

Toward a Liturgical Unity

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[Presented to the Metro North and South Joint Pastoral Conference,
Salem Ev. Lutheran Church (N. 107th) Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 16, 1992]

It's hard to imagine how different things were on the WELS worship scene just twenty years ago. Twenty years doesn't seem like such a long period of time. But worship attitudes and forms have undergone a decided change in those twenty years.

In 1972 *The Lutheran Hymnal* reigned supreme in the WELS. There were not many congregations which were not entirely familiar and entirely comfortable with "Page 5" and "Page 15." In many ways the thirty year old book hardly showed its age. Congregations were still struggling to learn some of its "new" hymns and canticles, like "For All the Saints" or "*Te Deum Laudamus*." The agendas, liturgy books, and lectionaries which had followed the 1941 publication of the hymnal still had bright red covers. Worship helps for using the hymnal to its fullest were still being produced; Ralph Gehrke's *Planning the Service* was less than ten years old in 1972. Young pastors were still scurrying to find used copies of Lenski's sermon books on the historic epistles and gospels, for these were the texts most often used Sunday by Sunday. The black Geneva was the vestment of choice. And in most congregations the King was still solidly entrenched. The New International Version would not appear until two years later, and then only the New Testament. Elizabethan language was the language of worship in liturgy and prayers, and often it was the language of the lessons as well.

There was not much interest in worship variety in 1972, at least not on the parish scene. The ten years which had followed the publication of the 1941 hymnal were full of pleas to abandon parochial practices and to become part of the liturgical mainstream. Pastors who had been encouraged to strive for the adoption of the *Common Service* in 1945 did not have a mindset which led them to encourage changes in 1965. They were willing to drop parts of the liturgy, but not to substitute different parts for familiar ones. Only the most sophisticated WELS congregations heard the *introits* and graduals chanted by their choirs. There was not a widespread interest in using non-keyboard instruments in church. A notable Michigan congregation had on its books until 1972 a regulation prohibiting all brass instruments in worship!

In 1972 there was still a feeling in some circles of our church body that too healthy an interest in worship change was likely a sign of theological laxity. Liturgical interests which were too pronounced made it likely (at least to some) that a man was "unsafe." One begins to understand that attitude when it is remembered that the WELS was very sensitive about its conservative stance in 1972. As Missouri raced toward the Seminex wars, Wisconsin stood alone as the bastion of Lutheran orthodoxy. The atmosphere was not one which encouraged change in worship or even a desire for it.

In 1972 there were not many missionaries calling for change, either. In fact, there weren't many missionaries, at least not many outside the Midwest. 40% of the Arizona-California District's present congregations had not been founded in 1972. Florida and Texas had ten missions a piece. Only four of the North Atlantic District's present 37 congregations were in existence in 1972. Most of these young congregations had been formed by transplanted WELS members or disgruntled Missourians. There was little desire to change a worship style which, in many cases, actually was a drawing card. Even our foreign missions seemed comfortable with the 1941 hymnal. You have missed a special experience if you have never heard tapes of Zambian congregations chanting the *Gloria in excelsis*' Scottish chant in rich African harmonies!

There was no more external pressure for worship change in 1972 than there was internal pressure. In 1972 the Evangelical boom was a half-decade away. The movement was still struggling to break free of its revivalistic history, a necessary move if it was to attract the nation's white collar constituency. Evangelical worship life was still in its formulating stages and not much of an attraction to main-line WELS members. The Church Growth Movement did not become interested in domestic

mission work until after 1972, and so our pastors heard very little about the need for liturgical pragmatism.

There was some talk of a new hymnal in 1972. Martin Albrecht and Kurt Eggert had attended the 1965 opening sessions of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship which established a pan-Lutheran hymnal as its goal. By 1972 the first two booklets of the Contemporary Worship series had been completed, but their content, much more radical than what Lutheran Book of Worship eventually included, offered little which interested the WELS. Fellowship principles seemed to disallow a formal joining of the I.L.C.W. by our representatives, and soon the pan-Lutheran commission met without WELS observers.

With little pressure for worship innovation, neither our Synod nor its Seminary saw much need to educate for worship innovation. The Commission on Worship was only seven years old in 1972. Its publication, *Focus On Worship*, made its maiden appearance during the year before. The Seminary's worship offerings were primarily historical and practical (the first quarter's liturgy practice class was dubbed "Physical Education" by students of my era). There was little need for a study of liturgical principles since there were few opportunities for liturgical applications. Seminarians were exposed to some of the new hymns and canticles which appeared in Missouri's 1969 *Worship Supplement*; a few of the former were popular, the latter decidedly not.

The sketch is not exactly exhaustive, but it serves the purpose of this essay. The WELS was quite happy with liturgical uniformity in 1972, and the norm of uniformity was *The Lutheran Hymnal*. There was little pressure from inside or outside for change. The synod was on the verge of a growth spurt, a sure sign to many that our members were content with the status quo and that our God was blessing us.

How different the scene twenty years later!

In 1992 there is nothing approaching liturgical uniformity in the Wisconsin Synod. The roster of our 1200-plus parishes includes congregations which will use nothing else but *The Lutheran Hymnal* as well as congregations which will use everything else but *The Lutheran Hymnal*. A visitor to our congregations just in the state of Wisconsin could find the very liturgical *Common Service* at one end of the spectrum and a very unliturgical "seeker service" on the other end. A poll of our home missionaries, conducted by the Commission of Worship in 1986, revealed that the majority were regularly using dozens of hymns from sources other than *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Homemade rites for marriage, installation, confirmation, and baptism abound, and are often shared among congregations. Replacements for the *Common Service*, prepared by men considered to be wise innovators, are duplicated and mailed upon request. Even before the new rites from *Christian Worship* began to appear, it was not uncommon that congregations would have a different order of service each Sunday of the month. Such has become more common since those services began to be issued. Many of our pastors no longer preach on the basis of lectionary texts; expository preaching (defined by its advocates as chapter by chapter preaching) is growing in popularity.

Before one year passes, the 1993 convention of the Wisconsin Synod will have formally received a new worship book, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. When that hymnal is delivered, the issue I am raising in Rice Lake today will be raised again all over the synod: *Can we regain a liturgical uniformity?*

Some will venture that the question is asked more properly, "Should we regain a liturgical uniformity?" During this era our confessional uniformity has remained seemingly unblemished. Some may opine, therefore, that such is proof that liturgical uniformity is unnecessary. They may also be of the opinion that liturgical uniformity is impossible, given the heterogeneous world in which we minister. On the grounds that familiarity breeds contempt, they may even have decided that conformity with an established norm is to be avoided. And there are more than a few of our pastors and congregations who will stand against any synodical sense of uniformity by their determined hold on the liturgies of the 1941 hymnal.

There are many others in our church who lament the loss of a common liturgical confession. They advance the argument that it was the sense of synodical closeness, fostered by public worship, which encouraged the strengths of that era two decades past. They are asking if our confessional unity

can long endure if a common hymnal and worship rite no longer set the pattern for what the people are to believe. They wonder if all the various worship orders and hymns being used in our synod are not actually fostering (or perhaps already the result of) a watering down of doctrine.

You might have expected that this essayist is convinced that there does need to be a liturgical uniformity in our church body, and that such uniformity can come to exist on the basis of the worship book which nearing completion. I am not so naïve to think, however, that all in our synod (or even in this room) share that conviction. The fact is, I believe that this issue cannot even be addressed without work, sweat, and prayer. It involves more than a simple analysis of one form or another. It is an issue which cannot be laid to rest on the basis of pragmatism. It demands rather a study of principles, principles derived through a study of Scripture, the Lutheran confessions, and the writings of Martin Luther. I am pleased that your pastoral conference chose to undertake such a study and I intend to set before you two such principles. Even if all these studies do is cause thoughtfulness and contemplation, perhaps they will allow us to begin moving *toward a liturgical uniformity*.

I. Lutheran Worship Is Evangelical

According to Luther himself, in 1514 and 1515 he began to discover that the heart and soul of God's relationship with man was not to be found in the dictums of the medieval church but in the writings of St. Paul. By no means was the discovery immediate, nor did it thoroughly cleanse Luther of his scholastic bent. But several strains were becoming clear to him. The true God was not a God Luther had to fear. The "righteousness of God" which had so terrified him in earlier years now brought him comfort, as he realized that this was a righteousness God imputed to him through Christ by grace alone. The gospel was the vehicle through which God offered that grace and by which God created faith to believe it. Luther's good works were not the cause of his salvation but the joyful response to it. As these discoveries occurred one by one, it was obvious that Luther inevitably would challenge the foundations of Rome's false theology, her Mass and her entire sacramental system.

In November and December of 1519 Luther prepared sermons on penance, baptism and the sacrament which indicate that he was beginning to apply what he had learned from Paul to the Lord's Supper. He followed these in the summer of 1520 with "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility" in which he only touched on the Supper. But it was in July of 1520 that Luther proclaimed a scriptural principle which stood at the very center of the corporate worship issue. His Pauline insight into the relationship which existed between God and humanity led him to write in "A Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, The Lord's Supper":

If man is to deal with God and receive anything from him, it must happen in this manner, not that man begins and lays the first stone, but that God alone—without any entreaty or desire of man—must first come and give him a promise. This Word of God is the beginning, the foundation, the rock, upon which afterward all works, words and thoughts of man must build. (*LW*, Vol 35, p 82)

Luther was beginning to understand that the essence of going to Mass was not giving but receiving. He also perceived that such was not the emphasis of his church: "I fear that they have made the Mass into a good work, whereby they have thought to do a great service to Almighty God" (*LW* 35, p 93). This was his conclusion: "I think it is not fitting that we should make a good work or merit out of it [the Mass]. For a testament does not take benefit from us, but brings benefit to us" (*LW* 35, p 93). The studying and searching which accompanied each new publication led Luther to greater clarity and determination on the issue. By September he would produce "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church." In that writing he was no longer just fearing or thinking: "By far the most wicked abuse of all, in consequence of which there is no opinion more generally held or more firmly believed in the church today [is] this, that the Mass is a good work and a sacrifice" (*Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, Vol I, p 387).

