We in WELS are probably feeling stronger inclinations for change to better appeal to youth and the unchurched. It is interesting that some of the “evangelical” churches—which have always emphasized appeal — are coming closer to traditional Lutheran ideals. (For some interesting reading in this area, see books by Robert Webber, a professor at Wheaton College: *Worship is a Verb; Worship Old and New; Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*.)

Sophisticated music may cause the average listener to have difficulty following the text, the message. It is not uncommon in great sacred music to have two texts being sung at once, or different voices in the choir singing the same text at different times (*Hallelujah Chorus*). Printing the text to aid the listener is not only a modern concession to bad acoustics, poorer choirs, or a concert setting; it is also what J.S. Bach did for the parishioners of Leipzig. “Service folders” containing the texts of his cantatas were available for the worshipers. I mention this because of the common criticism that sophisticated music is inherently too complex for a worship setting. Regarding a printed help for the listener, Erik Routley, writes, “The words of an anthem should be placed before the worshiper on paper. This is not to insult the choir’s diction. It is to give the unmusical person a visual image of the idea that the choir is setting to music. In any Word-oriented community that is a plain necessity.” 19

Following the artistry of composition, e.g. fugue, may also be beyond some listeners, but one does not need the composer’s awareness of musical form to be able to find praise or edification in music.

### **LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY— ROLES: PASTOR, CONGREGATION, CHOIR, INSTRUMENTS**

Kierkegaard has used the analogy of stage and theater to help us understand our roles in worship. Too often people perceive worship as a situation in which the pastor, choir and organist are the “actors” and the congregation is the audience. An emphasis on the pastor as a personality rather than a spokesman and perception of music as a concert add to the misunderstanding. Paul takes the spotlight off of the preacher’s person by emphasizing personal humility: “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Co 4:7).” And “I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom (1 Co 2: 1).”

In the sacrificial dimension of true Christian worship the people are “actors”; pastor, instruments and choir are “prompters”—as well as “actors”; God is the “audience” to whom the presentation is directed. In the sacramental dimension of worship it doesn’t quite work to say God is the actor and we are the audience, unless what we receive from God is parallel to tragic catharsis in theater. Perhaps the analogy of theater doesn’t work for the sacramental dimension. A different analogy suggests that God is the doctor and we are patients. Through Word and sacrament he brings us healing.

The role of pastor, instruments and choir changes in the sacramental dimension. They are no longer prompters assisting the people in their praise of God. Now they are mouthpieces (stand-ins?) for the Actor himself as they proclaim his Word. In the medical analogy they would be all the attending staff who assist the doctor in care of the patient.

Commenting on Kierkegaard’s analogy about the sacrificial dimension, Ben Patterson, a Presbyterian pastor in Irvine, writes, “It is bad enough to have the prompters doing what the performer ought to be doing. But it is blasphemy for the performer to presume to play the part of the audience—for that is to presume to stand in the place that only God can occupy. Most Christian congregations are functional blasphemers in that they come to Sunday morning worship as an audience.” 20

Of course, much of these ideals are unknown to some worshipers due both to our religious culture and to lack of proper education within the parish. To illustrate we ask Why do congregations expect to hear organ music as they arrive. The late Dr. Nathaniel Micklem said that music does for nonCatholics what incense does for Catholics—an impact on one of the senses reminds people where they are. 21 But the Lutheran understanding of the organ’s role has always included a larger purpose. The prelude is not meant to be sacred Muzak, even though many perceive it as such. The ideal prelude will be based on the opening hymn (or on another hymn of the service.) The Lutheran attitude has been that the worshiper worships through or along with the organ— either by calling to mind the thoughts of the hymn on which the prelude is based (the sacramental dimension), or simply by finding spiritual joy in the music (praise, penitence, reflection—the sacrificial dimension). Such music need not always be quiet. Full organ is not inappropriate. What about the quiet atmosphere for prayer before worship? That is important too, but worshipers should be flexible enough to allow the organ to fulfill its role. Maybe my grandmother’s approach was good; she often went to church half an hour early.

For the prelude to have a functional, liturgical role in the worship, noisy visiting is an obvious hindrance. The well-known lines apply: “Before the service talk to God; during the service let God talk to you; after the service talk to each other.” (Of course, we talk to God during the service too.) Have you ever heard an organist complain that after the service (when louder music is more common) the people “rudely” talk at a loud volume? The famous organist Paul Manz once commented that, after the service, it’s right for the people of God to visit; the organ should pipe down. Some churches offer a postlude as part of the worship before the ushers

begin dismissing the people. While this may not be an ideal solution, neither is an approach that approximates “loud, sacred Muzak for exiting.”

