"CONTEMPORARY" WORSHIP:
DARE WE APPLAUD?
"Contemporary" Worship: Dare We Applaud?

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In introducing "Liturgy and Hymn" of Luther's Works, Ulrich Leupold reminds us that while Luther's liturgical writing constitute only a small part of his literary works, these writings have had a powerful impact in the life of the church. Many became part of the church orders of the Lutheran Church and served as norms for Lutheran worship.

The key motivation in Luther's reform of the mass was a commitment to the Word of God and the sacraments as the heart and center of worship. Aware of confusion in many forms of worship, Luther was convinced that the proclamation of the Word of God was to serve as the sole guide in worship. He saw the Word as the center that prompted responses of praise and adoration, believing that one cannot give God anything but praise and thanks.

Another point of interest was Luther's insistence that any liturgical revision needed to begin with the worship practices of his day rather than with worship in apostolic times, for instance. In making such revisions, Luther's perspective was grounded in Christian freedom as a response to the Gospel which seeks to nurture faith through liturgy. In this spirit, he preserved the essentials of the liturgy and eliminated what was anti-Gospel and non-helpful. He also refused to sanction any one order of service. At the same time, Luther, after considerable delay, provided "The German Mass" as a liturgy for the people, emphasizing that order is needed to nurture faith and to help those who are becoming Christian.

In his revision of the liturgy, Luther's motivation was clear, that of giving glory to God and serving the good of the neighbor as a response to the Gospel. It is in this spirit that the authors of the editorials, book reviews, and essays offer a stimulating discussion of public worship in the church today.
Meaningful, Exciting, Memorable Worship

The Church Growth Movement has, if nothing else, raised our consciousness about the importance of Sunday worship. Even for those who would minimize the Church Growth emphasis on statistics, there is no denying the reality that worship, especially on Sunday morning, is the place where we gather the largest number of our people on the most frequent basis. And while we will all live to see more and more than just worship and worship also in Bible study, prayer, and service groups in our congregations throughout the week, not for the obvious reason that the people of our Sunday experience is the only significant faith encounter that they will have. Their spirituality is being formed by what happens in that precious hour of worship each week.

Thus the concern that has been gathering momentum in our churches regarding the form of worship is not only justified, but laudable. An ever-growing stream of ideas and materials is finding a market among an ever-increasing number of worship leaders who at last are asking the question: “How can we make worship a meaningful, exciting, and memorable weekly event?”

Inevitably, its quest to be more contemporary, more creative, and more expensive to our perceived local needs, we are tempted to consider substitution, and many would encourage us on the historic liturgy of the western church as a vehicle which no longer engages the contemporary American heart or mind.

To abandon the liturgy, however, is to fail to see it for what it is: a treasure that it is. Embedded in this centuries-old structure are the heart and soul of the people’s encounter with their God. The liturgy recognizes that the Bible not only reveals God to us, but also provides us with the context for our response to him. By its very structure, the liturgy compels us to listen to God as the One who invites our worship in the first place, and it keeps us from the “contemporary American” temptation to talk too much about ourselves. In the liturgy we have a feast of expression and a wealth of material with which to converse with God and with each other.

It is not the task of the worship leaders to lead the people of God to abandon such a gift. Rather, it is our task to help people uncover the treasure and appropriate it for their use. Such unwrapping, however, is not done through ritual repetition, the language of the liturgy, beautiful as it is, can be very inaccessible to modern Americans, and to say and do the same thing week after week without regard to the people’s understanding is simply to reinforce that inaccessibility. We may have to reshape that structure and language from time to time, substituting less lofty words and using music outside our normal tradition (or perhaps a mixture) to engage the person in the pew in the holy conversation. We may have to explain and teach as we worship, interrupting from time to time that elegant flow, so that the conversation does not simply “flow past” the worshiper. We may have to be concerned about time in the pew and movement for children and the length of the sermon. It is to be anticipated that people will engage in the liturgy, it is to be anticipated that they will speak the word of God, and not disregarded by the process.

To do all this is to boldly liturgy, for the liturgy is not simply a manual for efficiency, but a blueprint based on a passion for encounter with the Holy One and shaped for creativity in the conversation surrounding that encounter. Worship planning, approached with that same sense of creativity and passion, sensitive to people’s needs, and refined within the crucible of the liturgical illus, is a journey forward toward making Sunday morning the powerful response to God’s call and where the church has always wanted it to be.

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It’s Not Formality
Vs. Informality

In talking about contemporary worship many argue for informality. But there may be little help in trying to distinguish between “formal” and “informal” worship.

What is informal worship? No preparation? Hardly. Someone has to make some decisions—and probably beforehand. Nothing written down? No! If the leader has a song, the leader probably has something. No directions to participants? Only if they are written or projected! The informality of television viewing. No liturgical behavior? We’d all be acting like toddlers. Fun? But my fun may not please you. Creative, never done before? Fiction is the pattern behind this often observed eye, and it’s shocking, people usually miss the point.