The principle that Christian worship is gift before it is sacrifice is accepted in the WELS almost without thought. But to establish this principle Luther had to gainsay 1000 years of the western church's liturgy and theology. The sacrificial theology of the Mass was the outstanding element in Rome's plan of salvation. It drilled into medieval churchgoers the idea that God was an angry God who demanded to be appeased. It presented itself as one of the chief good works by which righteousness could be gained. It involved an actual denial of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. And it launched a whole set of additional atrocities: that grace could be gained, by simply doing or even seeing the Mass without any thought of faith; that the sacrifice could be purchased for spiritual gain by those who were not able to be present or for those who were dead; that only the priest could mediate between people and God. Luther's vehement denial of the Mass as sacrifice changed the concept of worship in Reformation lands, but it did not affect the teachings of Rome. Not 25 years after Luther's death the Council of Trent decreed:

If anyone says that a true and real sacrifice is not offered to God in the Mass...let him be condemned.

If anyone says that the sacrifice of the Mass is only one of praise and thanksgiving [This was Melancthon's contention in the Apology] or that it is a mere commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the Cross, but not one of propitiation; or that it is of profit to him alone who receives; or that it ought not to be offered for the living and the dead for sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities: let him be condemned. (Session XXII, canons 1,3; quoted in *Liturgies of the Western Church* by Bard Thompson)

Although even Trent recognized that some abuses had to be eliminated, it retained intact Rome's central theme that corporate worship was sacrifice.

Luther's understanding of the purpose of corporate worship was based not only on his perception of the interdependency of grace, faith and Scripture, but also on New Testament injunctions and examples. He realized that the concept of corporate worship Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians and the Colossians presupposed that the primary purpose of the assembly was for instruction (1 Cor 14:26), teaching and admonition (Col 3:16). The writer to the Hebrews encouraged meeting together for the sake of encouragement (Heb 10:25). The believers immediately after Pentecost obviously were involved in public worship as "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:41). First century believers in many cases were imitating what they had learned from the synagogue's emphasis (cf. Luke 4) on instruction. Even the service of the Temple and Tabernacle was not designed by God primarily for sacrifice. God intended the entire Old Testament sacrificial system, as well as the Passover, to be an occasion for impressing upon the people the concept of mercy. Thus Luther, while rejecting 1000 years of worship history, reclaimed the 2000 years of history which preceded the medieval concept and reestablished what God intended the corporate worship of his people to be.

It is difficult to know precisely when and where the church lost this evangelical principle. The earliest liturgies known to us, that of Justin's Rome, mentioned in his *First Apology* (155 AD) and the one Hippolytus prescribes in his *Apostolic Tradition* (ca 200 AD) give us no indication that apostolic doctrine had been lost. Hippolytus, in fact, was writing to defend the church against the vacillations of the Roman bishop Callistus (Thompson, p 13-14). Within 400 years, by the inauguration of Gregory I, the concept of Mass as sacrifice was firmly in place. In the 9th century Paschasius Radbertus proposed the seeds of the doctrine of transubstantiation and Walafrid Strabo justified the celebration of Mass without communicants (Thompson, p 42). The Fourth Lateran Council (1215 AD) dogmatized the entire claptrap.

A number of factors likely worked together in the years between Hippolytus and Gregory I to form the sacrifice concept. Even Paul had trouble ridding the New Testament church of sacrificial emphases. The Judaizers were not easily silenced, not only because they worked among Jewish believers but also because the *opinio legis* exists even in believers. The early and strong emphasis on thanksgiving in the eucharistic liturgies perhaps proved to be a breeding ground for the idea. Although his forms are pure, already Hippolytus spent a good deal of time presenting offerings. Finally, for all of Rome's

bluster about her place in the western church, she was hardly able to control the divergent liturgical customs which arose in the growing church. Given the communication limits of the medieval world, Rome wasn't even able to control divergent theologies. Unless her position was questioned, however, the church in Rome often found it easier to assimilate heresies than to burn heretics. It seems altogether feasible that the medieval church was pushed into the sacrifice abyss by eclectic theology fitting into a eucharistic emphasis, while all the time the *opinio legis* stood by and smiled.

By 1520 Luther understood that Rome's sacrificial system, however she had received it, was wrong and deadly. He firmly and thoroughly challenged it and pointed the church back to its evangelical roots. The principle was established, although the application would have to wait; in February of 1521 Luther was summoned to Worms to appear before the Diet and the Emperor. He made no effort to put his worship principles into practice until 1523 (at least as far as we know), and then only after fighting a battle against those who had applied his principles incorrectly and unlovingly. However, although he likely gave little thought to the actual forms of worship before 1523, the principles he enunciated in his liturgical writings (1523-1525) are the same as those he held to in 1520. Even a few quotations illustrate this.

When God's Word is not preached, one had better neither sing nor read, or even come together. (*LW 53*, p 11)

Let everything be done so that the Word may have free course. (*LW 53*, p 14)

Let us, therefore, repudiate everything that smacks of sacrifice, together with the entire canon and retain only that which is pure and holy, and so order our Mass. (*LW 53*, p 26)

By faith be free in your conscience toward God, but by love be bound to serve your neighbor's edification. (*LW 53*, p 48)

The orders must serve for the promotion of faith and love and not to the detriment of faith. (*LW 53*, p 90)

Luther was attacked roundly for his opinions on corporate worship, not only for what he proposed, but especially for what he denied. When Philip Melanchthon picked up his pen in both the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, he wrote more lines defending Luther's denials than his proposals. Especially in the latter document Melanchthon repeatedly wrote in a way similar to this:

Our opponents condemn us for teaching that human traditions do not merit the forgiveness of sins and they require so-called universal rites as necessary for salvation. Here Paul is our champion; everywhere he insists that these observances neither justify nor are necessary over and above the righteousness of faith. (*Ap*, XV, p 49-50)

But in Article XXV of the Augsburg Confession, he mentioned the Lutheran determination to retain the Mass because it was beneficial for "the instruction of the people." In Article XV of the Apology he defended the use of the ancient rites because they "helped instruct the common folk."

We have exhausted the issue (and perhaps you as well) to make the point that there is no disagreement among the Scriptures, the Confessions and Luther concerning the essence and the cardinal function of the public gathering of God's people in worship. Lutheran worship means to proclaim the gift, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, *Lutheran worship is evangelical*.

This principle distinguishes Lutheran worship from the worship of all other Christian denominations. Such an assertion may seem to be an overstatement at first glance. The reforms of Vatican II (1963-1965), for instance, have given the gospel a greater role in the Mass. Roman Catholic worship manuals are full of encouragements to parish priests toward better reading, preaching and pre-worship instruction. In fact, they offer a great deal which Lutherans can use, especially when it comes to communication. But as to essence, the Mass is still a sacrifice which offers benefit to worshipers simply as they do the work. While today's Mass contains the gospel—and certainly more of it than ever before—its essential purpose is not to proclaim the gift but to offer a sacrifice.

One seems to be on less sturdy ground when the opinion is offered that the worship of the fundamentalists is not essentially evangelical. Although the term fundamentalist covers a broad area of denominational territory, fundamentalists invariably share a commitment to preaching the gospel. In fact, there is very little else in fundamental worship besides preaching, praying, and hymn singing. However, where fundamentalists are Arminian, we find additional emphases in worship, e.g., the altar call, the testimony, and the emotional response. It is precisely here that fundamentalist worship loses its evangelical character. When the emphasis of worship is removed from the “you are saved” pronouncements of Scripture, the evangelical principle is lost. Whether the setting is a baseball stadium, a white frame meeting house or a Grecian-revival church building, the Arminian worship assembly exists to elicit the evidence of a spiritual awakening, whether an on-the-spot decision for Christ, a testimony of good deeds, or an emotional reaction. The fundamentalists proclaim the gospel, but the bottom line emphasis of worship in many cases is not the gift of the gospel but the sacrifice of the free will.

Since it finds its roots in the fundamentalist/evangelical camp, the Church Growth Movement tends to encourage a similar worship emphasis. Church growth proponents are more sophisticated than old-line revivalists and are a bit embarrassed by the fundamentalists’ whoop-de-do conversion tactics. To their credit, church growth leaders find great value in corporate worship. C. Peter Wagner considers worship to be one of the three factors which are essential for church growth (*Your Church Can Grow*, p 97). He and other analysts share points of view which Lutherans need to hear not only for the sake of the unchurched, but for the church as well. Often as not, their insights are those liturgical scholars lack. Yet, not every church growth expert understands (or is willing to grant) that it is the gospel and that alone which truly converts the lost and edifies the church. The church growth expert David Luecke has expressed concerns about the way Lutherans “package” the gospel. While this essayist agrees with any suggestion which encourages Lutherans to present the gospel with all the abilities God gives, there is a very real point in Luecke’s writing at which the package becomes the essence and the proclamation incidental. The very fact that many church growth leaders feel comfortable serving both confessional and non-confessional denominations indicates that, at least to them, the method is more important than the Means of Grace. C. Peter Wagner wrote, “If you can serve a diet of positive sermons focused on the real felt needs of the people, you will be preaching for growth” (*Leading Your Church to Growth*, p 218). Another of Wagner’s points makes a case for worship as celebration:

When a lot of people come together, hungry to meet God, a special kind of worship can occur. That experience is what I want to call celebration...The great camp meetings of a century ago, Finney’s revivals, Billy Graham crusades...—all these operated basically as celebrations. Christians love to go to them. They are a lot of fun.