One of the most distinctively Lutheran ways in which the choir carried out its role was the practice of alternating hymn stanzas with the congregation, a practice with roots in the Old Testament psalms. In Luther’s day you wouldn’t likely have heard six stanzas in a row — monotonously identical. Alternation became the Lutheran practice with congregation, choir(s), instruments, organ, soloist all “taking their turn.” The practice of varied organ accompaniments fits this approach but didn’t occur in Luther’s day. The organ wasn’t used for accompanying hymns until the middle of the seventeenth century.

The Pietists objected strenuously to the practice of alternation singing. “The practice of alternation in hymn presentation is very disturbing to devotion. The attention of the congregation is constantly being diverted and directed to subordinate matters. By such ‘liturgical’ interpolations the entire service increasingly becomes a strenuous concert performance, little conducive to composure within.” 22 The Pietists, because of a false theology, were the liturgical minimalists of their day. One of the Lutheran dogmaticians felt quite differently: “There is some mystery of nature about this alternative singing. For when I always sing with the crowd, I hear myself no more than the others and grow weary through the constant strain; I am not encouraged and fired by the others. But if I can with Augustine sing in the congregation in such a way that I pause a while, take a breath, and hear the other words of the other chorus, my spirit is the more quickened by the beautiful words. Thus is fulfilled what Paul urged: ‘Speak to one another in psalms.’ ” 23

The Pietists could be severely critical of organs too. “If some of those first Christians should rise, visit our assemblies, and hear such a roaring organ together with so many instruments, I do not believe that they would recognize us as Christians...” 24 I wonder what such a critic would have said about the Jerusalem Temple dedication: “All the Levites who were musicians...stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord (2 Ch 5:12).”

### **LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY—QUALITY**

Psalms 33:3 is a good worship-musician’s verse: “Sing to the Lord a new song; play **skillfully** and shout for joy.”

The dogmaticians showed a concern for quality — in architecture, for example. “Christian devotion does not forbid, but rather suggests, that church edifices are built imposingly, finished beautifully, adorned with historical paintings and statues, and also kept neat and clean, in honor of the divine service.” “As Christianity spread, pious rulers, emperors, kings, princes and lords also erected beautiful and costly basilicas, churches, and chapels and adorned them splendidly... Abuse cannot and must not abolish the right use of ecclesiastical art.” 25

Oliver C. Rupprecht offers the following on quality: “The reason why our offerings—speech and song among them—are to be as good as possible is that we are to be reminded of the power and the glory of belonging to the great God of heaven and earth. Specifically, our songs are to be as suggestive of divine glory as possible so that we become accustomed to thinking about God as He really is—the God of unlimited power... Are we ready...to strive for the best because God deserves it and because we need it?” 26

How well are we doing in the area of quality? I believe the quality level of music in WELS churches is not very healthy. This in part is due to “concentrating on other things.” It comes in part from the inherent (and acceptable) limitations of size in smaller congregations. It



comes also from the denominational fragmentation of our day that would have astounded a Lutheran prince of 1540 (*cuius regio, eius religio*—“If you run the country, you pick the church.”) or a Leipzig merchant of 1740. But I believe the primary reason is this: “we’re doing our best; it’s to God’s glory; and that’s good enough.”

If the debate about paying organists enters here, let me say only this: Far more than volunteer effort is necessary to plan, coordinate and carryout an effective, integrated, and quality worship-music program. I’m thinking especially of the church with more than one choir (youth, Sunday School, elementary school, adult, polyphonic), a school, potential instrumentalists, soloists, trios, etc. Luther’s comments on music frequently mention the duty of local princes to provide their churches and schools with professional musicians or cantors.

Yes, it is true that they who worship God must do so in spirit and in truth. But that’s not the end of the conversation. Every pastor and musician involved in the worship of God’s people needs to remember an insight aptly put by C.S. Lewis: “All things that edify glorify, but not all things that glorify edify.” The unprepared or not-skilled-enough organist who struggles with Bach may glorify God but does not edify the congregation. The choir attempting music beyond its grasp may glorify God but does not edify the listener. Actually, a choir or musician struggling with difficult music may be displaying pride rather than glorifying God.

Consider this comment from the *Report of the Committee on Church Music* to the 1930 convention of the ULCA: “...nor should choirs attempt to sing anthems that are beyond their ability. If an anthem is to edify it is far better to sing a simple one well than to mutilate a more difficult one.” 27

Of course, in this discussion we grant room for the inevitable lapses that come from the challenge of “live” music. More than one famous organist has slipped in public performance. But if our theology/philosophy about quality only says “trying our best is good enough” and not also “we will do what it takes to encourage the highest standards,” we have discarded one of Luther’s views about worship.