“Formal” and “informal” worship have the same characteristics. It is prepared. There are written materials. Leaders and people are directed to do things. Learned behavior, e.g., the Lord’s Prayer, is employed. Some elements excite more than others. All of it is created by someone—at least in the doing (“performance”) of it.

Perhaps the attempt to distinguish between the two is really getting something else.

Are we not desiring of “genuine” (communicative) worship? Empty words are not wanted; we want what comes from the heart. It is not formality versus informality, for a “flow” are you? It could be said either way. It’s best to drop this confusion and focus on genuine.

Clearly, God wants this genuine quality. Our hearts must be involved, or our worship is empty. Indeed, it is no worship without text, that is, worship in Jesus. Worship leaders must be genuine in their leading. It is conveyed by means that you do (pray, praise, proclamation) and by doing what you mean (from faith). When folks sense empty words, they feel there is no communication. It makes it hard to avoid full participation. It is deadly. Leaders may need to take greater care in getting their faith to come through in worship. This takes preparation; there are no shortcuts. Learn from “good performances” that people honestly make choices and dedicate the complete self to communicating a live, because people of the television age can spot a fake faster than ever before, the pressure is on to be genuine.

Inhaling worship, above all, is genuine. Don’t hide behind formality—or informality. It’s a murky distinction which no one can nail.

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Reflections

The Grass-Roots Liturgical Movement

Even a casual observer will note the proliferation of contemporary liturgies, a grass-roots liturgical renewal, cropping up in the church. Today’s trend is toward an evangelical style of informal and non-traditional worship. Many of our church leaders applaud this change, believing that if the church is to grow, it must rid itself of our traditional Lutheran liturgy.

But what kind of growth? Growth as another form of American Protestantism with its Methodistic and Pentecostal roots, or growth as a Lutheran church with its catholic and Reformation heritage? Is it really possible to maintain, as a recent LMCS author suggests, our Lutheran substance with an evangelical style? We think not!

There are two fundamental liturgical principles ignored in this shift toward contemporary worship services. First, our Lutheran liturgy of the Gospel and the Sacraments is the primary means by which the church builds up its Biblical and Confessional faith from generation to generation and nurtures its members. Until the 20th century, liturgies were the most conservative documents in the church. The worship in which the people change more slowly than theologians or church leaders do. Our forefathers were careful to reject all worship forms that do not reflect a distinct Lutheran ethos. They knew that what a church believes is found in its liturgies and hymns. Lutheran worship is objective worship—the Gospel is proclaimed through the objective means of grace. Here the congregation stands in God’s presence to receive God’s gifts, and it responds in faith and love. Even an informed layman recognizes that most contemporary liturgies and hymns foster subjective worship and cross emotions.

Second, liturgy serves to transform the culture and not vice-versa. The church exists to convert the culture, not be converted by it. Although liturgy is sensitive to the culture, it transcends culture as it transcends generations. The liturgy places us in the construction of stories on an historical and sociological line where we have the same status in the kingdom of God as the saints in glory. It is not our responsibility to give people what they want, but to give people what they need. Visitors do not visit us to change our liturgy, but to be changed by it. Contemporary informal worship reflects our obsession with trends in the religious milieu of the day. Our American Protestant culture (i.e., evangelicalism) is hostile to the theology of the cross and to our Lutheran theology that proclaims that salvation may never be separated from Christ’s sacrificial presence. Many fast-growing churches have adopted this evangelical style of worship. This allows culture to dictate the church’s liturgical prominence. This growth, impressive as it is, is an indictment of the church’s unfaithfulness to its Lutheran substance.

This grass-roots liturgical movement threatens and will destroy everything that it means to be Lutheran.

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And How Shall The People Sing?

**Introduction**

For hundreds, even thousands, of years God’s people have been singing His praises in worship. Music has long been recognized as an important component of worship. Martin Luther had a high regard for music; he placed it next to theology in importance. He worked hard at making it possible for the people of his time to participate heartily in singing at worship services. Luther also recognized the importance of choral music; he had strong words of praise for a musical leader of his time, Josquin des Prez. Thus, Luther emphasized not only the great choral music of his time, but also the music of the people.

Music used in worship is first and foremost the music of the people in the pew. Organists, choir directors, instrumentists, and soloists need to keep this in mind as a music program is planned for a parish. The contribution of each of these entities should be used to reinforce and assist the hearty participation of the worshippers.

Leaders involved in the Church Growth Movement have indicated that high quality and an energetic vitality in worship services have a profound influence in attracting and keeping worshippers. However, in many LCMS churches, the level of congregational participation in music and the general tone of the worship services are quite dull and uninspiring.

What is the reason for this and how can the situation be improved? Because worship in Lutheran churches has been identified as being liturgical and because much of its hymnody is historical, some have said that the problem is in the materials being used in worship. Others have claimed that the problem is in the manner in which worship is planned and executed. However, before looking at ways to improve the musical aspect of Lutherans’ worship life, it would be appropriate to review the reasons music is used in worship.