Some Sunday morning services in our churches are fun, too. Unfortunately, in a large number of our churches, the Sunday morning service is more like a funeral than a festival. There is nothing unauthentic about that kind of worship...But it is not the kind of experience that Christians are very enthusiastic about inviting their friends to. Why not admit it? It’s no fun!

This is probably one reason why many churches have remained small over the years.
(*Your Church Can Grow*, p 98)

The method for “successful worship” can be fellowship rather than fun. Luecke sees “feelings of joy, love and fellowship” as almost equal to the sacraments in having the power to foster a renewed faith (*Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*, p 85). Larry Vogel, in an article entitled “Mission Across Cultures and Traditional Lutheran Cultus” understands that the church growth question “Did we please the people with what we did today?” is no different essentially from the Roman Catholic question “Did we please God with what we did today?” (*Concordia Journal*, May 1986, pp 84-85). Both are competing views to the evangelical principle which always asks, “Did God come to us in the gospel today?”

The part of Protestantism which is neither part of fundamentalism nor much inclined to church growth mechanization is best characterized by its social action emphasis. These churches have little if any interest in gospel proclamation; what little remains in their worship forms is moralizing, in good Calvinistic style. The theologies which stand behind these forms always have tended to view worship in general and especially the reception of the Supper as divine obligations. Strangely, church members in these denominations tend either to completely disavow their traditional worship rites or to hang on them indefatigably—and with the same rationale: they want to do what’s “right” in their worship, either socially right or traditionally right. Larry Vogel comments: “It is certainly not an exclusive Roman Catholic error to center worship on sacrifice” (*op. cit.*, p 85). He adds in a footnote: “This attitude of worship is as present in the cultic practices of ‘social action churches’ as it was in Tridentine Roman Catholicism.”

The Apology speaks for the Scriptures and for Lutheranism’s evangelical worship principle when it says: “Thus God wishes Himself to be known, thus He wishes to be worshiped, that from Him we receive benefits, and receive them, too, because of His mercy, and not because of our merit” (Ap, IV, p 137). It was exactly that understanding which led Luther to see that first the Supper and finally the entire corporate worship function is not sacrifice, but gift. He also wrote: “It must also necessarily follow where faith and the word or promise of God decline or are neglected, that in their place there arise works and a false, presumptuous trust in them” (*LW* 35, p 92). Luther loved the newly-discovered doctrine of justification too much to allow that to happen. And so he arranged his examples of corporate worship services in such a way that the proclamation of the gospel was clearly their primary function. He did not ignore the people’s sacrifice of praise, for that is an aspect of worship which cannot be lost, either. But in order to maintain the doctrine of justification by faith, the distinctive view of worship as God serving man with his grace must continue to oppose the ever-recurring view of worship as humanity’s meritorious service to God. As Peter Brunner (*Worship In the Name of Jesus*, p 126) puts it: “Worship as a service of God to the congregation is the beating heart of Lutheranism.”

The evangelical principle has deep implications for anyone who is at the task of worship planning or revision. This is especially true for members of a hymnal committee. The sixteen men who sat on our synod’s Joint Hymnal Committee shared a serious determination to maintain and encourage the evangelical principle in the worship forms they prepared for our new hymnal, *Christian Worship*.

It should come as no surprise that this is true. What is somewhat surprising is the deep resentment many WELS members hold because of the changes the committee suggested, many of which are being offered precisely for the sake of the evangelical principle. The language issue is a case in point. When problems arose in a congregation over the introduction of the *Sampler*, the invariable point of contention was the new liturgy’s contemporary language. We might have expected some problems in this area, since “you” was replacing “thee” in forms which had been thoroughly committed to memory. However, the most strident chord which was struck by the batch of complaints was that contemporary language is somehow disrespectful to God, and that God cannot be worshiped with anything but a formalized, religious language. While it is true that reactions of this sort are often emotional and not thought through with careful analysis, it is also true that many of our people seem to hold to the opinion that worship must be offered to God in certain forms to qualify as God-pleasing worship.

It was reported to me several years ago that a local WELS couple, both Roman Catholic converts, were disturbed by the *Sampler*’s contemporary language because, as they insisted, “We will lose our traditions just like the Catholics lost theirs.” These concerned Christians surely look to Jesus as their Savior, but it is likely that they have not totally repudiated their former concept of worship. The loss they and many Catholics mourn in Rome’s departure from Tridentine customs is a worship which was purely and only sacrificial in character.

What Catholics gained was at least a flicker of the gospel light. But as long as people hold to the impression that their Sunday morning experience is designed to give the right thing to God (i.e., the “rite” thing!) and not to receive the right thing, they will be loathe to abandon traditional worship forms.

There are surely more of these people in our congregations than we care to imagine, and we do them no favors by failing to address the issue, lovingly but consistently, that Lutheran worship is not a

matter of proper form but of clear proclamation. Not so long ago one of our pastors pleaded with me to urge the hymnal committee to return to Elizabethan language because people in his area were attracted to his church precisely because of what he called “the WELS commitment to traditionalism.” I fear that this brother of ours is presenting a caricature of the Wisconsin Synod position; at least I hope it is a caricature! There is a great difference between conservatism in doctrine and traditionalism in form. The former is the heart and soul of the evangelical principle; God’s gift is compromised if his doctrine is proclaimed without purity. The latter opposes the evangelical principle if it either dulls the clarity of the gospel or becomes to our people the only right way to worship. We are surely wise to hold to traditions, but we must hold to them for the sake of the evangelical principle.

The noted social observer H.L. Mencken wrote: “What killed religion in France was a clear translation of the Bible.” That observation speaks volumes about what religion must have been in France! All of us, but especially our laypeople, need to understand that faith is built on the Means of Grace and not on human traditions. It is the Means which dare not change; the traditions which carry them may change, and, in fact, have changed. It would be tragic indeed if our great heritage would become nothing more than a human tradition. We dare never make this our theme song: “Page Five is our great heritage, and shall be ours forever.”

There are similar warning signals, I think, in the letters people have written in reaction to the Hymnal Committee’s hymn corpus. The consistent refrain of these letters is that the committee is dropping some hymns and failing to include others which are a part of what some people consider “that old-time religion.” One of the “drops,” “Nearer My God to Thee,” has elicited impassioned defense, as have a number of exclusions, e.g., “The Old Rugged Cross” and “In the Garden.” My mail increased when I spoke ill of the hymn “Blessed Assurance” in an issue of *Focus on Worship*. One man wondered, “What’s wrong with it? We love to sing it!” He added, “As far as bad hymns are concerned, the hymns by Martin Luther are the WORST in our hymnal.” We’ll grant that the fellow likely exaggerated for effect, but his strong convictions certainly indicate that he and others would like to be able to sing and feel good about it. When it becomes obvious that the Lutheran Church is not always enamored of these old favorites, (and some contemporary favorites as well), the reaction is not usually “Why is this hymn not doctrinally appropriate for me?” but rather “This hymn is emotionally appropriate for me!”

The desire of some Christians to “feel good” at worship is one which on the one hand is gratifying and on the other hand alarming. That believers desire to rejoice in their status as God’s children is good and salutary; one might wish more expressed that desire. Too often, I fear, some are looking to fulfill this desire in something besides the good news about Jesus. Also our members (and surely many who visit our churches) have been affected by the “consumer” syndrome. An a recent article in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Prof. Mark Braun adduced this quotation from *Eternity*:

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 there,” advised one professor of homiletics. “Be sure you have the four prerequisites of a successful church,” warned another; “upbeat music, adequate parking, a warm welcome, and a dynamite sermon.” The slogan is “Try it, you’ll like it.” (Arnold, Duane and Fry, George, “Weothscrip,” *Eternity*, September, 1986)

There is nothing so very wrong with lilting melodies, syncopated rhythms, uplifting modulations, and easy-to-learn refrains. There is nothing intrinsically wrong about a cheery “Good morning,” from the lectern at the beginning of the service, about humor in the pulpit, or about encouraging members to address the pastor as “Pastor Bob,” but if all these replace the gospel as that which elicits a good feeling, then the evangelical principle has been severely violated. Without the everlasting gospel joy is never lasting. No one ought to be congratulated for making worship dull and lifeless. Music, language, style of

delivery and performance ought to be uplifting. But those who teach the concepts of worship need to remind people that the key to joy is Jesus, not hype. Worship forms mean to carry the gospel, but when the forms begin to replace the gospel in the moving of hearts, then all is lost.

As long as the *opinio legis* remains a part of Christians, we will have all the work we need or want to maintain this principle in our ways of worship. As long as our members come from various denominational backgrounds and tune in to various religious broadcasts, our work will be difficult. Pastors have plenty to do without contributing to the problem themselves. Certainly a lackadaisical recitation of the forms of worship or a formalistic tone of voice do nothing to discourage the perception that worship has occurred as long as the right forms have been employed. We may want to rethink our long-standing custom of facing the altar to speak the Words of Institution. Luther encouraged a free-standing altar precisely so that the Words might be proclaimed to the congregation. We sons of Luther are wise to consider his advice. It is my opinion that we need to take care in the way we use confession as preparation for the Lord's Supper. Letters to the hymnal's project director leave a strong impression that not a few of our members view their pre-communion confession as the good work which makes them worthy to receive the "reward" of the Sacrament. It should not be surprising that the strong attachment of confession to communion has its roots in Lutheran Pietism, not Lutheran Orthodoxy. For exactly this reason the liturgy committee decided not to offer a revision of *The Lutheran Hymnal's* pre-communion confessional service. The general confession, spoken at the beginning of the service before we either hear God's word or receive the pledge of his body and blood, is preparation which seems to be in the spirit of Luther's "he is truly worthy and well-prepared who has faith in these words..." I also fear that too many law-centered reminders to attend the Lord's Supper make of the Sacrament, at least in the minds of some, a good work they offer to God. We need to examine any procedures which encourage such thinking, especially church discipline policies and (I shudder to hear this has been done among us) pledge cards for communion attendance.