What about organs? Harald Vogel, Director of the North German Organ Academy, recently lectured at California State University, Chico. He referred to the explosion of organ building in the last half of the seventeenth century, a boom that coincided with the beginning of using organs to accompany hymn singing. Small churches too acquired significant instruments. Vogel pointed out that organs in that culture cost six to eight times what they do in ours, a small instrument then having the value of a sixty-acre farm.

Routley’s *Church Music and the Christian Faith* makes many points about quality. In a chapter on beauty, Routley writes: “We may recall the remarkable fact that a certain kind of zeal for souls is accompanied by what sensitive people regard as a debased taste in music and ecclesiastical decor. And with all that, we must face the persistent generosity with which the church has for many generations now offered hospitality to the second-rate.” 28

### **LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY RETENTION / ADAPTATION**

Luther said, “*Quod bonum est, tenebimus*; Let us hold on to whatever is good.” Schalk comments: “Luther’s view, which sought to retain from the past all that was useful, rejecting only what could not be retained in good conscience, was no flight into a wistful nostalgia; it was rather a pastorally responsible attempt to demonstrate the continuity and unity of Lutheranism with all of Christendom.” 29

Another recent comment: “We have a debt to the past: to hold on to that which is good. We have a debt to the present: to meet the needs of our age, and place, and condition. We have a responsibility to the future: to hand on the treasures of the church, and by Word and sacrament to bind people to their God through Jesus Christ, and to forge strong bands of faith and worship, and of love and devotion.” 30

Luther’s German Mass, as described above, was an effort to meet the needs of the smaller country parishes. We have a parallel need today which is perhaps even greater. An exploratory mission is not only small; it is also largely unfamiliar with our liturgies. Mission congregations following the ideas of simplification and adaptation in the German Mass will be true to the Lutheran (biblical) understanding of worship as long as other distinctive emphases are retained, most importantly emphases on justification, the theocentric (God-centered), the objective, and the congregational.

In his remarkably sensitive and evangelical essay Rupprecht asks, “How can we succeed in the modern struggle for standards in religious music and in an endeavor to provide the best?... Ironically enough, a primary procedure may be recognition of the fact that the best is not always obtainable, or attainable. Some time ago a Bach organist and champion of the Lutheran chorale served for about six weeks on a special assignment in western New York, ‘presiding’ at a little reed organ while accompanying the singing of revivalistic and Gospel hymns. When asked, subsequently, how he felt about the experience, he replied: ‘I enjoyed every minute of it.’ Inconsistent? Not at all! Here was the natural— inevitable—outcome of genuine, well-balanced sensitivity. Although passionately in love with great church music and firmly devoted to its use at every possible opportunity, this church musician refused to become a fanatic... He knew that he must be sensitive, not only to the excellence of materials, but also—and primarily—to the capacities of specific human beings. Their needs must be his continuing and controlling concern. The use of better and richer and more uplifting materials must wait until the people were ready for them.” “One of the best rules is expressed in the words: ‘Meet the people where they are (at their own level) [Rupprecht’s parentheses] but don’t leave them there.’ Try to lead them to richer pastures. But don’t force or push or rush them into new areas.” 31

### **LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY— THEOCENTRIC, OBJECTIVE**

Lutheran worship — for sound theological reasons—avoids subjectivism. This emphasis has its foundation in the doctrine of justification by faith, the article by which the church—and its worship—stands or falls. Lutheran worship stresses the objective presence, power and grace of God. Far more important than my subjective feeling about being saved is God’s objective promise which establishes my salvation. More important than reinforcing my feelings is reinforcing an awareness of God’s promises. The proclamation of the Word (through sermon, lessons, and music by choir and in hymns) and the use of the sacraments reinforce the objective, sacramental dimension of worship.

While the Lutheran reformers spoke strongly against any faithless benefit in the sacraments and worship, they did not fall guilty of the other extreme—subjectivism, an over-emphasis on the feelings or response of the individual worshiper. “It is no accident that the typical Protestant construction of Lutheran sacramentology is to label it ‘magical’—nor is it accidental that that is also the typical construction of the secularist. We know the contours of that subjectivist, Protestant worship only too well: not only not sacramental, but in hymns, prayers, even sermons highlighting the worshiper and his ‘faith’ (as human response and virtue) so much

that the object of faith is often lost in the dust. I often marvel that some of our pastors who are very aware of that subjectivist danger in the realm of abstract theology cannot apparently see that accent on liturgy and sacraments is a major part of our arsenal.” 32

