

# Worship in the WELS – Changeless Principles

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By time-honored custom, the opening paragraphs of an essay such as this allow the essayist to offer disclaimers for being selected to present the paper and to beg indulgence for deviating from the assigned topic. In this particular paper, such a disclaimer is not mere posturing; it is genuine. I could give you a long list of men in this district far more experienced and much more qualified than I to present a paper on worship. Without naming names, the past professor of Church Music at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the present professor of Church Music at the same institution, the professor of Music at Wisconsin Lutheran College, the director of the WELS Hymnal Project, other members of the same venture, choir directors and music instructors from at least four area Lutheran high schools, as well as several dozen pastors, teachers and congregational musicians, come readily to mind.

If this paper succeeds at all, it will do so only because I have begged, borrowed and stolen extensively from their writing and thinking. I can stand tall only because I stand on their shoulders.

The title assigned to this essay is "Worship in the WELS – Changeless Principles," but it seems that what you want is something broader than that. I don't think it's any great secret (and it certainly shouldn't come as any great surprise) that Christians have been worshipping Jesus Christ long before those five immigrant pastors formed Das Deutsche Evanaelische Ministerium von Wisconsin in Granville on May 26, 1850. Our worship principles are based upon centuries of experience and experiment, stretching back through the Middle Ages and the Reformation era to the earliest communities of New Testament believers, before that to the synagogue, before that to the Temple and the tabernacle, before that to the simple devotion of the patriarchs, and before that, ultimately, to our first parents and a tree in a garden.

We can stand tall only because we stand on a whole lot of shoulders.

Disclaimers given, deviations rationalized, let me offer five changeless principles of all good worship, in the WELS and elsewhere.

## I

Alexander Maclaren, the great Scottish preacher of a century ago, made a significant observation about Christian worship, when contrasted with worship of every other stripe. In a sermon on Acts 17:22-34, Maclaren said:

All heathen worship reverses the parts of God and man, and loses sight of the fact that He is the giver continually and of everything. Life in its origination, in the continuance thereof (breath), and all which enriches it, are from Him. Then true worship will not be giving to, but thankfully accepting from and using for, Him, His manifold gifts. (*Expositions of Holy Scriptures*, Acts, II, pp. 141,142)

God designed men and women to enjoy a grace relationship with Himself. He gave our first parents everything they needed to live righteous, satisfying and worthwhile lives. The Savior God did not place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in their pathway as a test to determine if they loved Him or as a statute by which they could earn His acceptance. Their relationship was a given, and with it came the opportunity to offer Him grateful worship. "This tree of the knowledge of good and evil," Martin Luther explained, "was Adam's church, his altar, his pulpit. Here he was to yield to God the obedience he owed, to give recognition to the word and will of God, to give thanks to God, and to call upon God for aid against temptation" (*LW* 1:95). It was only after Satan deceived Eve into believing she could be happier and more fulfilled if she did something for herself,

that her worship, and her relationship with her God, was changed from thankful response to slavish work righteousness.

Casual observers, as well as those committed to the philosophy that all religion is simply an evolutionary process of human thinking, would suggest that Old Testament Israel's worship life was essentially the same as that of the nations around her. It involved priests and sacrifice, prayers and praises. The distinction, however, is that all heathen worship, because it was not a response to God's grace, attempted to appease unpredictable and angry gods. Israel's neighbors believed the Baals controlled the mysterious forces of nature, and they believed the only way to persuade the Baals to run things in their favor was through vulgar, desperate acts involving temple prostitutes, sympathetic magic and the sacrifice of their own children.

By contrast, Israel lived in the sunshine of the LORD's covenant with Abraham. The unadorned worship of the patriarchs was a grateful response to the Savior God's initiative in calling them. After the LORD gave Abram a cluster of promises **he built an altar there [at Shechem] to the LORD, who had appeared to him (Genesis 12:7)**. The LORD took the initiative in rescuing Israel from Egypt. Before He issued any commandments, He reminded them, **"I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2)**. The Sinai laws were never intended to effect Israel's relationship with the LORD, but to reflect it. St. Paul explained:

**The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed...The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. (Galatians 3:16-18)**

The New Testament reveals how all the Old Testament served as scaffolding, to be replaced and fulfilled by Jesus. But the basic element in the worship life of believers had not changed, but was simply brought into clearer focus. Christ came and lived and died and rose. You are redeemed. You are forgiven. **Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1)**. **Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...Forgive as the Lord forgave you...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 (Colossians 3:12,13,16)**.