It was precisely because Luther understood that human beings are at the same time righteous and sinful and therefore, are prone to violate the evangelical principle, that he valued a confessionally uniform worship rite. There have been voices, in Luther's day and in ours, which have insisted that the church is too careful about form in worship. These voices offer the opinion that forms stifle spontaneity and inevitably turn worship into formalism. They cite Jesus' warnings against imitating the babbling of the pagans. Their concerns are well-taken. We submit, however, that they are also somewhat naïve. It is not the nature of Satan to leave the church at worship alone. Why should he be less interested in the worship assembly than in any other part of the church's activity? Nor does it follow that a little impurity now and then hurts no one. Impurity in proclamation never edifies, even if it is unintentional. Consider this well-intended absolution, recently gleaned from a WELS service folder: "In the name of God, our loving Lord, I announce forgiveness to each of you who has honestly confessed your sins, earnestly repented of them, and truly accepts Jesus as your Savior and Lord." One can only surmise how many believers arrived home after hearing that offer of forgiveness wondering if their confession had been honest enough, sincere enough, and earnest enough to have received the Savior's forgiveness.

Impurities in praise do not edify either, even though they are presented with enthusiasm and devotion. Contemporary song lyrics which contain a call for a decision for Christ or downplay Jesus' work as Savior are never spiritually edifying, no matter how relevant or well-loved their musical accompaniment may be. As long as it desires to preserve the evangelical principle in corporate proclamation, praise, and prayer, and as long as believers retain a sinful flesh, the church will need to face the reality that evangelical worship requires gospel-centered forms.

Is there, in this caution, the inherent implication that the rites prepared for *Christian Worship* are better in one way or another than those prepared in pastors' studies? I think not. But it stands to reason that a committee of seven men with wide-ranging pastoral backgrounds, with almost 200 years of combined experience, and with a deep interest in and a thorough knowledge of worship forms and their theology are going to be able to produce something over a period of seven years (with help from critical and doctrinal review as well as field testing) which has at least as much value as a form which is composed in a busy pastor's study late on a Thursday night.

As it offers new forms of worship for use in our churches, the Joint Hymnal Committee has no desire to lord it over pastors and congregations. These men know well, as you do, the words of the Formula of Concord:

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 the most useful and edifying to the congregation of God. (FC Epitome X:2)

But there is another voice which speaks to that issue, and it is also found in the Confessions:

It is lawful for Bishops and 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 does not offend another, that all things be done in the churches in order, and without confusion. (AC, XXVIII: 53, 55)

As they consider the necessary defense of the evangelical principle, pastors and congregations need to take pause before they determine to go it alone. It is indeed proper to insist that the believers themselves have the right to decide the form of corporate worship they want to employ. Is it equally proper, however, for the congregation always to employ that right? In other words, does the congregation itself always have the ability to determine the forms of public worship which best suit its needs? In dozens of ways a body of believers calls upon certain individuals to make decisions on its behalf. Our church body, for instance, did not put into the hands of each congregation the task of writing its own *This We Believe*. Christians throughout our synod gave their tacit approval to the decision to designate qualified men to carry out the writing of that confessional statement. In the same way believers properly call upon others to assist them in forming a set of rites for public worship. Writing in his book *Luther On Worship*, Vihmos Vajta suggests this was Luther's point of view:

The believer indeed is free in stated forms of worship. He worships in spirit and truth. Yet he submits to them, first, because he himself is not a perfect Christian and needs to be trained in the faith, and second, in order to help his neighbor grow in faith. (pp 174-175)

The evangelical principle in Lutheran worship, so clearly understood by the apostles, so wonderfully rediscovered by Luther and so clearly summarized in the Lutheran Confessions, is wisely reconsidered by the churches of the 1990s. It is finally in corporate worship where most of the 421,000 members of the WELS receive their only weekly contact with the faith-empowering Means of Grace. It is in corporate worship where these thousands most often are empowered to be faithful stewards, eager evangelists, wise parents, loving spouses and devoted students of the word. This is a very timely reminder as our church body carries on what has been called spiritual renewal. After a recent presentation in the Seminary's lecture series, Dr. Robert Kolb of Concordia College, St. Paul, remarked that any call to a new Lutheran piety (a term he prefers to spiritual renewal) must be centered on a return to one's baptism, on confession and absolution, and on Word and Sacrament. We were not able to agree with everything Dr. Kolb said in his post-lecture remarks, but we had no argument with the sentiments he expressed concerning growth in sanctification. Missouri's past president, Ralph Bohlmann, carried the point a step farther in the Lutheran Witness:

Worship is central to growth and we dare not forget it. With all the attention we place on our efforts, our organizational know-how, our studies and surveys, let us never forget that the power by which God's people live and serve him is the power that comes through Word and Sacrament.

If we want to grow in numbers, we must first and continually grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Growth occurs as we read, study, learn and inwardly digest the Word of God with its new and powerful story of the redeeming love of Christ. Through baptism, lived daily as we repent of our sins and cling to the forgiveness offered by Christ, we continue to be renewed and strengthened in our Christian faith and life.

Through the body and blood of our Lord in his precious supper, our sins are forgiven and we are strengthened to love and serve him. God's Word and Sacraments are not only means by which he forgives our sins, daily and richly, but the sources of God's power in and through us.

When congregations, like individual Christians, experience a lack of spiritual energy and enthusiasm, the reason may well lie in our neglect of the worship of God that centers in the joyful use and reception of his Word and Sacraments. Too often, our worship life has grown cold and we find ourselves spending more and more time on programs and less and less time in the Word. (*The Lutheran Witness*, February 15, 1987, p 24)

II. Lutheran Worship is Liturgical

Once he had rediscovered the doctrine of justification and reestablished the principle that corporate worship must proclaim that doctrine, Luther was loathe to take any step which would have allowed the tyrant sacrifice to raise its ugly head again. Without a doubt, it was that kind of thinking which discouraged him from proposing a new worship rite for the Lutheran churches. He wanted nothing to interfere with the gift concept, neither a form which obscured it nor a form which replaced it as the primary emphasis of worship. He concluded his German service with this strong injunction:

This or any other order shall be so used that whenever it becomes an abuse, it shall be straightway abolished and replaced by another...For the order must serve the promotion of faith and love and not be detrimental of faith. As soon as they fail to do this, they are invalid, dead and gone. (*LW 53*, p 90)

Luther was also aware, already in 1522, of the weight his words carried in northern Germany. He understood, for example, that his return to the pulpit could put a stop to the liturgical anarchy which Andreas Carlstadt and Gabriel Zwilling had been fomenting in Wittenberg ever since he had been hidden away at the Wartburg. Against the Elector's better judgment Luther left his hiding place and arrived at Wittenberg to begin a series of eight sermons, the first delivered on the First Sunday in Lent. Order was restored quickly, and just as quickly Carlstadt and his comrades left town. Luther respected that land of power and zealously qualified every liturgical suggestion he made with words similar to these:

We heartily beg, in the name of Christ, that if in time something better should be revealed to them [i.e., other Christians] they should tell us to be silent, so that by common effort we may aid the common cause. (*LW 53*, p 20)

Besides all this, Luther on principle would not violate the emphasis on liberty which his hero St. Paul defended so strongly to the Colossians: "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with respect to a religious festival...These are a shadow of the things that are to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col 2:16).

Luther's careful defense of Christian liberty in the forms of worship is convincingly supported by the Lutheran Confessions. We could adduce many quotations at this point. One from the Apology and another from the Formula of Concord will do.

But just as the dissimilar length of day and night does not injure the unity of the Church, so we believe that the true unity of the Church is not injured by dissimilar rites instituted by men. (Ap, VII and VIII: 33)

We unanimously believe, teach and confess that the ceremonies or church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word...are in and of themselves no divine worship nor even a part of it.

We believe, teach and confess that no Church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other. (FC Epitome, X, p 329)

There were those in Luther's day and in the generation which followed him who would have preferred that the reformer and the Confessions stop at this point of freedom. Similar voices are sounding in today's church. The freedom principle seems to match up exactly with the evangelical principle. When the essential question in corporate worship is this: "Did God come to us in the gospel today?" it seems that content is primary and form secondary.

A careful reading of Luther and the Confessions reveals that there was in the land of the Reformation an equal concern for content and form. Luther understood that too much freedom could obscure the gospel just as quickly as too little. He valued textual stability for the sake of teaching children. In his Preface to the Small Catechism he strongly urged the teachers of the catechism to "adopt one form, adhere to it, and use it repeatedly year after year," and not to "alter a single syllable or recite the catechism differently from year to year," so as not to confuse the people. Despite his words about freedom in worship he wrote this about his paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer in the German service:

I would like to ask that this paraphrase or admonition follow a prescribed wording or be formulated in a definite manner for the sake of the common people. We cannot have one do it one way today, and another, another way tomorrow, and let everybody parade his talents and confuse the people so that they can neither learn nor retain anything. (*LW* 53, p 80)

Luther saw just as clearly the unifying value of form. To the Christians in Livonia he wrote:

For those who devise and ordain universal customs and orders get so wrapped up in them that they make them into dictatorial laws opposed to the freedom of faith. But those who ordain and establish nothing succeed only in creating as many factions as there are heads, to the detriment of Christian harmony. (*LW* 53, p 46)

Finally, the Reformer was of the opinion that too much changing was a sign of some deeper problem. He refused to align himself with

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. Such people are a nuisance even in other affairs, but in spiritual matters, they are absolutely unbearable. (*LW* 53, p 19)

Luther was all for freedom, but not for disorder. By 1523 there were reports from all over Germany that the number of reformed rites was growing and that, often as not, confusion ensued. The fact is, Luther composed both his Latin and German services only after repeated requests to produce something which would bring uniformity.