In an article titled *Confessional Music*, Daniel Reuning contrasts “body” and “mind” music. The enthusiast party, charismatics of Luther’s day, used body music “because the ‘worship service’ now featured hit-parade, theatre, and entertainment music, designed for dancing and hand-clapping, and arousing outward emotional reactions in people.” This was a natural development “because the dominant concern of the enthusiast’s theology was with visible, yet very subjective, manifestations of the faith... Thus, to use music designed specifically to produce physical and outward emotional reactions was exactly what the enthusiasts needed to support their worship.” Reuning then contrasts the Lutheran approach: “The confessional party (followers of Luther), most interested in the mind, learning, emotions controlled by conviction, and the response of the heart, chose to follow quite a different musical direction than the outwardly and excessively emotional enthusiasts... Rather than employing an idiom that was designed to entertain and elicit bodily, outward, superficial responses, they used music to alert the mind to the meaning of the text,... an idiom designed to deal interpretatively with the text, a music that preached... Mind-music is written to move the mind and heart, inwardly and intellectually, in a deep-seated response to the text —by engaging the materials of music to interpret, clarify and reinforce the meaning of words—and is most often associated with education and worship.” Notice how this understanding of music’s role does not ignore emotions. 33

Evangelical authors have also sounded warnings regarding musical trends and tastes in worship. Harold Best, a colleague of Robert Webber and Director of the Conservatory of Music at Wheaton College, writes: “In confusing relevance with immediacy and communication with imitation, we have reduced Christianity and what we mistakenly call Christian music to the level of market research and audience response.” 34 Lutheran worship gives an objective, proclamatory character also to its music. Hymnody and choral music are first a communication (proclamation) of God’s Word and second a vehicle for our response. Choirs didn’t just sing “songs”; they sang the Word itself. In 1619, 1620 and 1621 three books of *Sunday Gospel Parables (Sonntagliche Evangelische Sprueche)* by Melchior Vulpus were published. Many of our hymns, of course, are paraphrases of biblical texts. Worshipers would benefit from a greater consciousness of the proclamation/response difference in music. For a modern (but sometimes liberal) example of hymns which sing the gospel lessons see *New Hymns for the Lectionary*, Oxford Press. A sample is included in the Appendix: “These Things Did Thomas Count as Real.” It can also be sung to familiar melodies. Copyright permission is available for these hymns; for St. Mark’s reproducing 350 copies in a service folder, the fee is \$3.50 per use. The other hymn in the Appendix, “Christ, Upon the Mountain Peak,” is from *Hymnal Supplement* published by Agape. Again not all the hymns will be useable. The one I’ve included has a very strange melody. I first encountered it at a workshop where the leader called it a “mysterious tune for a mysterious event.” He also said, “If Methodists can sing this, anybody can.” I doubt it; or at least the effort may not be worth it. Since Transfiguration music is not so common, we used this as a solo at St. Mark’s.

I believe that our Synod (and American Christianity in general) has a need far greater than variety of worship formats or more and different styles of hymns. The greater need is realization that worship is primarily theocentric, something the congregation does for God and something God does for the believer. The most unChristian view sees worship as something we

do to gain God's favor or placate his wrath. The least spiritual view sees worship as something the minister (organist, hymnal revision committee, etc.) does to "catch the interest of the worshippers." This is the entertainment approach to worship. Other "spiritual" views are unscriptural if they replace the theocentric emphasis as the primary reality of worship. These other spiritual views include emotionalism as the goal of worship, and going to church first for the good feeling it gives and not to worship God.

Emphasizing the theocentric focus is our greatest need because someone without a proper understanding of worship may perceive even the most distinctively Lutheran worship service as sacred entertainment. With the frequent mention of Bach as a culmination of Lutheran worship, it's important to note that his music, e.g. an entire cantata, is not necessarily an ideal model for today—certainly not in a WEF, but probably not in a 1000 member parish either. Because some of his music is so complex and sophisticated, it may be perceived as highbrow entertainment rather than the proclamation/response that worship ought to be. Folksy entertainment is not worship; neither is highbrow. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutherans addressed this issue too, as the following questions from 1671 indicate: "Whether in church, before or after the sermon, you really exercised your devotion with the Christian congregation and helped to sing the spiritual songs and hymns of praise, or read in your prayer book during the playing of the organ; or whether you entertained other thoughts, gazed at the organ loft, and were too lazy to open your mouth in the praise of God. Whether you attended church only for the sake of the beautiful music and organ playing; and whether you visited now this parish church and now that because you knew that a choir would be there and good music would be heard", 35

A caution against misplaced entertainment is implicit in the New Testament view of worship; it is also explicit in Augustine in his *Confessions*: "I am inclined to approve the custom of singing in church. Nevertheless when it happens that I am more moved by the song than the thing which is sung [the text, the message], I confess that I sin in a manner deserving of punishment, and then I should rather not hear the singing." Augustine is perhaps too harsh on himself?