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**The Role of Music in Worship**

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text is highly synergistic. When people leave the worship of some evangelical services, they are happy and feel good. However, just as one would not change the theology of the LCMS in order to achieve a similar feeling of happiness, so also care must be exercised in the choice of music used to support the teaching involved in the liturgical service and conduct of worship. Pastors must comprehend the importance of Word and Sacrament in the life of the church. They must support the teaching of the liturgical service and understand the functioning of each portion of such a service. Pastors must know the many ways in which a liturgical service may be varied; they need to be aware of the vast array of musical possibilities for involving the parishioners in worship. Finally, if pastors are to be effective leaders in worship services, they must have an enthusiasm for what they are doing. This is difficult to achieve if the pastors do not have the proper background, understanding, and experience with the liturgical service itself.

Preparing a worship service means paying close attention to details which will assist the person in the pew to participate fully in the service. Pastors and worship committees must know how to prepare a service bulletin which ably assists the worshippers, both new and experienced, in following the flow of a worship service. Parishioners should never be confused about what they are to do in the sequence of worship.

Pastors and worship committees must know and recognize the needs of organists and choir directors as they work to assist worshippers in their musical participation in the service. When hymns are given to organists and choir directors a few days or even only a few weeks before the worship service, then the service will not be anything but the organist and the choir assist the congregation in the singing of service music and hymns.

Organists and choir directors are very important in their role as being that of assisting the congregation. The worship service is not a time to display technical proficiency for its own sake. Hymn introductions and variations require skill, but the purpose of the performance is to assist the congregation to sing well and to interpret the hymn text. Preludes, voluntaries, and postludes should be chosen to enhance, further, the liturgy. The organist should be assisted by the choirmaster, as demonstrated by the preludes, the readings, and the hymns.

Choir directors need to view their leadership of the choir with the needs of the congregation in mind. The choir’s foremost role is to lead the congregation in the singing of the hymns and the liturgy. The choir should be related to the thrust of the worship service. Church choirs need to function as service choirs, not as little concert choirs.

In far too many instances, congregations are willing to get by with the least possible investment in personnel to serve as organists. In some cases people are hired who have minimal skills in playing the organ; in other instances congregations compound the difficulty by having only a tiny budget to assist the organist in growing in their skills and to purchase adequate amounts of music.

Even when an organist has sufficient skills, in many instances the organ used by the congregation is simply incapable of leading the congregation. An inadequate instrument in an acoustically poor environment makes it impossible for the hymn singing of people to sound good.

In a related area, congregations at times try to get by with only a small investment in the area of choir music. They don’t recognize the importance of having a trained choir director, nor do they see the importance of having a choir which assists congregational singing. In surgical instances this is the fault of the choir itself for failing to assume such a role.

Perhaps the greatest impediment to full musical participation by a congregation is the acoustical environment found in the church’s worship space. The unfortunate situation in the LCMS is that by far the majority of church buildings have acoustical setups which impede the sound of the congregation. When one attempts to worship in such a building, one immediately gets the feeling of isolation. Only a few people in the immediate vicinity can be heard speaking and singing. Sound absorbing materials such as soft porous walls, plush carpeting, padded pews (sometimes both on the back and top of the pew), and acoustical tiles in the ceiling serve to stifle the sound of any congregation. There is no corporate musical style that can survive in such an environment.

Is the picture so dismal that no hope is possible? No! There are instances where congregations, both large and small, urban and rural, have a thriving musical participation of worshippers. It is possible for most pastors, musical leaders, and congregations to make adjustments necessary for the improvement of singing by the people.

Can the music of historic hymnody and the liturgical service appeal to the first-time worshipper? Yes! However, that to happen, the first-time worshipper must come into an atmosphere of enthusiasm, vibrant, corporate participation on the part of the people in the pew. The enthusiasm for such a service is contagious.

Can the music found in Lutheran Worship and Lutheran Book of Worship appeal to the first-time worshipper as well as the experienced worshipper? Yes! Time after time it has been the author’s experience to see congregations quickly respond positively, not only to the old, but also to the new materials in these hymnals. With proper leadership and a positive acoustical environment, people sing the hymns with great energy and enthusiasm. It also has been most gratifying to hear children singing not only the hymns, but also the service music, in these books. The quick fix of using a simplistic type of hymnody in a non-liturgical service will not solve the problem of poor musical participation in the long run. Rather, pastors, congregations, and musical leaders must commit themselves to a position in which they will make it possible for all to participate fully in worship. This means pastors, musical leaders, and congregations must all do their part to improve the capability of the worship leaders and the physical environment in which they work. It means that all must take time to plan worship far in advance so that much energy, imagination, and resourcefulness may be directed to enabling the people in the pew to participate heartily in the worship service.