Here is the most fundamental principle of Christian worship: all worship is a grateful response to the gospel. When the psalmist urged Israelites, **Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things (Psalm 98:1)**, he wanted them to sing the song that came from the new heart of faith. Any other worship is mere civic righteousness. Any worship which reverses the roles of God and man, which expects God to reward man for his good performance, his right sacrifices, his proper genuflections, is the absolute opposite of Christian worship.

That was a key element in the Reformation. "I fear that they [the Roman church] have made the mass into a good work," Luther wrote, "whereby they have thought to do a great service to Almighty God" (*LW* 35:93). In the *Smalcald Articles* he wrote:

The Mass in the Papacy must be the greatest and most horrible abomination, as it directly and powerfully conflicts with this chief article [justification by faith], and yet above and before all other popish idolatries it has been the chief and most specious. For it has been held that this sacrifice or work of the Mass, even though it be rendered by a wicked scoundrel, frees men from sins, both in this life and also in purgatory, while only the Lamb of God shall and must do this. (II, II, 1; *Triglote*, p. 463)

"God does not demand great sacrifices or precious treasures of great price for his blessings," Luther explained. "No, he asks for the easiest work of all, namely, to sing his praise" (*LW* 14:111). "The worship of the New Testament...is nothing else than song, praise and thanksgiving. This is a unique song. God does not care for our sacrifices and works. He is satisfied with the sacrifice of praise" (*LW* 17:72). "There is now in the New Testament a better service of God...For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it so that others also may come and hear it" (*LW* 53:333).

Well-intentioned people may ask, "Haven't we overemphasized the gospel in our worship? Wouldn't it be better, since we are all agreed on the gospel, to go on from there and put greater emphasis on the law?" It is true that both law and gospel must be preached. Sometimes we need to comfort the afflicted and other times afflict the comfortable. But the uniqueness of Christian faith and Christian worship lies in the gospel. All other religious systems have law, often more impressive and more demanding (at least externally) than Christianity. The primary message of Christianity is not, "This do!" but, "This happened!" Only the gospel contains the power to change people so that they can become more and more what the law demands that they be. Only the gospel can say, "Be what you are!"

## II

God might simply have told Adam and Eve that He loved them, but He chose to make vivid His love and goodness by placing them in a beautiful garden. He might have given them no object on which to focus the attention of their worship, but He gave them the tree. Early in his lectures on Genesis, Luther argued for the point: "God always establishes some outward and visible sign of His grace alongside the Word..., an outward sign and work or Sacrament....Thus the church has never been without outward signs." The clothes God made for Adam and Eve was a sign and memorial of their fall. The rainbow after the Flood proved that God always attached a sign to His promises (quoted by Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, p. 106).

We can say, in a broad way, that another changeless principle of worship is that it is sacramental.

The Old Testament festival cycle, prescribed at Sinai, recalled and re-enacted God's great saving acts. The Sabbath was to be a weekly reminder of His rescue: "**Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD has commanded you to keep the Sabbath's (Deuteronomy 5:15)**. When Israelite families observed Passover, and children [asked], "What does this ceremony mean to you?" parents were to tell them, "**It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians" (Exodus 12:26,27)**. Pentecost or Weeks was a thanksgiving celebration for the spring harvest and in time came to commemorate God's act of initiating His covenant with Israel at Sinai (**Leviticus 23:9-15-21**). On the Day of Atonement the LORD prescribed a powerful audiovisual demonstration by symbolically placing Israel's rebellion onto the goat of the sin offering, then removing her sin from His sight by driving it away on the back of the scapegoat (**Leviticus 16**). At Tabernacles Israelites celebrated the fall harvest and, by living in booths for seven days, were reminded that the LORD preserved their fathers as they wandered through the wilderness (**Leviticus 23:33-43**).