In March of 1522 Luther became aware that some in Wittenberg were making prescriptive for worship New Testament practices which he understood were only descriptive. To them the words "Take eat" determined that the communicant had to take the wafer into his own hands. Ulrich Zwingli would

make similar assertions in Zurich two years later and insist that the altar be replaced by a table, according to New Testament custom. Luther knew that there were no Mosaic ordinances in the New Testament. His eventual suggestions were surely influenced by concerns in this area.

Then there was the problem with the enthusiasts. Luther may have joked about Thomas Muentzer swallowing the Holy Ghost, feathers and all, but he certainly understood how dangerous the heavenly prophets were. At the same time they refused to accept any of the traditional forms of Christian worship they also claimed direct revelation from God and denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament. Luther saw in these anti-liturgical Schwaermer an actual loss of the gospel.

As early as 1522 Luther expressed concern that those who were following him were being considered sectarian and not simply reformed. He discouraged the use of the term "Lutheran" for that very reason. He insisted that the churches which followed his lead were teaching what true believers had always taught. In 1524 he wrote: "We teach nothing new. We teach what is old and what the apostles and all godly teachers have taught" (*What Luther Says*, p 861). He continued to make that point to the end of his life. In one of his last sermons he said, "We can prove that our faith is not new and of unknown origin, but that it is the oldest faith of all, which began and continued from the beginning of the world" (*What Luther Says*, p 860).

While he was insisting that the forms of worship were the free choice of every Christian congregation, all these other concerns were weighing on Luther's mind at the same time. He understood that the sacrificial concept of the Mass had to be overcome and he hesitated to replace one set-in-concrete rite with another. But disorder and irreverence had to be conquered, too. Not even the perception could be allowed that New Testament forms of worship were somehow prescriptive for the 16th century church. Whatever forms were employed, Word and sacrament had to be clearly in the foreground. And the understanding that the church of the Reformation was nothing else but the continuity of the one, holy, Christian Church had to be retained.

One last factor molded Luther's thinking in the early 1520s. It was not a concern so much as it was part of his character. Luther valued the legacy he had received from western civilization, and he had a sense of artistic propriety and appreciation. He would have agreed, no doubt, that "there has never been a maudlin voluntary which someone has not considered beautiful," but he recognized that such judgments do not render the unbeautiful beautiful. We see a commitment to artistic integrity in all of Luther's writings. In the subjective land of artistic appreciation, Luther recognized that there was a place for objective judgment. He understood that beauty is not just a matter of personal preference. He considered it improper, for instance, to force rough German words into the flowing Gregorian chants of the historic liturgy. He would not produce a German service until he had an opportunity to consult with the best musical minds (both Lutheran and Catholic!) in Europe. He was loathe to lose the beauty of language and strongly urged that the children learn Latin. He understood that the same Paul who had championed the doctrine of justification by faith alone and who would allow no other gospel to replace the one he had received from God had also encouraged: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent and praiseworthy—think about such things" (Phil 4: 8-9).

Where did all of these concerns lead Luther? Let him answer.

It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use. (*LW 53*, p 20)

Luther understood that the outline and the basic elements of the Roman rite had their roots in the seedbed of the western church and were pure; only medieval additions like the Canon—"that abominable concoction drawn from everyone's sewer and cesspool" (*LW 53*, p 21)—had polluted it. He was not about to abandon the pure for the sake of the impure.

The service now in common use everywhere goes back to genuine Christian beginnings, as does the office of preaching. But as the later has been perverted by the spiritual tyrants, so the former has been corrupted by the hypocrites. As we do not on that account abolish the office of preaching but aim to restore it again to its right and proper place, so it is not our intention to do away with the service, but to restore it again to its rightful use. (*LW* 53, p 11)

Besides, if his reformed church was, as he believed, the continuity of the “one, holy, Christian and apostolic church,” Lutheranism had a right to the ancient liturgy. In fact, the use of that order was a public confession of the same. Given his concerns that the new church was being perceived as just another sect, the choice of the historic rite was a natural for Luther. The use of the ancient service was also a witness to the voices which insisted that only those forms could be used which were specifically mentioned in the New Testament. Luther aimed a sharp arrow toward Reformed Zurich when he opened his Augustinian breviary and began to copy the ancient Mass elements for use in the Lutheran church!

It is obvious that Luther felt the existing service proclaimed the gospel more than adequately. He commended the church fathers for their selection of the *introit* psalms, the *Kyrie*, the epistle and gospel lessons, the *Gloria in excelsis*, the graduals and alleluias, the Nicene Creed, the *Sanctus*, the *Agnus Dei* and the collects. While he wondered if some “lover of works” had chosen the epistle selections for the ancient church, he was satisfied that the church year lessons were witnessing to the gospel. He encouraged pastors to preach on them to ward off any temptation to “preach his own ideas” (*LW* 53, p 78).

The historic service was the antidote Luther needed to fight against the subjectivism of the enthusiasts. The ancient rite did not allow much room for “How do I feel about this?” By Word and sacrament the service testified objectively to the promises of God. In his German Mass Luther mentioned his desire for another worship service besides the Latin and German rites. These were to be informal; people could gather in a house “to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament.” He abandoned the dream because, as he wrote: “I have not yet the people for it, nor do I see many who want it” (*LW* 53, p 64). I won’t be surprised if I find out in heaven that it was Luther’s fear of enthusiasts gathering in formless worship assemblies which deterred him in this endeavor just as much as the lack of willing people. The point has been made already that Luther’s evangelical principle excluded any replacement for the gospel, be that meritorious sacrifice or subjective feelings. In a sermon on 1 Corinthians 15, he wrote:

If you are not ready to believe that the Word is worth more than all you see or feel, then reason has blinded faith. So the resurrection of the dead is something that must be believed. I do not feel the resurrection of Christ but the Word affirms it...So we must not be guided by our own feelings but by the Word. (quoted in Adolf Koeberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, p 79)

It was in this ancient liturgy, in the church year and in the sacrament that Luther found the cold, clear facts which pointed to Christ, and these were what he was determined to employ for Lutherans at worship.

To gain from Luther that, in worship, any form bearing the gospel will do, is to misread Luther. He did not make liturgical decisions or write his liturgical orders in a vacuum. As we have noted, pressing concerns led him to the historic rite, its church year and its emphasis on the sacrament, concerns which had to do with the essentials of his theological point of view. Werner Elert notes about Luther:

No matter how strongly he emphasizes the Christian freedom in connection with the forms of this rite, no matter how much he deviates from the form handed down at the end of the Middle Ages, no matter how earnestly he warns against the belief that external

customs could commend us to God, still there are certain ceremonial elements that he, too, regards as indispensable. (*The Structure of Lutheranism*, p 325)

These words of Luther should become as well known to us as his words about freedom:

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. (*LW* 53, p 48)

It stands to reason that both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, written within six years of Luther's liturgical innovations, would echo his attitudes toward the historic forms of worship. It must be added that the Confessions' opinion was not more capricious than was Luther's; the concerns that led Luther to his opinion were surely also shared by the subscribers to the Confessions. The upshot of their theological concerns led them to agree that:

The Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained. (AC XXIV: 1-3)

Since, therefore, the Mass among us is supported by the example of the church as seen from the Scriptures and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disproved, especially since the customary public ceremonies are for the most part retained. (AC XXIV: 40)

So in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's day, and the other important feast days. With a very thankful spirit cherish the useful and ancient ordinances. (Ap VII & VIII: 33)

We can truthfully claim that in our churches the public liturgy is more decent than in theirs. (Ap XV: 38-40)

The use of the rite of the western church, the historic church calendar, the regular provision for the sacrament, these were what Luther and the Confessions chose, in freedom, but for good reasons, for the worship life of the Lutheran church. Since the ancient liturgy was built around the church year and included provision for the sacrament we have come to describe this kind of worship with the term "liturgical." With this definition, it may be said that Luther himself gave impetus to the principle that *Lutheran worship is liturgical*. "For among Christians," Luther wrote, "the whole service should center on Word and sacrament" (*LW* 53, p 90).

Luther's desire for a common worship order in the reformed lands was never achieved. There was no central ecclesiastical structure in 16th century Germany. For that matter, there was no central government, either. Liturgical unity often was attained only within the borders of a specific province, and then usually by governmental decree and according to the prince's personal religious sense. Since there was not always precise theological agreement from province to province, there was not liturgical conformity, either. Keep in mind that Luther did compose two services, one in Latin, one in German. Even though both are truly liturgical (as I have defined the term), the orders are different, and we see some provinces adopting the Latin fullness and others the German simplicity, again with the result of little conformity. In many cases the worship orders were drawn up by theologians and appended to the end of the provincial church constitutions. Knowing Lutheran theologians, we would expect these liturgies to be richly doctrinal, and they are. We would also expect each one to be little different, and they are that, too! Finally, Luther's own reluctance to violate the freedom principle bears some of the responsibility for the variety.

In all this diversity, however, the worship forms of Lutherland bear the clear stamp "liturgical." Unless the doctrine of the province had been compromised by encroaching Calvinism, the emphases in worship remained the ancient liturgy, the church year and the regular use of the sacrament. The minor dissimilarities in the orders of the German churches pale by comparison with their similarities in these

emphases. Leonhard Fendt, a noted expert on 16th century liturgics, is quoted by Luther Reed to maintain the point that these emphases were not retained by the German churches simply for the sake of tradition but because they were “expressions of pure Christian faith and devotion” (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p 108). “Nowhere does the pulse of the Reformation beat so warmly as in its worship,” Fendt wrote. “Worship is the body in which Luther’s spirit entered into the life of the people” (*op. cit.*, p 107).