Great things are possible with the current worship services and musical materials found in LW and LBW. A vibrant worship will result which appeals both to the new and the experienced worshipper, may be built using these resources.

For Further Reading
Let The People Sing A New Song!

by Daryl Wildermuth

When the Reverend Wayne Pohl spoke as a Circuit Convention in Tacoma, Wash-ington, he related an incident in an address presented by Lyle Schaller to the Council of Presidents of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He reportedly told them that no church body did a better job of gathering together the immigrants as they came to our shores than the Lutherans. They sought out fellow Lutherans, offered them the worship and the language of the old country, and most effectively gathered them into congregations throughout the nation. Because of this effort, Lutheran churches experienced rapid growth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

"However," he is supposed to have said, "I have some news for you. The boats stopped coming."

The point is valid. The boats did stop coming. But although the Lutherans did adopt the English language, they are still by and large gearing their outreach to people by using European music and worship forms developed between 1600 and 1900 A.D.

The boats stopped coming. And now it is time for the Lutheran Church to take a new look at the worship style we are offering to the people of America, both our members and those whom we are hoping to win for the Lord.

It is no secret that Lutheran churches, including The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, are in a zero growth pat-tern. Some souls are being won, but barely enough to cover losses to other denominations. When we ask questions about why people are not being attracted to the Lutheran Church today, or when we ask members why they leave for other denominations, the answers very frequently include references to worship. Either people who worshipped at the Lutheran Church did not feel at home and moved on to another denomination, or members who visited other congregations found a more exciting worship and left our con-gregations for them.

Other factors, such as the quality of sermons, con-gregational programs, and pastoral care, will attract people or drive them away. But the one place where the congrega-tion meets Sunday after Sunday and where potential mem-bers make their first tentative contact with the congregation is in the worship service.

The point of this article is not to criticize or to con-demn traditional Lutheran worship. It is greatly loved by the majority of our people. It is the highest type of classi-cal worship and has proved itself throughout centuries of usage. But it is not meeting the needs of two groups of peo-ple: 1) Members of our congregations, often the younger or newer Christians, who want something different; 2) The people in the community whom we hope to win for Christ. Therefore, any congregation which has a concern for these two groups of people will want to consider offering also a regular, every Sunday Contemporary Worship Service.

Contemporary Service Defined

There are many different types of contemporary ser-"vices, but there are a few common characteristics:

1. Easy entry. A service which is easy for anyone to enter, with the hymns being singable, and the service easy to follow.
2. Contemporary music. A type of music which relates meaningfully to people whom a congregation is attempting to involve.
3. Warm, personal. Members and visitors feel at home.
4. Word and Sacraments. Containing the Word and the Sacraments as we know them from the Bible and Lutheran Confessions.

The big, obvious reason for the need for a more contem-porary approach to worship is the many changes in our society, including the following:

1. The boats did stop coming. Methods used to gather the scattered Lutherans yesterday will not work to win presences in our communities today.
2. The movement of the masses. One in five families moves every year, and when they move they shop for a new church. People today are not necessarily loyal to their own denomination. They often instead pick a warm, comfortable church.
3. New hymnals. The publication of the Lutheran Book of Worship and Lutheran Worship with their numerous choices in liturgies caused a monumental change in the philosophy of worship in our circles. The attitude reflected in the publication of The Lutheran Hymnal, which assumed that worship should be uniform in all Lutheran churches of the same synod, is obsolete. The new hymnals are based on a philosophy that worship can, may, and should differ from congregation to congregation. Furthermore, each congregation should and does design its worship according to what is most appropriate for its particular situation.

This is consistent with the attitude of Luther, who in his preface to the Deutsche Messe wrote: "In the first place I want to make a request, in all kindness, and in God’s name, too, that all who see this order of service or desire to adopt it shall not impose it as a law or cause anyone’s conscience to be distressed or bound by it, but shall use it in Christian freedom as they may please, as, where, when and as long as conditions war-rant or call for it."

4. Changing musical tastes. Only about two percent of American people listen to classical music radio stations. Not more than five percent of Americans have a strong Lutheran heritage. Therefore, a classi-cal music style of worship appeals to an extremely narrow band of the American public.

5. God is old-fashioned. American movies and televi-sion depict no committed Christians except those who lived at least 50 years ago. One of the greatest challenges for the Christian is attempting to convince people that Jesus is real for today.

Unfortunately, hymns written 100 to 500 years ago and a liturgy which is reminiscent of a monastic set-ting re-enforce the concept that God is a God of yester-day, but not of today or tomorrow.

6. Changing attitudes toward worship. Attitudes of people, including Lutherans, toward worship have changed. Some examples:

- Scripture readings. After much initial opposition some years ago, most congregations now use a modern translation.
- Sermons. Sermons have changed. Years ago, no pastor would have dared to use humor or personal references.
- Prayers. The classic, Pastoral Theology, by John H.C. Fritz warned: "In the pastor's absence, the teacher of the parish school or a member of the church council may read (itales in original) a prayer that has been prepared for such an occa-sion. Since praying in public is teaching (itales in original) in public, only such should publicly offer ex voto prayers as have been called publicly to teach.”