Old Testament sacrifices demonstrated how God forgave sins by bloody substitution, and foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. Two of the "bloody" sacrifices expressed Israel's relationship with God: the Burnt Offering, by the burning of the entire animal on the altar, expressed complete devotion to God; the Fellowship Offering, by the sharing of a communal meal with the priest, pictured thanksgiving and joyful fellowship with God. The other two "bloody" sacrifices repaired Israel's relationship with God after Israel damaged it by her sin: the Sin Offering emphasized atonement for the sinful act; the Guilt Offering removed the defilement of sin and required restitution. God could have merely announced, "I forgive you"; He did, in fact, announce that, hundreds of times. But in the sacrifices He illustrated and actually conveyed forgiveness.

In the New Testament, God individualizes and personalizes the gospel in the sacraments. The *Smalcald Articles* cite Augustine's definition: "Let the word come to the element, and it becomes a Sacrament (III, V, 1; *Triglot*, p. 491). Professor Francis Rossow of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has written:

In the Sacraments...we see especially clearly that peculiar marriage of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the common and the divine, the natural and the supernatural, that is so characteristic of our God, that God who is present in a burning bush or in a dove, that God who comes to earth as a baby in swaddling clothes, that God who enters Jerusalem on a donkey, and that God whose revelation of Himself is curiously connected with human language....This God...[has linked] salvation with something so ordinary as water and bread and with something so "shocking" as wine. ("The Significance of the Visible Elements in the Sacraments, *Concordia Journal*, July 1982, p. 127)

The liturgy of the western Christian church isn't simply an agenda, a mere listing of "what we'll do when" in the worship service. The liturgy relives and re-enacts the drama of salvation. Those elements of the service which remain the same from week to week (the ordinary) repeat the great truths that need to stick tight to Christian hearts. Those elements of the service which change from week to week (the proper) add variety as the church recalls the important events in the Savior's life and reviews the major themes of the Christian's life.

One might think all this is nothing more than a propaganda piece favoring our particular way of worshipping. Yet it is the usage of the western liturgy that gives Lutheran worship an ecumenical outlook, in the best sense of the word. "In matters of outward form," Prof. Theodore Hartwig has written, "past Lutheran practice...has avoided the sectarianism of going it alone, being different, striving for the unique. Thus Luther kept with the church year and the general structure of the Mass inherited from the Medieval church....Though for confessional reasons, we live in a state of outwardly divided communions, the Christian church nevertheless remains a single catholic community of believers confessing one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Using the liturgy demonstrates that we too **contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3)**.

The challenge lies in steering a middle course between two extremes: the one, the Roman view, that ceremonies justify in and of themselves, *ex opere operato*, apart from faith; the other, the Reformed view, that since faith alone justifies, ceremonies and sacraments are a mistaken reliance upon "works." "Ceremonies," Luther wrote in *The Freedom of the Christian*, "are to be given the same place in the life of a Christian as models and plans have among builders and artisans. They are prepared, not as a permanent structure, but because without them nothing could be built or made. When the structure is complete the models and plans are laid aside....What we despise is the false estimate of them since no one holds them to be the real and permanent structure" (*LW* 31:375,376).

### III

Catholic bishop Fulton J. Sheen once told the New York State legislature, "I'm not going to pray for you. There are certain things a man does for himself. He has to blow his own nose, make his own love, and say his own prayers."

Although this paper is devoted largely to public or corporate worship, private worship finds equal emphasis in the Scripture and provides a balancing ingredient in Christian lives. Another changeless principle of Christian worship is that it is, and needs to be, both corporate and private.