Debate about proper styles of music for Lutheran worship has been with us for centuries now. The debate exists partly because of the tension between gospel freedom and the need for theocentric worship. More significantly the debate exists because of human nature's innate tendency to look for certainty elsewhere than in God's justification. In 1950 (before Chuck Berry?) Walter Buszin of Concordia Seminary wrote: "It is tragic that in some of our Sunday schools the youth of our Church is being habituated along revivalistic lines and is exposed not to the fine hymnody and other excellent worship materials of the Christian Church, but to a type of hymnody and worship expression which...appeal to primitive and sensuous instincts..." 36

His concern is multi-faceted. An inappropriate style of music may signal a loss of worship's objective focus; it may encourage emotionalism. But his concern is also that we keep viewing God as heaven's king and not only as loving father. "Church history proves that those church bodies have fared best in the long run which have conducted a decent type of worship, a type of worship which takes not only the father-son relationship between God and His people into consideration, but which likewise shows due regard for the holiness and majesty of God. We owe God not only our love, but also our respect; our worship life should indicate this, also while we are still in our youth." 37

Robert Webber has distilled nine proposals from a recent class of seventy students. We consider two related to our theocentric, objective concern. "**#4. Orient worship toward God rather than human beings.** Many students felt that the worship of their church was more

oriented toward human beings and their experience than toward God. They pointed to the current trend in Christian music that emphasized a near narcissistic self-interest and to the entertainment approach in worship that attracts the crowds but fails to lead them into the praise of God's person and work. For this reason more care should be given to the planning of the service so that a vertical focus be regained. This could be accomplished by the use of more God-oriented hymns, the singing of psalms..."

**"#5. Restore a sense of awe and reverence, mystery and transcendence.** It was agreed that a frivolous attitude too frequently appears in the social chit-chat before the service, in overextended announcements, and in too casual an atmosphere projected by the minister. The key to changing this lies in the attitude and actions of the minister. The demeanor of his voice and body language can create a sense of the holy. The congregation must then follow his lead and act with a sense of hushed silence, a reverential awe, an appropriate fear..." 38

In this theme of theocentric worship we face a great challenge. Our Agenda Committee suggested that this essay "present practical advice on developing worship services that are Lutheran in nature and meaningful to both the church and unchurched alike." What kind of worship service is meaningful to the unchurched? Those with linguistic training might call this an oxymoron, a juxtaposition of contradictory ideas. How can the unchurched—as part of their spiritual searching — evaluate worship without a proper understanding of worship?

But I think I know what the Agenda Committee intends. This essay at various points offers suggestions, but beware of the pitfalls. Lutheran worship (traditionally, historically, confessionally) has been the act and the event of the "already converted"; **Christians** gather to worship. Lutheran churches do not have altar calls partly because Lutheran worship is not meant to be the forum in which unbelievers are converted. (Of course, some do first come to believe the gospel through the reading of Scripture or sermon; pastors do include "specific gospel" in every sermon. Luther emphasized this point too in a climate which required so much reteaching of Christianity.)

Another pitfall in appealing to the unchurched sees one of its most questionable outcomes in the theology and worship of the Crystal Cathedral. We are "poor miserable sinners," and the sensitivities of the unchurched dare not change that emphasis. I believe this also applies to the music of worship. A desire for "happy" music dare not remove music that is appropriate for the many-faceted biblical emphasis on sin.

Of course there is a middle ground here. We know that terms like Collect, Introit, Quinquagesima, and "Dominus regit me" (The Lord is my Shepherd) can be barriers. The same is true of "superfluity of naughtiness" (James 1:21, KJV). So we revise and update. These terms neither attract the unchurched, nor edify the majority of current members, nor meet any distinctively Lutheran need in worship.

My concern is that, in our desire to appeal to the unchurched, we do not minimize the theocentric character of our worship. When a visitor says (as I've been told more than once) that he isn't interested in my church because it's too formal, is the problem with the formality or the visitor's conception of what ideal worship should be? If the greatest influence on the religious tastes of today's culture is "generic American protestantism" or the "successful evangelical movement," is it any surprise that some church-shoppers find Lutheran worship too formal?

**LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY—  
INTEGRATED INTO CHURCH YEAR**

When we call Lutheran worship liturgical, we don't mean only that it is more or less formal, or that it has certain repetitive features. We mean also that it is woven into the church year. Lutheran preaching is liturgical preaching; it's not based on whatever topic or whim may come up. It's based on one of the readings for the Sunday, "thoroughly mortised into the church year" (Hummel). Yet I have heard of pastors who use one lectionary as the basis for the scripture lessons, another for their sermons. While this practice certainly has the kind of order that allows sermons to cover "the whole counsel of God," it does not permit the sermon — except by coincidence—to be an integrated part of the liturgy.