Furthermore, Grandma was never without her prayer book, which had a prayer which could be read for every occasion.

Today, laypersons lead in prayer, and they do it personally, from their hearts. The prayer book in general has gone the way of the dinosaur.

- Warmth and friendliness. In times past people looked for awe and majesty. Even little country churches imitated Gothic cathedrals. Though we may disagree with John Naisbit’s theology, he is...
right in saying that in today's impersonal, technological, computer age, people are looking for warm personal relationships. People join the "friendly" church. We built fan-shaped church buildings. The emergence of the nuclear family was a negative, no one has ever had a warm relationship with their extended families. The breakdown of many families is a reality. Many people in our churches are living in two independent, living in our own communities. Almost without exception those experiencing almost immuneless growth are also closely tied to the music of the day.

As I write this article, the religion section of Time Magazine is devoted to the Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. The basic point of the article is that "The prime market for Hybels (the pastor's) softsell pitch is what he calls 'unchurched Harry,' 25-to-45-year-old professional types who have become disillusioned with the stodgy ritual and sanctimoniousness of many traditional churches. This is the generation that grew up on television," says Hybels. 14

The experience of our congregation (Grace Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington) reinforces the importance of the contemporary service for evangelism. Our own congregation holds three Sunday services. A traditional Lutheran service begins at 8:00 a.m., and contemporary services are scheduled at 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. (the 9:30 a.m. being an outgrowth of the 8:00 a.m. contemporary service).

When the last group of new members joined our congregation, we asked each person to fill out a survey form. Forty-six persons returned the forms. Of those, seventeen specifically mentioned that they joined the congregation because of contemporary worship services. Thirty-eight of the forty-six regularly attend the contemporary services.

But Is It Lutheran? Probably the most often heard objection to a contemporary worship service is, "But, pastor, it's not Lutheran." If by "not Lutheran" the person means the service according to our experience in the Lutheran Church since the publication of The Lutheran Hymnal in 1945, then he or she is probably right. However, most would define "Lutheran" in broader terms. The genius of the Lutheran Church has been to keep the traditional and to add the contemporary as Luther did in keeping the Latin mass and adding the Deutsche Messe.

The Lutheran Confessions direct attention to worship. In the Confessions there are two basic emphases. The first is found in "The Augsburg Confession," Article VII, which states that "The Church is that community of by God's institution... by persons instituted by men should be alike everywhere." This theme is repeated in several other places, as in "The Apology of The Augsburg Confession," Article VII and VIII. The second accent is the teaching that traditional ceremonies do not help to merit justification for the believer. This concept is mentioned in the "Apology," Article XV, and repeated in a number of other places. In fact, the "Epitome" of the "Formula of Concord," Article X, emphasizes that ceremonies and church usages are perfect by free and not need in any sense be uniform. The "Epitome" states:

"We believe, teach and confess that the community of God in every locality and every age has authority to change such ceremonies according to circumstances as it may be most profitable and edifying to the community... that no church should condemn another because it has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God as long as there is multiform evidence in doctrine and in all its articles, as well as in the right use of the sacraments." 16

Why Not Simply "Teach 'Em"? Two questions sometimes asked are: "Why do we need to offer different music and different liturgy to reach the non-member? Why not simply bring people into the church and teach them to appreciate the beautiful Lutheran liturgy and the great Lutheran chorales?" There are two responses. First, visitors who come to a worship service and are not excited or touched by the service simply will not return a second time, making it impossible for anyone to teach them about the Lutheran liturgy. A second response is that it is extremely difficult to teach a person appreciation for a type of music or a type of liturgy. Each of us likes one's own particular style of music, and it takes a great deal of time and effort to change tastes in music or in art, or, for that matter, in clothing or automobiles. It is certainly possible to win a person to the church by providing a worship service or some other means, so that the individual becomes a part of the congregation in spite of a dislike of a particular style of music or liturgy. But in the process we simply lose too many people.

The Decision

Every church body, every congregation, must eventually make the decision as to how important outreach, evangelism and growth are to that particular body. Evangelism as a priority will be reflected in the worship of the congregation and the extent to which a parish is willing to adjust its worship services to the needs of the outsider and visitor, even to the slight discomfort, perhaps, of the long-time parishioner. We have to decide what kind of church body, what kind of congregation we wish to be. Through the years one has heard criticism of other denominations. One denomination is criticized as adopting a philosophy which suggests that it does not wish to grow, and that it is very happy to remain small because doctrinal purity is the first priority. Another denomination appears to believe that growth and winning souls, which might be considered the "numbers game," are much less important than ministering to the social, physical, and emotional needs of the people in the community. We must ask ourselves, "Do we wish to become known as the church body which is so 'Christian' that we naively think we can lose members gradually to others who that we might preserve a particular form of worship set in a specific time period in our history?" The price, it seems to me, is too high.
Tension and Release

Some Implications of the Church Growth Movement for Worship Leaders and Other Educators

What an exciting and fascinating time to be a part of the Church's mission! So much interest and emphasis on so many areas of ministry! So much exploration into contemporary media! So much study in the different disciplines of theology and sociology! So much reflection upon effective parish planning and management! Who knows, years from now, what significance this decade will have had for the Church?