Corporate worship is implied from the beginning. The recurring phrase in Genesis **that men began to pall on the name of the LORD (Genesis 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25)** is better translated: "men began to call out the name of the LORD," which suggests public proclamation. Moses told Pharaoh, "**This is what the LORD says: 'Let my people go that they may hold a festival to me in the desert'**" (*Exodus* 5:1). The

tabernacle and the temple were centers for corporate worship. Prof. Richard L. Jeske, describing how the Psalms functioned in the worship life of old Testament believers, has written:

The individual Israelite always addressed God as a member of the community of Israel, even if the address was made in the first person singular. That may be worth remembering when we sing our individualistic hymns; that is, that we always address God, whether in private or in private or in public worship, as members of the greater community of his people and not just as separate individuals. (*Understanding and Teaching the Bible*, p. 70)

Jesus often worshiped at the temple (**John 2:13; 5:1; 7:10; 10:22**); early believers in and around Jerusalem continued to go to the temple (**Acts 3:1; 5:12; 21:26**).

Synagogue worship, which developed during the Babylonian captivity and as a reaction to it, served smaller corporate worship needs. The synagogue functioned as a Jewish community center to rally Jews to each other and to God as they lived in strange lands and under sometimes hostile circumstances. It was never intended to replace the temple but served where there was no temple, and became an ideal location to do mission work.

Early Christian worship form is directly descended from the major elements of synagogue worship: prayer, confession of the Shema, Scripture reading, interpretation, commentary, application. Tertullian (ca. AD 155-222) in his *Apology* (39), described the corporate worship of the church of his generation:

We meet together as an assembly and congregation, in order that, offering up prayers to God as with united force, we may wrestle with him in our supplications. This violence God delights in. We pray too for the Emperors, for their ministers, and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation.

We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful. However it be in that respect, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and, no less, by inculcation of God's precepts we confirm our good habits....

On the monthly collection, if he likes, each puts in a small donation....These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts and drinking bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute in means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house. (quoted by William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments for Today*, pp. 43,44)

The private worship of Old Testament believers involved praise, prayer and, before Sinai, individual sacrifice. Abraham, Eliezer and Jacob provide outstanding examples of private prayer (**Genesis 18:22-33; 24:12-14,26,27; 32:22-32**). Abel, Noah and Abraham offered sacrifice (**Genesis 4:4; 8:20; 22:13**). Jacob made vows to the LORD (**Genesis 28:20-22; 35:1-4**). Moses instructed Israelite parents to keep the Passover as both worship event and instructional tool (**Exodus 12:1-11,24-28**); he later commanded Israelite fathers to make their homes miniature worship places, passing on the faith by word and example (**Deuteronomy 6:4-9,20-25**). The Sinai laws gave guidelines for private vows (**Numbers 30:1-16**) and offerings (**Deuteronomy 26:1-15**). David's confessions of sin, trust and praise fill the psalms (**Psalms 3,6,9,13,16,23,30,31,32,51** and others), often striking an intensely personal note. Daniel prayed in an upstairs room with the windows opened to Jerusalem (**Daniel 6:10,11**).

Jesus prayed frequently in private and taught His disciples to do the same (**Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18,28-29; 11:1; 22:32,41; 23:34,36**). He promised that "**where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them**" (**Matthew 19:20**). The church in Jerusalem enjoyed a blend of corporate and private worship: **Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts (Acts 2:46; 5:12,21)**, yet they also met **in their homes (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20)**. Paul met a group of women who would gather for prayer along

the banks of the Gangites River outside Philippi (**Acts 16:13-15**), and he sent greetings to small groupings of believers who met in private **houses (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2)**.

WELS Lutherans have often felt uneasy about some forms of private worship, and anyone who knows a little church history can sympathize with that concern. Pietism contained some genuinely good concerns for the spiritual health of the church, but when it encouraged Christians to meet apart from the worship service, it inevitably disparaged corporate worship. Private meetings became more subjective and emotional as Pietists lost appreciation for the objective gospel presented in corporate worship. Liturgy and the church year became irrelevant. Doctrine filled-prayers of the church gave way to "from-the-heart" meanderings. Hymns based on the objective events of redemption history were discarded in favor of songs expressing immediate personal experience. Frilly tunes replaced rugged chorales. The Lord's Supper was devalued and celebrated infrequently.