Liturgical worship flourished in Germany for a hundred years and more. Within its parameters great Lutheran artists crafted masterpieces—men like Nicholai, Crueger, Gerhard, and Bach. Thousands of prayers, hymns and choral works were added to enrich the historic services of the church. Many examples of these are considered still today, by Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike, to be among the noblest contributions of Protestant Europe. It was during this same time period that the great Lutheran dogmaticians—men like Chemnitz, Quenstedt and Gerhard—sharpened their theological pencils and carefully set down the intricacies of Biblical and Lutheran theology. Luther’s principle that Lutheran worship is liturgical, and the worship life that principle fostered, was responsible, at least in part, for creating a setting in which devotion, theology and art could flourish. It should not go unnoticed that, while Lutheran liturgical worship was at its pinnacle in Germany, the German Lutheran church was undoubtedly enjoying its golden age.

What hurried the end of both that golden age and the demise of liturgical worship in Germany were the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and Pietism. By far the more significant of these was Pietism, but the war created an environment in which Pietism flourished.

Already before 1618 many in Lutheran circles were reacting with more than a little interest to the writings of men who were the descendants of the enthusiasts, Luther’s old liturgical antagonists in Wittenberg. One of these was Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) whose Lutheran mysticism eventually came to influence John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Another was Johann Arndt (1555-1621). His major contribution, *True Christianity*, would have profound influence on a serious Lutheran pastor by the name of Philip Jacob Spener.

Spener wanted to be an orthodox Lutheran, but it soon became obvious that he had imbibed many ideas from Reformed theologians. To put it simply, he got his priorities mixed up. He spoke more often about believers living for Christ than he did about Christ’s living for believers, he tended to talk about Christian living without talking about the Means of Grace which empower that living, and he gave the impression that the Christian’s reaction and response to the gospel was a surer guarantee of his salvation than the promise of the gospel itself. History has labeled him a Pietist. In reality, he was a Calvinist, and so were his spiritual descendants. “German Pietism is certainly to be regarded as an overflow of the Calvinistic spirit into the territory of Lutheranism” (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p 146).

Orthodox Lutheranism may have won the day had it not been for the Thirty Years War. Between 1618 and 1648 Germany literally was a battleground. For as much as the land and the people suffered, the church suffered even more. Pastors were killed or driven into exile, churches were burned and congregations scattered. In many localities a whole generation of German youth grew up without religious education, and the great Lutheran emphasis on doctrinal precision began to seem somewhat superfluous amid the carnage of the battlefield and the sorrow of the cemetery. To their credit pastors tried to restore an orderly church life and practice at war’s end, despite unendurably large congregations. To their discredit—and this seems to have been true of too many pastors—they failed to add both life and life applications to their preaching and teaching and too often resorted to legalistic methods to encourage Christian living and attendance at church and communion. Sadly, in many German churches church members who lived notably impious lives regularly sat below the pulpit and knelt at the communion rail.

It was not at all surprising that there would have been a reaction. In 1675 Philip Spener had published his *Pia Desideria* which contained six major proposals for reform. The university at Halle began producing pastors who possessed the pietistic spirit, having been trained by Spener’s protege, August Francke. Moravianism, under Nikolaus Zinzendorf, separated itself from the Lutheran Church after 1727, but most Pietists remained within the pale of Lutheranism. They insisted on the personal integrity and conviction of the clergy, encouraged more practical and effective preaching, promoted

Bible reading, personal devotion and prayer. The privilege and responsibility of lay activity were stressed, as was a renewed conception of mission work.

Had these issues been promoted within the parameters of Biblical theology and apart from Spener's improper emphases, they would have brought great benefit to the Lutheran Church. Tragically, they were not. What had been the strength of orthodoxy, its careful formulations of correct doctrine, were considered by the Pietists to be exactly that which had brought about the need for reform. It seemed, at least to the Pietists, that proclaiming the objective facts of Scripture had done nothing in Germany but encourage hypocrisy. They were correct in their opinion that the church deserved some of the blame; they were right to suppose that a solution could be found. But they were tragically wrong when they laid the blame on the Word and the sacraments and found the solution elsewhere.

Since it was in church that Word and sacrament were most notably in use, Pietism's whipping boy became liturgical worship. Beginning with Spener's suggestion that genuine Christians meet apart from the regular service, the Pietists continually downplayed the Lutheran worship heritage. As their meetings became more subjective and emotional and as they struggled for a personal consciousness of their conversion and rebirth, they lost all appreciation for the objective facts of the gospel. With that point of view the liturgy and the church year became irrelevant. The doctrine-filled prayers of the church gave way to formless meanderings by pastors and laymen. Hymns based on objective facts of redemption were discarded for those expressing immediate personal experience. Highly emotional, even frilly tunes replaced the rugged chorales. Opera-like solos and sentimental songs in the popular, contemporary styles displaced choral music which had so carefully carried Biblical texts to Lutheran hearts. And it was Pietism, more than any other force, which fostered the devaluing of the Lord's Supper in the regular worship life of the Lutheran Church. Luther Reed comments:

Orthodoxy, though cold and intellectual, had respected objectivity and preserved formal dignity and reverence. Pietism, with its intensely personal limitations, neither understood nor long used what remained of the restrained and polished forms of the church's historic liturgical system. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p 146)

In rejecting liturgical worship the Pietists proved how far they were from Luther's thinking. In fact, for precisely the same reasons that Luther promoted liturgical worship, the Pietists rejected it. Luther saw the liturgy and the church year promoting the gospel and the sacrament as part of the gospel; so did the Pietists, and thus they rejected it. Luther saw the church's way of worship as a confession of the present church's unity with the church of the past. So did the Pietists, who also saw in the church of the past papism and dead orthodoxy. Luther saw in the liturgy order, reverence, and dignity for the sake of the gospel. So did the Pietists; the reason they rejected the liturgy was for the sake of emotional spontaneity. Luther chose to employ the western rite as a testimony that he would not subscribe to the faulty presuppositions of the enthusiasts. The Pietists sensed that purpose in Luther's choice and rejected the rites because they wanted to break down confessional barriers between like-minded reborn brothers. In short, almost every theological thing Luther stood for was eventually disputed by the Pietists. Should it surprise us that they also disdained that which so ably supported what Luther stood for, namely liturgical worship? In 17th and 18th century Germany, Pietism stabbed the Lutheran Church in its liturgical heart. Without that gospel-pumping organ, the body lay bleeding and dying. Rationalism may have finally killed the German church, but Pietism rendered it defenseless.

Except for the grace of God (and several of God's servants) Pietism might have delivered the same blow to the Lutheran Church in the new world. Although Henry Muehlenberg's 1748 liturgy gave the fledgling Pennsylvania ministerium a good liturgical beginning, it wasn't long before America's Lutherans began to be affected by Europe's rationalism and unionism. Carl Schalk claims that the worship orders and hymns which appeared in Philadelphia and New York between 1786 and 1860 could have been used with satisfaction by a Unitarian (*A Handbook of Church Music*, p 85). Now there were Pietists in America who were concerned by this absolute lack of a Lutheran confessionalism. Samuel S. Schmucker (1799-1873), driving force behind the formation of the General Synod and founder of the

Gettysburg Seminary, was one of them. He was also the leading proponent of what he called “American Lutheranism.” Schmucker was no friend of the Rationalists, but he was no friend of Luther’s, either. He sent out from Gettysburg a generation and more of pastors whom he taught to see five errors in the Augsburg Confession: an approval of the ceremonies of the Mass, the approval of private confession and absolution, a denial of the divine obligation of the Sabbath, and the affirmation of baptismal regeneration in baptism and of the real presence in the Lord’s Supper. With those presuppositions, I need not mention what Schmucker thought of Luther’s worship principles! It should be obvious that the Pietists, given their emphasis on emotionalism and mission work, would have been strongly attracted to the Reformed revivalism which swept through America during the early years of the 19th century. Revivalism, as we have noted, needs little more in corporate worship than experiential hymns, fiery preaching, and altar calls, and, if you can believe it, this became the stuff that Lutheran worship was made of in the 1840s. Liturgical worship was thus rejected by the American Pietists for the same reasons it had been rejected by their German ancestors.

This brings us to a point which is not so far removed from 1992. Lutheran theologians in Germany, finally reacting to the horrors wrought by Pietism and Rationalism, took another look at Luther and the Confessions and began to promote sound Lutheran doctrine and practice. Their influence reached America by means of scholarly writing and immigration. The Saxons established the Missouri colonies in the 1830s; Wilhelm Loehe sent confessional missionaries to Michigan’s Saginaw Valley in the 1840s; Charles Porterfield Krauth led sound Lutherans out of Schmucker’s General Synod and helped establish first an opposition seminary at Philadelphia and then the General Council in 1867. In all three cases we see orthodox Lutheran leaders rediscovering the value of liturgical worship. Loehe sent his *Agenda for Christian Congregations of the Lutheran Confession* to Frankenmuth in 1844. C.F.W. Walther published the *Church Agenda* in 1856. Krauth was a member of the committee which produced *The Church Book* in 1868. The first and the last of these are the direct ancestors of the 1888 Common Service which has been the worship order of most Wisconsin Synod congregations since 1941.

I have tried to show in this admittedly long review of church history that a church’s choice of a liturgical form of worship has very little to do with tradition and very much to do with confession. Invariably, those who chose the triple crown of the western rite, the church year and the inclusion of the Lord’s Supper were those who came down on the side of SOLA GRATIA, SOLA FIDE and SOLA SCRIPTURA. Invariably, those who rejected the importance of the SOLAS rejected liturgical worship. This is not to say that every proponent of liturgical worship has remained a confessional Lutheran or even that he chose to be liturgical for the right reasons. Nor will I contend that everyone who tends toward the non-liturgical side of things is a flaming Pietist. But when we hear of the concerns which led Luther to where he landed, when we listen to the voice of the Confessions, and when we examine the evidence of history, it becomes perfectly clear why the WELS Joint Hymnal Committee was squarely committed to fostering a worship in our synod which is liturgical.