Of course, with such a burst of activity in all directions, controversy inevitably arises. Some in the Church fear such tension and ignore it or hide from it. Others revel in it! But tension always accompanies times of creativity. It is to be expected. Only a tenacious working through of the dilemma finally brings a release in the form of a new product, a new vision, a new way of doing things. Such is the nature of creativity.

What implications does the Church Growth Movement hold for us as worship leaders (whether or not we actually "lead," assist, or teach)? Should our churches continue to pull their members into an understanding of our heritage, or should they discard that and break new ground, create brand new, "user-friendly" services for corporate worship? What can we do to assist the Church in its present dilemma? First of all,

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Let's accept the present tension. We may even come to regard it as healthy—a necessary part of an active, living Church. We all know that if the topic is worship and music, whenever two Lutherans gather, there will be three opinions! All of us—pastors, teachers, musicians, lay people, church growth spokesmen, liturgical renewal leaders—feel a deeply personal involvement when it comes to worship. This is an emotional issue because it touches the heart of every Christian. How shall we "Call on the name of the Lord"? (Genesis 4:26)

Let's accept the likelihood of pitfalls which can trap us as we embrace programs which promise all the answers or yield to those who would compel us to retain ceremonies as if they are commanded. Let's keep an eye out for the misrepresenting of LCMS tradition or a sloppy analysis of it. There are few truisms in the current debate. Are there liturgical churches in the LCMS which are growing? Of course! Do some churches that adopt informal worship services continue to decline? You bet! Let's support dialogue with clear definitions. What does liturgical mean? Even our private prayers and praises coalesce into regular acts and forms—liturgies. Is informal worship really informal, that is, without form? Not really. Formal worship follows the prescriptions of the church at-large, the compilation of the efforts of countless people and generations; most informal worship follows the design of one person, the pastor.

Let's acknowledge the pitfalls of programs generated from a different theological perspective. At Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, the faculty (consistent with their tradition) does not consider Baptism and Holy Communion as means of grace. Rather they are ordinances which the Church performs, obedient to Christ's command. This does not mean that Church Growth principles can't be applied in a Lutheran context. But the concern remains since, as Thomas Windsor pointed out in a recent lecture, "there have been times in American history where the means of grace were abandoned in favor of sensational new techniques as the church's emphasis turned away from the nurture of its members to the enthusiastic recruitment of converts."

Yet another pitfall is close at hand. It seems to me that the current distinction between style and substance has a hollow ring to it. ("Our church is still 'Lutheran' in substance, but our worship style is 'evangelical.") The worship forms of a group of Christians develop grows out of the faith which it holds. Its teachings may be contained in confessional writings and dogmatic textbooks, but it is experienced in worship. As the people gather for worship, hear the Word of God proclaimed, sing, and pray, doctrine (substance) enters and transforms their lives. Within the form of worship, the church's confessional message is taught and made clear. It follows then that if you worship as a Baptist, you're a Baptist; if as a Roman Catholic, you're a Roman Catholic; if as a Sacristy Brethren (Garrison Keillor fame), you're a Sacristy Brethren; if as a Lutheran, you're a Lutheran.

We are not talking here about the details and actions of the worship form, but rather the content. Discussions about remaining truly Lutheran should center on the latter and not the former. The phrase, "Well, historically it's been our practice to . . . " is not, in and of itself, enough of a justification for what we do in the different sections of our
liturgy. The essential why must be addressed and affirmed.

Let's accept the reality of a quickly changing society. Homogeneity is distant, virtually non-existent in our part of American life. An all-pervasive pluralism has led us to expect variety in every part of daily living. Where exact replication does not fit, we are conditioned to tune it out. Small wonder then that we occasionally encounter disdain for ritual (especially given the mechanical detachment with which we experience our liturgy). It is also not surprising that members of high-tech society crave warmth and welcome in their worship experiences. According to Carl Dudley, professor in McCormick Seminary, that warmth is their entry to faith. Only then will they move to believing and finally to belonging. This is the opposite of what we have been conditioned to and have come to expect. We grew up in what David Luecke calls "the village church" model. We were members long before we had worked out the details of our faith. We belonged and then believed. For most of us, the warm, personal faith experiences were much later. As society changes, so must the way in which the church operates.