It's interesting to study how closely Bach and his pastors worked together. Here's an example of an integrated sermon and cantata on Romans 1:16,17: "Deyling had preached a sermon in two parts: *'The Testimony of the Apostle Paul Regarding the Pure Evangelical Doctrine of the Faith, As he Testified (1) Regarding Its Saving Power; (2) Regarding Its Excellent Contents.'* The second section of the cantata, presented after the sermon, immediately referred to the sermon, for at first the recitative sang the praises of the 'excellent contents' of the 'pure evangelical doctrine of faith:' 'Lord, if Thy Gospel, the heavenly doctrine, had not been our consolation, distress and death would have overwhelmed us completely...' And then followed an aria that took up especially the first part of the sermon: 'Blest are we through the Word; blest are we through believing... ' " 39

The great hymnologist, Erik Routley, has addressed the issue of pastor and musicians working for an integrated service from a primarily British perspective. "Until the discipline of decent neighborliness is accepted by the clergy, until they are content with preaching from Scripture instead of preaching on topics, until they are, moreover, content to be part of the larger community of the church sufficiently to follow a common lectionary, the choirmaster's job remains chaotic and religiously frustrated. It is not enough to encourage choirmasters to make the best of this situation. Making the best of it perpetuates it. No, they should rebel [?], and insist that the clergy do their work properly. They should be as discontented with the confusion produced by clerical perversity as they have a right to be with their personal stipends..." 40

How does this apply to the WELS? Pastors, don't you dare wait until Thursday to pick your hymns. It's not fair to organists, choirs, or worshipers. You really ought to do some of that planning far enough in advance for organist and choir director to plan, purchase, and learn/teach appropriate music. You don't need theme and parts a month in advance, but texts for the service and key hymns? Yes, far more than a month in advance! True, some of your musicians may not know how to operate with such a system. Help them learn how. Learn, how together.

Our Agenda Committee suggested as one area of inquiry "The method and advantages of diverging from the page 5 and 15 liturgy." In my opinion one of the most creative, appealing — and Lutheran — ways of diverging comes from "Creative Communications for the Parish." See the Appendix. (You may purchase the right to reproduce these liturgies instead of buying the cards. I think the fee is \$10 per year per liturgy.) These communion liturgies do an excellent job of maintaining the logic and the historic structure of the communion service while at the same time allowing a seasonal variation. Notice especially that the *Preface, Sanctus, Agnus Dei* and *Nunc dimittis* are still present as hymn stanzas. This is parallel to what Luther did in preparing his *German Mass*. But these liturgies not only reflect the textual essence of traditional liturgical portions, they also reflect a specific season of the church year. I think the value of such an approach is reciprocal: the flow of the traditional liturgy gives meaning to the variation, and vice versa.

Another excellent resource for integrating the worship service is *Proclaim, A Guide for Planning Liturgy and Music*. A sample of suggested music for tomorrow's gospel lesson is in the Appendix. This resource also includes a few paragraphs on the theme of each Sunday, hymn suggestions and introduction for each major part of the church year. Some public domain hymns are also given. We used the following during Lent at St. Mark's in place of "Glory Be to God on High" (which Lutheran custom omits during Lent).

(Tune of 558, Tallis' Canon)

Teach us through self-control to find  
In body and in heart and mind  
A holy use of all you give  
That we in richer joy may live.

Thereby for us this Lent may be  
A time of growth in sanctity,  
A time of walking in your ways,  
Throughout its holy forty days.

Let all the world from shore to shore  
You, gracious Trinity adore;  
And may these forty days of Lent  
In penitence and praise be spent.

### **LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY— EVOLVING?**

The style and structure of Lutheran worship in America has evolved greatly since Lutherans settled by the Delaware River in 1638. The frontier immigrant experience saw an obvious sparseness and simplicity in worship. These styles at times have become their own "tradition." Various factors have influenced the evolution of Lutheran worship until today.

The ethnic and language struggles helped cure a parochial and inward-looking mentality. To be serious about Christ's mission to all people, we move not only beyond the German language but also beyond translations of German hymns. We also move beyond the venerable KJV when better choices are available.

The theological scholarship of liturgical revival also affected the form of Lutheran worship. "Liturgical revival" is not a red-flag synonym for "high church" or Catholic. Many of the concerns addressed in the early part of this century would not go ignored by anyone in the WELS today.

Ecumenical influence (in the good sense) has acquainted us especially with the hymns of other Christians. A contemporary hymnal will be cosmopolitan even more so than a 1941 hymnal. We have many useful discoveries to make, such as the uniquely American hymn style of a book like *Southern Harmony*. Lutheran worship has historically been ecumenical in that it hasn't chosen to abandon the cumulative experience of centuries and go its own isolated way, as sectarian churches did.