Not many months had passed after the various committees began their work when the project’s liturgy committee determined that the main service it intended to compose would have three objectives: it would follow the sequence of forms which occurs in the western rite; it would include provisions for a full set of the church year-ordered propers; it would include (and not easily allow the exclusion of) the sacrament. Along the way a fourth objective was added: the service would allow for an easy and natural inclusion of a baptism. This new service, together with the revision of the *Common Service* (the *Sampler* liturgy) will assure that at least the next generation of WELS worshipers will be able to benefit from the liturgical principle. [The committee has also offered a revision of the main services of the Office, Matins and Vespers (*Morning Praise, Evening Prayer*), and, because there still is a need for it in our synod, a service without communion entitled *Service of the Word*.] It is perhaps noteworthy that the committee followed no specific order of service as a pattern for either of its communion services. For instance, the inclusion of an Old Testament lesson has little historic precedent, nor do the texts of several new liturgical canticles. The committee was convinced, however, that there are good reasons for these several innovations, just like Luther was convinced that a paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer was a salutary

addition to his German service. He did not feel, nor do they, that such minor variations violate the liturgical principle.

The committee worked to provide ways and means for an increased use of the propers in the new services. We made a real effort to allow sung psalmody to become a natural and easy task for worshipers. We have carefully crafted Proper Prefaces which fit into the communion liturgy in a streamlined way. You will see in the years to come an encouragement to church choirs to become liturgical in their orientation, i.e., to have as their primary objective not simply to “beautify” the service with an anthem, but to sing the propers and to assist with the hymns. New and easy settings of the Gospel Verse (today’s version of the Gradual) are on the market and can be used not only by choirs but by soloists, children’s choruses, and sections of choirs. A worship leaders’ manual will be ready for purchase with our new hymnal. One fourth of its pages will be devoted to helping pastors, choir directors, and organists plan for the liturgical worship of our congregations. An even more detailed planning guide, produced in loose-leaf format, will begin to be available in six-month segments when *Christian Worship* appears.

The Hymnal Committee deeply desires that *Christian Worship* will encourage a stronger and deeper love for the Lord’s Supper. We have not formed services which encourage a pre-communion dismissal. Both communion services have been streamlined so that even larger congregations can be at the benediction within an hour and ten minutes or so. I am not going to try to champion an increased use of the sacrament on these pages. Let it simply be said that gathering all the evidence from the history of the Church which supports an every-Sunday communion besides an every-Sunday sermon would fill many volumes; gathering all the evidence which discourages such a practice would hardly fill a page. That the early Christians received the Supper whenever they gathered on the Lord’s Day is obvious as one reads in the Acts and 1 Corinthians. The Apology states: “In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the Sacrament is offered to those who wish for it” (Ap, XV:49-51). Wilhelm Loehe, whom I credited earlier as being one of the champions of a liturgical worship in the Franconian colonies, wrote in his agenda:

A morning service on Sundays or festivals without communion is like a broken column...God is rich toward all who seek him, and those who come to his table shall be satisfied with the abundance of his house. Nor ought anyone to say that frequent celebration serves to bring the Sacrament into contempt, for those who are rightly prepared will always hunger for this bread and thirst for this drink; and the more frequent that they commune, the firmer becomes the persuasion that all of the earthly life is only a preparation for the celebration of the great Supper on high...It should not often occur that the Communion is altogether omitted from the morning service.

It is sadly true that Lutheran Christians have never, even in Luther’s day, come to value the Sacrament as Luther hoped they would. May it never be said, however, that the leaders of our churches bear some of the blame for this lack of sacramental piety. Rather, pastors, teachers, and influential laymen ought to be the first to encourage others, by word and example, to frequent the Lord’s Table. The risk of offending visitors, the consideration of service schedules, and the fear that some might partake unworthily ought to be very far down on a list of considerations when the frequency of the Sacrament is discussed among the leaders of the churches.

I conclude my lectures on liturgical worship in the Junior class of our Seminary with this outline statement: The use of a liturgical form of worship demands *ongoing education, occasional revitalization* and a *determined commitment*. The Hymnal Committee has taken care of the occasional revitalization, and the Hymnal Introduction Program will help with the ongoing education. That leaves the matter of a determined commitment.

Can we expect that pastors, teachers, and layleaders of our synod’s congregations will have such a determined commitment to the concepts of liturgical worship? I am convinced they will, especially

when they review the value it holds for their fellow believers and then as they compare it with what they see in the worship life of many other Christian churches.

Consider the way Lutheran liturgical worship points the worshiper away from himself and his culture and toward his Savior on the cross. The Liturgy presents sin as damning guilt, Christ as atoning mediator, God as justifying Father, conversion as free gift and Means of Grace as Spirit's tool. Therefore, the Liturgy continually presents Christ in action for the world: "Lord, have mercy," "Glory be to God on high," "I believe in God, the Father..." "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God..." "O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world." The Sunday Liturgy carries the worshiper through Christ's birth, his appearing, his victory over Satan, his passion and death, his resurrection, his ascension and the commissioning of his Church. The Liturgy offers to the believer what Christ told the Church to offer, his body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. The Liturgy does not care so much how people feel about Christ, how they choose Christ and what they do for Christ. It cares instead that Christ felt enough love for people to choose to give up his place in heaven and come down to suffer and die. When it comes to the Christian response, the Liturgy expects what God has promised: "My Word will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Is 55:11). The Liturgy allows for response and even expects response, but it correctly puts justification before sanctification and allows the Means of Grace to promote sanctification according to the Spirit's desire and will ("It produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Matthew 13:8). In every way the Liturgy presents Christ for us. Compare this liturgical text (presented as a replacement for the *Gloria in excelsis* in the new *Service of Word and Sacrament*) with the testimonials, life-style preaching and popular music so often found in Evangelical worship:

O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name in all the earth.
 Almighty God, merciful Father, you crown our life with your love.
 You take away our sin;
 You comfort our spirit;
 You make us pure and holy in your sight.
 You did not spare your only Son, but gave him up for us all.
 O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name in all the earth.
 O Son of God, eternal Word of the Father,
 You came to live with us;
 You made your Father known;
 You washed us from our sins in you own blood.
 You are the King of Glory, you are the Lord!
 O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name in all the earth.

As liturgical worship points the believer to Christ, so it focuses his attention on the Word. Because Lutherans believe that the Holy Spirit works through the Word to create, maintain and strengthen faith, they value the "pattern of sound teaching." And nowhere is the pattern of sound teaching more important than in the forms of corporate worship. For this reason the orthodox Lutheran church of the past and present views its liturgy as a precise (though not necessarily exhaustive) confession of Biblical theology. Liturgical worship expects that the Liturgy will be used; it also expects that the Liturgy will be right.

Liturgical worship does not insist or expect that every congregation will worship in lockstep formation. The Liturgy allows variety, and does so purposefully. There is room in liturgical worship for some home-made forms. There may be good reasons to use a form from time to time what has not been tried and tested. There may even be a place for what is avant-garde, esoteric, or simplistic. It is precisely so that there might be variety that the Liturgy offers precision and clarity in its unchanging core.

By means of this precise repetition believers are able to review the most important teachings of Scripture Sunday by Sunday and to take those words and doctrines into their hearts. C.S. Lewis made a point about the "liturgical fidget" whose continual novelties serve only to set up obstacles to worship. A

service, he said, “is a structure of acts and words through which we receive the sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore.” As in dancing so in worship, Lewis suggested, one needs to be thoroughly at home with the form in order to concentrate on the content without distraction: “As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not dancing, but only learning to dance.” The ideal service, he said, “would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this...” He concludes with an entreaty for uniformity, and says he could

make do with almost any kind of service whatever if only it would stay put. But if each form is snatched away just when I am beginning to feel at home in it, then I can never make any progress in the art of worship. (C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, pp 4-5)

The people of 20th century America need stability in their worship: one or two services, one church calendar, one set of propers, etc. Liturgical worship can help overcome what Luther always feared, namely, “everyone parading his talents and confusing the people so that they can neither learn nor retain anything.” Hymnal revision is a necessary reality in a changing world, but pastors and people can be thankful that such revisions come upon us only once or twice in a century!

Closely connected to the matter of stability is the issue of reverence at worship. One cannot help but feel that the preference of many church members (including some WELS members) for a Sunday worship service which is “laid back” and “casual” is somehow connected to the low regard our society has for the Word of God. Liturgical worship with its symbols and ceremonies helps our members to keep in mind the awe which attends an entrance into the courts of the King of kings. Let me add here that perhaps we are fooling ourselves if we think our members (and our visitors, for that matter) really want worship to be casual. Any number of recent studies indicate that the opposite may be true. The January 15, 1990, issue of *U.S. News & World Report* included an article on the amazing growth of liturgical churches. Reporter Jeffrey Sheler concluded, “While no one expects ritualism to replace evangelical traditions, there is a clear recognition that the pendulum has begun to swing in that direction.” In a recent issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Dr. John Brug commented on an article in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Dallas Theological Seminary) in which the author contended that the three aspirations which today’s church can and must address are the need for transcendence, significance and community. Brug noted that

the church can best address this need [transcendence] through worship which expresses a mixture of awe, wonder and joy at the close encounter with the living God. As Lutherans, we are especially equipped to address this perceived need for transcendence if we can communicate a fresh and clear understanding of the depth and beauty of our worship tradition. (*WLQ*, vol. 85, no. 4. Fall 1989, pp 303-304)

In light of these observations and trends, we issue an encouragement to the leaders of the church to rethink the need to be casual in worship. One wonders what is really gained when the pastor comes to church in cardigan sweater and penny loafers, moves in the chancel as though he’s walking to the backyard barbecue pit, carries the service book like a loaf of bread, gives mid-service directions as though he’s supervising a grade school volleyball game, and after the service allows his children to run around in the chancel as though it were the parsonage basement. Let us work together to encourage dignity and reverence in our worship services—and the Liturgy will help us in this effort. Listen again to the Augsburg Confession: “Nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches” (AC, XV:22).