It seems Christians need a balance of both corporate and private worship. The writer to the Hebrews said, **Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25)**; corporate worship is certainly implied. Paul said, **Pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17)**. **Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests (Ephesians 6:18)**; private worship is surely encouraged. It is to be hoped that our present emphasis on spiritual renewal will lead to increased private prayer, family worship and small group study, as well as richer, more powerful corporate worship.

#### IV

The word "liturgy," as almost every worship source reminds us, derives from leitourgia, which Luther Reed defines as "a public act or duty performed by individual citizens for the benefit of the state" (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 19). The very word reminds us of yet another changeless principle of Christian worship: it belongs to the people.

Old Testament worship was highly regulated and centered in the priesthood, performed by Aaron's sons at the tabernacle and in the temple. Yet it was designed to be participatory. The sacrifices invited participation. The Psalms feature a "back-and-forth" dialogue between assembly and leader. God didn't fashion Old Testament worship to be a free-for-all, but neither did He want it to become a spectator sport.

New Testament worship was not governed by the Sinai legislation. Circumcision was no longer obligatory (**Acts 15:1-22**). Special days and months and seasons no longer had to be observed (**Galatians 4:1-10**). Dietary restrictions have become obsolete (**Romans 14:2-9**). The Old Testament Sabbath was abolished (**Colossians 2:16,17**). New Testament worship, from the glimpses of it we catch in the Book of Acts and the Epistles, was informal, spontaneous and, if Corinth was typical, highly lay oriented. **When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of revelation, a tongue or an interpretation**, Paul wrote (**1 Corinthians 14:26**). Paul wanted to bring the disorder under control, but he didn't want to squelch the lay involvement.

Does our worship really belong to the people? Should our worship belong more to the people than it presently does?

Unfortunately, once it is affirmed that worship belongs to the people, the knee-jerk reaction of some is that worship ought to bend to the whims of the masses. Duane W.H. Arnold and C. George Fry, in an article entitled "Weothscrip," *Eternity*, September 1986, decry the effect populism as has had on worship:

Worship...fits right into the consumerism that so characterizes American religious life. Church-shopping has become common. A believer will compare First Presbyterian, St. John's Lutheran, Epiphany Episcopal, Brookwood Methodist, and Bethany Baptist for the "best buy." The church plant, programs, and personnel are scrutinized, but the bottom line is, "How did it feel?" Worship must be sensational. "Start with an earthquake and work up from that," advised one professor of homiletics. "Be sure you have the four prerequisites of a successful church,"

urged another; "upbeat music, adequate parking, a warm welcome, and a dynamite sermon." The slogan is, "Try it, you'll like it."

Paul told the Corinthians: **In the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing...**, and more. He could have added (though not necessarily last on the list) : "...also those having gifts of arranging and leading corporate worship." Paul asked, **Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are, all teachers? Do all work miracles?** He could have posed one more question: "Do all arrange and lead worship?" The answer Paul expected to his questions was "No," which he would also have expected if had he asked about worship leadership (1 Corinthians 12:27-30). Does everyone in a congregation have the ability to determine the forms of public worship which best suit its needs? Many Christians admit they do not have such ability. Some Christians who think they do have it, don't.

The Lutheran Confessions grant congregations considerable latitude in establishing their worship forms. "We believe, teach and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such a manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God" (*Formula of Concord, Epitome, X, 2; Triglot, p. 829*). But the Confessions also recognize that decisions concerning worship forms need to be made and are best made by those most qualified to make them; such decisions are not legalism, nor do they usurp worship from the people. "It is lawful for bishops or pastors to make ordinances that things be done orderly in the church....It is proper that the church should keep such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquility, so far that one do not offend another, that all things be done in the church in order, and without confusion" (*Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, 53,55; Triglot, p. 91*).

Arthur Graf, in "Liturgies and Legalism," *Affirm*, December 1986, offers this "democratic" view of worship:

The final decision belongs to the congregation whether or not to use [a service order] and whether to omit parts of a service....It means using a service order which everybody can follow -- members, unchurched, those in mixed marriages, older children. It means removing that which hinders the Gospel. It means selecting hymns that are singable by the people of America today. And it means loving others, especially the unchurched, as much as we love ourselves.