What is the biggest influence shaping Lutheran worship today? It might be (or yet become) the sociological research of the church growth movement. We want to know what works, what reaches people—in evangelism methods, in worship, in everything. While serving

in El Paso I wrote to Win Arn, a leader in the Protestant church growth movement, about adding a second Sunday service. He responded in part that the second service ought to have an entirely different flavor. If one service is traditional, the other ought to be contemporary. Another writer in the church growth field has urged Lutherans in their worship life to “stay as you are” and to expect growth because of it. He doesn’t want to see Lutherans become less distinguishable from other Protestants. Lutheran worship “fills a need” for a certain “market segment.” For us an important question to ask the sociological approach is not only does it work, but also is it soundly biblical. It is also perhaps unfortunate—with reference to the hymnal project — that New Mode / Evangelism-Outreach mission work is only in its infancy among us. Ten years of experience and a broad base of input would be invaluable for preparing a new hymnal.

The evolution of Lutheran worship will probably remain at a conservative pace, just as it was with Luther. We need a healthy respect for tradition (while being open to innovation). One reason for that respect is evident in a comment by the preceptor of Coventry Cathedral. He says that the church’s worship is “a conversation which began long before you were born and will continue long after you are dead...” Routley says that the great church musician “listens to the conversation already going on before joining in it.” 41

### **LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY— ODDS AND ENDS**

1. What will new technologies mean for Lutheran worship? Copy machines have already allowed mission congregations to use a worship format which is rich and full and still easy to follow. Computers expand this potential even more. Would it be practical manually to type variety Sunday after Sunday — with or without a secretary? Desktop publishing—including music engraving—has opened up even greater possibilities.

2. Lutheran worship has always expressed strong opinions on adiaphora. It is instructive to realize that our use of the term adiaphora (indifferent things; items not decided by the Word) is much broader than it was for the early Lutherans. The following comment regarding the 17<sup>th</sup> century dogmatists shows this. “Strictly speaking, however, the concept of the adiaphora...concerns only matters liturgical. During the later period of Orthodoxy (about 1680) Pietism transferred the question of the adiaphora to the field of ethics (dancing, the theater, taking walks, the use of alcohol and tobacco, etc.). Orthodox dogmatists,... on the other hand, always understands the term as referring to part of the worship ritual.” 42

Kalb’s discussion of 17<sup>th</sup> century worship includes this characterization: “The use of ceremonies is subject to a further limitation in that they are not left to the arbitrary decision of individuals, but that these ceremonies, in so far as they bear a public character, are reduced by the community to a definite order, to which the individual submits for the sake of love... To interpret liberty in ceremonies as boundless arbitrariness would be doing poor service to the cause of formal worship. The pronounced conservatism of Orthodoxy regarding the liturgy, which almost seems to militate against freedom in ceremonies, becomes intelligible at this point. Let the liturgist exercise the same circumspection and faithfulness in ecclesiastical ordinances which he observes in those portions of the service which have been instituted by Christ. For changes can be carried out only by the church as a whole; they are not within the scope of private, subjective judgment.” 43

We hear a faint echo of this feeling in our own seminary’s textbook, *The Shepherd Under Christ*: “In order that proper consideration might be shown for sister congregations, it would also be well that a congregation which is contemplating a liturgical change solicit the reaction of the



Commission of Worship of the WELS.” 44 With the great variety apparent in our synod today, such a suggestion seems to come from a distant time.

Strong opinions regarding adiaphora are also apparent in this comment from 1978: “When Lutheran worship forsakes its roots in the liturgy, as it substitutes other priorities, or as it seeks to imitate sectarian practices, it loses its orientation and perverts the role of both music and worship.” 45

3. In our hymnal revision process we have often heard about the “over-emphasis on the Lutheran chorale.” Some suggest eliminating more of these to make room (in a congregation’s feasible hymn repertoire and in a new hymnal) for other hymns. Of course, we will want a balanced, American Lutheran hymnal. But if we recommend omitting certain Lutheran chorales, let’s be careful that we are not saying that they (their melodies) are inherently unusable. The problem is not that these chorales are not “good” and therefore ought to be eliminated. They simply tend to be unfamiliar. People don’t usually like the unfamiliar; it is uncomfortable. In the flow of history our 1941 TLH was an effort to recover certain chorales, not a perpetuation of their use. Previous hymnals had not included them. Should an attempt to recover a chorale be limited to one hymnal?

Christian rock singer, Amy Grant, has included Bach’s harmonization of “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” on one of her recordings. This certainly does not mean that Bach really “connects” with contemporary youth only this once. Rather, this chorale is simply the most familiar among American Protestants.