Liturgical worship helps today’s Lutherans understand the value of their theological roots. Our humanistic era has little use for the voice of history, especially when that voice speaks in terms of right and wrong. Neither the Reformed theologians nor the Pietists valued the voice of the Church as much as

Luther did (as we have seen), and their contemporary heirs find less value still. We could expect no less from a theological system which values subjective reaction over objective proclamation. The seminaries of the ELCA consider the Lutheran Confessions to be little more than historic “witnesses” to what the Church believed in the 16th century, and hardly “a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church” (*Lutheran Agenda*, The Ordination of A Minister, p 106). The present-day attitude toward the historic confessions of the Church is summarized well by words written by Milwaukee’s sitting archbishop, Rembert Weakland. Although his comments concerned primarily music in worship, one easily sees how much he values anything other than contemporary forms of worship:

If, on the other hand, the liturgical experience is to be primarily the communal sensitivity that I am one with my brother next to me and that our song is our common twentieth-century response to God’s Word here and now and coming to us in our twentieth-century situation, it [music] will be something quite different. We will not expect to find the holy in music by archaicism, but in our own twentieth-century idiom. (“Music As Art in Liturgy,” *Worship*, vol 41, no. 1, January 1967, pp 5-15)

By valuing its ancient Liturgy, today’s Lutherans demonstrate that they believe themselves to be the continuity of the ancient church. In a soon-to-be-published volume, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, the noted Lutheran conservative Kurt Marquardt writes:

The Church of the evangelical Reformation wishes to be neither a new-fangled sect nor a biblicistic one which imagines that it can bypass a whole intervening history of the Church...Behind this respect for genuine tradition—Chesterton called it “the democracy of the dead”—stands what might be called the principle of ecclesial humility: “Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?” (1 Cor 14:36)

Our Lutherans are well served when they are taught to see the Liturgy as a conversation between God and his people which has been going on for centuries, and which they have only recently joined. In the Liturgy 20th century believers repeat word for word forms which were repeated by believers in the second century. In the Liturgy WELS believers join with unseen and unknown believers throughout the world. A pastor once instructed me, “When you make those liturgies, make them as different as you can. I want my people to know instantly when they’re not in a WELS church!” I wondered to what extreme he wanted us to go. Should we have eliminated the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer? The Catholics are singing “A Mighty Fortress” these days; should we have kept that out of our new hymnal? In a 1989 article in the Seminary’s *Quarterly*, Prof. Theodore Hartwig presented an eloquent (and more realistic, I think) summary of Lutheran thought on this issue:

In matters of outward form, 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 [i.e., universal] community of believers confessing one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. In this light would anyone want to gainsay that the sameness of outward form...has been a heartwarming and compelling witness to the true unity of the Church? (*WLQ*, vol. 86, no. 3, Summer 1989, p 203)

Finally a determined commitment to the Liturgy retains the attitude which Scripture and the Lutheran fathers hold toward the arts. There is a real danger in trying to copy the artistic sensitivities of

contemporary religious America. The mainstream of Evangelicalism looks at art in the same way it looks at all worship forms, i.e., with pure pragmatism: Does it “work” to generate the emotional response which is the essential evidence of salvation? Even some Evangelicals despair over this point of view. Francis Schaeffer’s son Frank wrote:

Today, Christian endeavor in the arts is typified by the contents of your local Christian bookstore-accessory-paraphernalia shop. For the coffee table we have a set of praying hands out of some sort of pressed muck. Christian posters are ready to adorn your walls with suitable Christian graffiti to sanctify them and make them a justifiable expense. Perhaps a little plastic cube with a mustard seed entombed within to boost your understanding of faith. And as if this were not enough, a toothbrush with a Bible verse stamped on its plastic handle, and a comb with a Christian slogan or two impressed on it. On a flimsy rack are stacked a pile of records. You may choose them at random blindfolded, for most of them will be the same idle rehash of acceptable spiritual slogans, endlessly recycled as pabulum for the tone-deaf, television-softened brains of our present-day Christians.

In fact, without making the list endless, one could sum up by saying that the modern Christian world and what is known as evangelicalism is marked, in the area of the arts and cultural endeavor, by one outstanding feature, and this is its addition to mediocrity. (*Addicted to Mediocrity*, Good News Publications, 1980, pp 22-23)

That’s strong language, but Schaeffer is not the only Evangelical making that kind of statement.

The differences between Evangelicalism and Lutheranism are very real, and in step with the theological emphases of each. Lutheranism considers art to be a part of worship, and, therefore, calls for the giving of one’s best to God. Whether in language, speech, music, poetry, sculpture, tapestry, or painting, whether in historic or contemporary form, Lutherans bring their art first to God. But Lutherans also bring their art for the benefit of their fellow believer and employ it in the church to affect intellect and emotion for the strengthening of faith. Thus art glorifies Christ and proclaims Christ at the same time.

Within the Liturgy the Christian artist has opportunities to give his best to God and his Christ to his neighbor. The Liturgy almost demands music; it encourages the choir and the cantor/soloist. It seeks beauty of language in prayers and hymns. It has room for respectable designs in architecture, symbolism and ceremony. In countless ways liturgical worship allows Lutherans to practice what they preach about art, which is a gift of God, they say, for the glory of God and the edification of his people.

With all these benefits in mind, with the reality that this worship form matches our theological confession, and with the observation that even non-liturgical churches are becoming increasingly interested in Lutheran style, why do we continue to hear voices in our church which openly question the value of the worship style we call liturgical? Perhaps Larry Peters, a Missouri Synod pastor, has the answer:

Lutherans have generally not done a great job utilizing the resources for worship their liturgical forms provide. It is a sad truth that much Lutheran worship is dull, boring, and seemingly irrelevant. This is an abuse of the liturgical form and not a proper use of it. (“Lutheran Worship and Church Growth,” an essay prepared for and distributed by the LCMS’s Commission on Worship)

Anyone who insists that the members and guests in his congregation are turned off by liturgical worship must first ask if it is the Liturgy which offends or the way the Liturgy is done. If Peters’ charge has any validity in our circles, we have come to a serious matter. If we give less than our best in worship, no less than in preaching or teaching or stewardship, we offend God, for we take advantage of his gracious promise to receive our praise. But even more we offend the people of our congregations and

the visitors they bring to church, because we give them the impression that it is permissible to take advantage of divine grace.

It's time to sing a new song in Wisconsin Synod congregations. In many locations this new song will be just that, one or another of the new hymns or canticles which *Christian Worship* will include. But in a more important way, it's time for us to sing a new song in the attitude and interest we take toward worship. Most of the pastors attending this conference already have discovered Pastor Paul Kelm's *Parish Renewal: Theses and Implications*:

Worship must be what the church does best, for in our worship we minister to the greatest number of our members and introduce visitors to our Lord. Our worship is still the most apparent statement of the "worth" we ascribe to our God. The challenge for Lutherans today is to combine the best of our tradition with contemporary communication, to be both faithful to Scripture and relevant to contemporary life, to touch head and heart with the message of sin and grace in an age of anti-Christian philosophy, to lift refugees from a jaded generation in praise to their God.

- a) Lutherans must strive for the best preaching possible. That is the product of quality time spent in text study and sermon preparation. Preachers need continuing education in homiletics. Those whose dominant gifts lie in other areas of ministry can benefit from published sermon studies. We need to be both open to the Lord as we study his Word and open to improvement in our crafting and delivery of the message.
- b) Lutheran worship should have clear liturgical progression and a "freshness" each week that is combined with familiarity. That requires easy-to-follow orders of worship, a "personal" tone by the officiant and his conviction that corporate worship is much more than sandwiching a sermon.
- c) Lutherans will want to offer the best instrumental and choral music possible. That will mean training opportunities for church musicians and the availability of music appropriate to a variety of abilities, occasions and preferences. That may mean more than one choir where possible, with varied musical styles. That may mean more than one musical instrument.
- d) Lutheran worship should combine warmth and reverence, avoiding the extremes of cold ritual and trivial fads. That means attention to detail so that slip-ups don't distract our focus. That means also a style of leading worship that reflects God's love for people.
- e) The Lord's Supper should have deep significance and a clear focus on God's grace. Churches may need to find better ways to prepare communicants for the sacrament than the sign-up sheets which have replaced the confessional service and personal "communion announcements" of an earlier generation.

Not merely for the sake of synodical conformity, but precisely to help us attain these goals, do I believe that we in the Wisconsin Synod need lovingly to strive for liturgical uniformity within the context of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. In the author's judgment, the forms which are contained in this new book are, in fact, evangelical and liturgical, and will encourage the congregations to a worship which is pleasing to God, a worship *in spirit and truth*. Such worship is wrought only through the Means of Grace, in reality, the heart and soul of Lutheran worship.

Northwestern Publishing recently published a new book I think we all should read. Written by Harold L. Senkbeil, pastor at Elm Grove Lutheran Church in Elm Grove, it is entitled simply *Sanctification*. With cutting analyses and solid scriptural defense, he comes down squarely on the side of the evangelical principle in worship. His words bring this study to a close.

The Lutheran church has a rich legacy to offer in its worship. Here is reality, not symbolism. Here we have real contact with God; not as we come to him, but as he comes

to us. He meets us in the proclamation of the Word. Here the Son of God distributes his actual body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Here the people of God gather to offer him their thanks, their praise and their prayers. This is the real thing.

It's time for a new initiative in worship. People are longing for God. Where are they going to find him? In the shifting sands of their inner life or on the solid rock of his gospel? How are they to offer him their thanks and praise? With trivial methods borrowed from the entertainment industry or in worship forms which focus on the praise of God's gracious glory? This is the kind of worship which lifts the heart while it exalts Christ. And this is what Lutheran worship does.