Such advice appears commendable, but who determines what constitutes a service order that "everybody can follow"? What are we left with if we are confined to "hymns that are singable by the people of America today"? Rap music and commercial jingles? Must we reduce corporate worship to such a low common denominator that the most uninitiated visitor can understand all aspects of it? C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, said it is "no good asking for a simple religion" because "real things are not simple." Lewis continued:

When you try to explain the Christian doctrine as it is really held by an instructed adult, they [people who want a "simple" Christianity] then complain that you are making their heads turn round and that it is all too complicated and that if there really were a God they are sure that he would have made "religion" simple, because simplicity is so beautiful, etc....Notice, too, their idea of God "making religion simple": as if "religion" were something God invented, and not His statement to us of certain quite unalterable facts about His own nature. (pp. 46,47)

If our worship life is a living expression of our faith, can we safely popularize it, minimize it, even trivialize it, in the name of leitourgia?

If you read Martin Marty's bimonthly newsletter *Context*, you have no doubt come away irritated or enraged more than once. Sometimes, however, what's most irritating about what he writes or quotes is that it contains the ring of truth. Years ago, Marty complained, "More junk, more tawdriness, more slipshodhood, more mediocrity is peddled in church circles than in many others. Yet are we not supposed to offer God our best gifts?" British writer Dorothy L. Sayers put it more bluntly:

In her own buildings, in her own ecclesiastical art and music, in her hymns and prayers, in her sermons and in her little books of devotions, the church will tolerate, or permit a pious intention to excuse, work so ugly, so pretentious, so tawdry and twaddling, so insincere and insipid, so bad, as to shock and horrify any decent draftsman. And why? Simply because she has lost all sense of the fact that the living and eternal truth is expressed in work only so far as that work is true in itself, to itself, to the standards of its own technique. She has forgotten that the secular vocation is sacred. Forgotten that a building must be good architecture before it can be a good church; that a painting must be well-painted before it can be a good sacred picture; that work must be good work before it can be called God's work (*Creed or Chaos?* p. 57).

Holy shoddy is still shoddy.

One may disagree with the assessments of Marty and Sayers, but their plea for excellence rings biblically true, and it provides a fifth changeless principle of worship: it calls forth our best arts and skills.

God is an artist. He loves beauty and variety. He filled His creation with it. He could have made a purely functional universe, but He chose to adorn His handiwork with brightly colored flowers, majestic beasts, dazzling constellations of stars – and man as male and female, the crown of His creation. Chances are no crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth when the Son of God worked there.

God is pleased when we use the beauty and diversity of His creation as we worship Him. The blueprints for Israel's tabernacle (**Exodus 25-28**) and temple (**1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3-5**) indicate that God used color, texture and design to create worship facilities that were as richly symbolic and aesthetically pleasing as they were serviceable. And He didn't want it cheap. I read somewhere that if we were to construct an identical temple building today, the materials alone would cost 22 billion dollars. I don't know exactly how that figure was arrived at. But we know what the price of gold is per ounce, and if you've bought oak or maple hardwood lately, you can guess what cedar planks and olive wood might cost. Such descriptions should forever put to rest the notion that God is better worshipped in a pole barn, with the remainder of the offering given to charity. Judas, you'll remember, was the one who scolded Mary's extravagance; Jesus praised it (**John 12:1-8**).

Scripture itself is a collection of diverse literary styles. There is the straightforward reporting of Moses and Matthew, the soaring poetry of David and Isaiah, Jeremiah's heartache, Mark's breathless action, Paul's exuberant bursts of doxology which occasionally left syntax dangling, striking imagery in Daniel and the Revelation to John. Isn't it unfortunate, given the rich assortment of style and idiom in the Scripture, that we so easily cram it all through our ecclesiastical meat grinders, and it all comes out as pretty much the same predictable, dogmatic sausage?