I believe that— with a proper plan — a congregation can learn just about any hymn. Some congregations can sing “Isaiah, Mighty Seer” (249) with great vigor. I wouldn’t expect such vigor from St. Mark’s, where I serve, because it’s only been sung once in the last nine or more years. (Once is enough?) We have, however, made another great liturgical hymn our own, “O Lord, We Praise Thee” (313). In some Lutheran churches this has been the standard post-communion hymn. When I arrived in Citrus Heights, the congregation had sung this hymn seven times in seven years—not really enough for those who don’t know it to become comfortable with it. We used stanzas one and three for a number of months (twice a month) as a rousing substitute for the *Nunc dimittis / Song of Simeon*. It’s comfortable and enjoyable for most now.

#### **FALSE ALTERNATIVES**

From Hummel’s essay, quoted several times, here is a list of false alternatives and/or overcorrections against which he cautions.

Intellectualism (doctrinal) vs. mysticism (experiential, emotional). In correcting the errors of subjectivism, we run the risk—especially as conservative Lutherans — of emotionless intellectualism.

Legalism vs. freedom. “Many become very legalistic in their opposition to what they call legalism... Luther’s concept of ‘the freedom of the Christian man’ was a far cry from the individualistic, subjectivistic one of many moderns, whose concept is obviously formed far more by the Enlightenment than by the Reformation and the Bible.”

Tradition vs. original simplicity, or vs. novelty. It wasn’t the confessional, biblical Lutheran reformation which became iconoclastic in regard to traditions; it was the Reformed. Which tradition shall we follow, Luther’s, Bach’s, Walther’s, TLH’s? “Sometimes a sort of quasi-Lutheran tradition has developed on the basis of Luther’s *Deutsche Messe*, forgetting that Luther intended this highly simplified service only for small village churches with few resources, not as a repudiation of his own earlier and more strictly liturgical work, classically in the *Formula Missae*.” [I’ve even heard Seminary professors miss this point regarding Luther.]

Church vs. individual. In its crassest form we hear, “I don’t have to worship in a church to be a Christian.” True, but anyone with a mature understanding of Christianity will gather with other Christians for worship. And how frequently do those who worship God at the lake receive communion? An emphasis on baptism here reminds us that we are baptized into Christ’s body, not into spiritual isolation. Cf. Pietism.

Externals vs. internal life of the spirit. Ritual is not ritualism. Use of forms is not formalism. “We still usually celebrate Ash Wednesday without ashes and Palm Sunday without palms. Incense, which has about as much biblical and traditional weight in its favor as any external, is thought to be really ‘off the wall.’... Older Lutheran churches made considerable use of statuary, of crucifixes (with a corpus on the cross), but newer ones tend to be rather bare and austere. In part, no doubt this is due simply to architectural fashions, but I, at least, suspect that these are not totally divorceable from the prevailing Protestant cultural prejudices against such forms. And almost humorous are attempts to defend bare crosses as signifying the risen Christ.” “One might think that the massive pedagogical accent today on the value of external teaching aids, of the realization that people learn affectively as well as cognitively, might temper some of these prejudices.”

“Catholic” vs. (allegedly) biblical. Often where this seems to have abated, doctrinal indifference has moved in. “While one has a pastoral obligation toward the prejudices of the weak, there comes a point where it is no longer taking, but giving offense. Patience and education are mandatory, but ultimately one cannot let himself be held hostage by every prejudice which claims ‘offense.’ ” Often the reality behind a “that’s Catholic” label is an inability to distinguish between doctrine and externals. Cf. LW psalm tones.

Unity vs. uniformity. Uniformity can degenerate into mindless repetition of page 5/15. Unity is a flexible approach to liturgical worship that allows Uncle Walt from Michigan to know what’s going on even though local variety adds its distinctive touch.

### **SOME KEY POINTS**

Certain things are **Lutheran** in worship.

Lutherans do many things in worship that are not inherently Lutheran.

Gospel freedom does not require our worship practices to be exclusively Lutheran.

We shouldn’t stretch and strain to label the various kinds of innovation in our synod as Lutheran. We do not have to justify something as “Lutheran” for it to be valid or useful.

We ought not stretch logic/tradition to say something is “what Luther would have done had he lived today.”

While the WELS is a banner of truth doctrinally, we ought not make WELS the standard by which we judge the many adiaphora of worship practice.

WELS churches have hardly begun to use the variety which is part of the Lutheran heritage, a variety which goes a long way in keeping worship from seeming “routine.”

Our starting point in producing edifying (sacramental) services which direct (sacrificial) praise to God should be the vast resources— both modern and historic — which fit the distinctively Lutheran view of worship.

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