Let's accept the changing music needs of a church body set in a diverse culture. No discussion of contemporary worship is possible without bringing up the topic of the church's music. People's opinions are even more passionate, if that's possible (!), in this area. The music of the service simply must seek to touch the hearts of all those gathered. Dr. George Hunter, Church Growth consultant, points out in The Continguous Congregation that music is a primary factor in reaching the unchurched today. Most of our churches do an excellent job in choosing music that is accessible to the average listener. The popularity of the music of the church today across denominational lines in our country attests to the appeal of the fine work being done in this area. But in a 1989 presentation called "Contemporary Christian Music—Problems and Possibilities," Dr. Thomas Gieschen, music professor at Concordia, River Forest, Illinois, provided a new frame for discussion. After delineating eleven discernible styles in current sacred choral music (ranging from "church modern" to "holy pop" and "jazz and rock"), Gieschen offered a new premise. "One of the major factors in music today is education. One of the major problems is education. What we have in contemporary church music is that it is not educationally neutral. That is to say, there is nothing inherently evil in any of the above styles. This premise also suggests that no style carries with it a kind of negative baggage to the church listener because of its prevalent use in American secular music. (Author's note: I doubt that much of the church is ready to accept this as a premise, but there may be some congregations that would accept it based on their cultural setting. If this premise is accepted, how would the church's musicians choose from the tremendous amount of material being written?) Dr. Gieschen offered some questions as part of a screening process:

1. Text concerns
(Misplaced evangelism—trying to convert people who already believe; Latent synagogy—"I came looking for you, Jesus; Sub-Christian thought—"See, how pretty the snow must have been that morning!") Quality of expression—insipid wordings, doggerel.

2. Residual style concerns
(Is the morally neutral premise still valid in my congregation? Am I incurring a residual cost? Could I be cheating the experienced worshipper? Is the listener being sanctified to a higher purpose? Do I continue to teach, or am I simply taking the easy way out? Is the congregation being edified or entertained?)

3. Propriety concerns
(Is our church music program balanced? Is the music still functioning within the service, or are they performing? Is the music destroying the flow of the liturgy?)

4. Musical concerns
(Is the music excellent within its style? Is it really a "first fruit" programming?)

In accepting the option of choosing the contemporary music of a diverse culture, we need to be aware consciously of television's diluting of the term ministry. Every TV evangelist, contemporary Christian singer, or touring Gospel group has twisted the term onto its name. Subconsciously, we've begun to think of their music as somehow sacred or church no matter how superficial or theologically questionable the texts might be. It is really the function of the music which takes it out of the church music realm. Yes, they meet a need, and they really do provide the music of the people; but their concerts are not worship, and their purpose is closer to a kind of religious entertainment, a spiritual divisiveness. The term ministry is misplaced to them. The pastors and teachers I know do real ministry. They serve and meet the needs of their children, their members, and others on an ongoing basis, and they do so in a life of personal sacrifice. To apply the term ministry to both servants and entrepreneurs does a disservice to the former; and muddles the waters when it comes to the church's music. Let's stick with the basic definitions. (We'll talk about fundamentals in music and worship later.)

AFFIRM

Let's affirm all those things which we as a church body know to be true. Herb Miller has an important reminder in How to Build a Magnetic Church.

"... Christianity is not a method but a message. The Christian faith does not derive its enormous people changing power from sociological principles."

Its primary potency comes from theological truths.

Christian worship is not primarily evangelism. We would do well to remain devoted to "the apostles' teaching" and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42) Controversies often pertain to peripheral areas about details and traditions. These pull our focus away from the true area of concern: Is the Gospel which our Christians are clearly proclaiming in the sacraments which He instituted being properly administered? Is Worship in the Lutheran Church a strong message when it brings to the worshiping congregation that Biblical, Christ-centered message which it is committed to proclaim. More often than not, our so-called liturgy has successfully achieved the opposite.

Let's affirm that our liturgy has always adapted to changing cultural context. Times of tension and release, of creativity in worship, are not new to us. It was a radical step in 1912 when the LCMS officially adopted the Common Service of 1888. Some minor changes were made when The Lutheran Hymnal was produced in 1941. Lutheran Worship (1982) offered extensive alterations. Among them:

1. Wider use of psalmody
2. Emphasis on more Scripture reading (three lessons according to a suggested three-year lectionary)
3. A new aural emphasis: "This is the feast of victory," "Thank the Lord and sing His praise," and "What shall I render to the Lord," among others.

Even the Church's Year, with its system of Sundays and major festivals retelling the story of salvation in Jesus Christ and the implications for the faith of the life of the church, has undergone some changes. The calendar and the lectionary guarantee that the full range of pastoral care will be covered. Many contemporary services which I have attended fail miserably (besides being downright boring) in truly conveying the comprehensiveness of what our heritage offers.

Beginning with Luther himself, it has been our nature to adapt, to refine, to pare away what no longer works, and to try new things. It is not our nature to simply discard what has been given to us. It is not our nature to break cleanly, completely with our past. The biggest problems in American music today are not in the Roman/Romanite or Lutheran rites and starting out anew is that it will likely take many years of hard work to develop something truly worthwhile. What is the effect of this experimentation on the congregation over the long haul? What if, twenty years from now, someone suddenly realizes this wasn't such a good idea? By that time the worship life of an entire generation will have been impoverished. There's much less risk in simply re-molding and re-working what we have.