There is diversity in the songs of both Testaments. The superscriptions of the Psalms contain nearly a dozen different Hebrew designations, each defining a slightly different poetic or musical style. Psalms 149 and 150 invite worshippers to praise the LORD with dancing, tambourine and harp (**149:3**), trumpet and lyre, strings and flute, and clashing and resounding cymbals (**150:3-5**). Paul encouraged the Ephesians and the Colossians: **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as...you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Colossians 3:16; see Ephesians 5:19)**. Whatever differentiation lies in his words, the fact that Paul strung a list of synonyms together suggests a variety of song styles, both ancient and newly composed.

We enjoy a rich artistic heritage in worship since the first century. While there was much with which to disagree in medieval Roman Catholicism, we have inherited and appreciated the architecture, sculpture,



painting, liturgy and music of Catholic Christendom. Luther was not in favor of stripping the church bare of these artistic elements: "Nor am I of the opinion that the gospel should destroy and blight all the arts....I would like to see all the arts, especially music, used in the service of him who gave and made them. I therefore pray that every pious Christian would be pleased with this and lend his help if God has given him like or greater gifts" (LW 53:316). "Let the mass be celebrated," he wrote, "with vestments, with chants and all the usual ceremonies" (LW 45:254).

Luther not only praised that heritage; he added to it. Winfred Douglas, in *Church Music in History and Practice*, said that Luther "practically created the chorale." Robert M. Stevenson, in *Patterns in Protestant Church Music*, added: "We may say of Luther's musical achievements that he lifted the art to a loftier level than it has attained anywhere else in evangelical thinking....No advance we may make in church music will exceed his ideal of what it should be."

The Catholic and Lutheran legacy in the worship arts stands in stark contrast to the attitude of the more radical Reformers. While Luther was at the Wartburg, Carlstadt told people, "Organs belong only to theatrical exhibitions and prince's palaces," and, "Images in churches are wrong," and, "Painted idols standing on altars are even more harmful and devilish." He and Zwilling led mobs into several churches, destroying statues, altars and other works of art (E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, pp. 536-538). Early New England Puritans sang nothing more than rhymed metrical versions of the Psalms in unison without instruments or choral settings. The Disciples of Christ erupted in controversy in 1859 when a melodeon was placed in a church in Midway, Kentucky. Following Alexander Campbell's dictum, "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where it is silent, we are silent," and finding no biblical command for instrumental music, elders of the Disciples and Campbell himself in the *Millennial Harbinger* led the attack: "No element of public worship is legitimate which is not explicitly authorized in the New Testament. Instrumental music is not so authorized. Therefore it is not legitimate." The Disciples' *Lard's Quarterly* in 1864 declared: "Let every preacher resolve never to enter a meetinghouse of our brethren in which an organ stands. Let no one who takes a letter from one church ever unite with another using an organ. Rather let him live out of a church than go into such a den. Let all who oppose the organ withdraw from the church if one is brought in" (cited by Elmer T. Clark, *The Small Sects in America*, pp. 212,213).

Such history is far removed from our own. But do we employ the arts in worship as well as we could? Do we give as much encouragement to the arts in our Lutheran grade schools and high schools we do to our sports programs? Do we have artistically talented men and women who've come to feel their gifts are unnecessary and unwelcome in their church? Have we – pastors, teachers, leaders – disparaged the arts ourselves? Have we unwittingly adopted the Quaker motto, "No pomp under any circumstances"?

Monstrous airline disasters have been caused by pilot error – sheer boredom at 33,000 feet. A skillful surgeon can become so dulled by routine that, in sewing up a bypass patient, he leaves a surgical sponge inside. You and I as worship leaders enjoy a rare privilege. If doing worship becomes wooden, tedious or deadly predictable for us, think of the poor victims upon whom we inflict our Lutheran lethargy, Sunday after Sunday!

George Kraus, in *By Word and Prayer*, has offered a thoughtful prayer for people like us:

Lord, prepare my heart and mind for the privilege of leading Your people in worship. From my thoughts and attitudes remove indifference, arrogance, fear and egotism. Make me eager to share the Bread of life with those who gather in Your house this day. Cover my human faults and errors during the sacred hour, so that Your redeemed people may see You clearly through me in spite of my frailties and sins. May my words, my actions, my intentions reflect the love of the Lamb of God, who has taken away the sin of the world.