Let's affirm that Lutheran theology differs from much of American religious thought today. Most television religion expounds what Luther referred to as a theology of glory. Today it is more commonly called "triumphalism," and it centers on man's successful efforts to win God's approval. Again we turn to Tom Windsor:

"Are we, in some way, seeking out that perfect methodology in evangelism so that we can prove we possess God's blessing? According to Luther the cross of Christ examines our efforts and declares them wanting. Through the cross God has put an end to our self-efforts at achieving his approval. Let's be wary of any plan which desires statistical success for its own sake."

Let's affirm why music always has been such an important part of worship in our church. We eagerly remind others that we are the singing church. (Even Bob Newhart speaks of this.) We've been blessed with an equally strong tradition in organ, choir, and instrumental music. But too often we still think of music as an extra ornament enhancing the service. Music is not so much a wrapping around the Word, but rather it is an unwrapping of the Word. Where words fail, music speaks. Robin Leaver, noted Luther scholar, has provided the church with a timely gift in his essay, "The Theological Character of Music in Worship." In it he pulls together a coherent statement on why music is so essential to us as we worship. Leaver shows how music and Biblical theology are interrelated and interdependent, and how this understanding deeply affects how music is used in worship. Music for its own sake, whether called "modern pop," has no place in worship, since it is alien to Biblical thinking; it points to man instead of God. For Luther music was the transforming power in the heart of the redeemed. In emphasizing music as God's—not man's—creation and as God's gift to man to be used in His praise and glory, the church is particularly open to the church priesthood of all believers. Luther laid the foundation for the musical involvement of every Christian—congregation, choir, church, instrumentalists—in corporate worship. Mark Bangerter, speaking recently of his worship experiences in Tanzania, pointed out that these Africans come to worship expecting to participate fully in the musical fully in the expression whether by playing the drums or just swaying. A critique of how well the organist played today is simply not a part of the agenda. How much can we teach about how to worship?

ADAPT

Let's adapt by re-examining the variety already built into the Divine Service and building upon it. Let's risk change! Let's seek out what it takes to proclaim the Gospel genuinely in our society. Let's find out what it means to be American Lutheran (and not be embarrassed to capitalize both words). Let's adapt by redirecting our investments at all levels toward worship education and worship itself. This is desperately needed.

In 1984 the Lutheran World Federation Assembly requested a study of the viability of dialogue between Lutherans and Evangelicals. This request demanded that the author give a panoramic view of the varied landscape of Evangelicalism and the equally uneven landscape of world Lutheranism. To perform such a momentous task by specifying the points of dialogue for the two traditions, Ellingsen solicited contributions from outstanding spokespersons of several facets of both Lutheran and Evangelical traditions and gave them editorial privileges as he moved to characterize the several distinctive elements in each. The result is an excellent and evenhanded treatment of all aspects of both traditions.

The author unravels the strands of historical patterns within both groups, revealing diversity where none was supposed and demonstrating unity or points of agreement where none was suspected. The author separates his task into four major areas. First, he reviews the birth of the Evangelical Movement in North America and worldwide. Second, he deals with the major institutional side of the movement—denominations within the canopy of Evangelicalism. He discusses Lutheranism and its institutionalism insofar as it shares common interests and deviates from various segments of remaining institutions. He then concludes with a discussion of parachurch, mission agencies, and cooperative agencies serving the cause. Third, the author identifies those elements, segments, and denominations within the movement which make the effort to reflect the best of Church tradition, seeking orthodoxy, as Ellingsen puts it, “in modern dress.” In the fourth section he investigates common cause issues for both Lutherans and Evangelicals in the modern world, surface deviative approaches each step of the way. Neither Lutheranism nor Evangelicalism can enter dialogue on common issues and common concerns without preparing the agenda. Ellingsen’s work is a necessary primer for such an agenda.

Ellingsen candidly gives snapshots of both church groups, exhibiting blemishes on the Church’s face in both traditions. The reader may well take exception to the total picture of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, suspecting it may be a character sketch rather than a snapshot. But Ellingsen notes, sensitively, that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (often branded as Biblicistic by critics) shows itself Gospel-centered as well as Biblical. As easily as the LCMS is misunderstood by elements in Lutheranism, by the same token, institutions within Evangelicalism are misunderstood by other elements of Evangelism. One can only imagine the misconceptions which must be addressed as both traditions seek mutual understanding. Ellingsen admits diversity can make impossible common confession regarding Scripture, Creeds, the work of Christ, justification, church and ministry, and social ethics, but some elements of each tradition may find common cause on one or more of those topics for discussion. Ellingsen has made a major contribution to a mutual understanding of the two traditions, if not in a larger way, to the future dialogue of the two traditions.

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