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CONTENTS

MAKE HIS PRAISE <i>GLORIOUS!</i>	John Reim
PANORAMA:	
Problems Today in the ELCA	John Lau
On "Conflict Resolution"	John Lau
From "Distortion" to "Misrepresentation"	John Lau

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MAKE HIS PRAISE *GLORIOUS!*

[Presented to the CLC General Pastoral Conference, Eau Claire WI, June 15-17, 1999.]

John Reim

I. Being Biblical About Worship

One might expect a paper on worship to begin on page 5 of *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

It is always safest to begin, however, at the beginning. For Christians, this means that we look to the Scriptures. The word of God is the starting point for any meaningful discussion of God-pleasing worship. It is the point from which we attempt to answer the question that was posed to the pastoral

conference: **Is our worship practice suited to our mission?**

The beginnings of God-pleasing worship are found, of course, in the Old Testament. Much can be said about the worship practices of the ancient people of Israel. For much *was* said – by God! Every detail for worship at the temple was spelled out for God’s covenant people. There was no question as to whether the ‘liturgies’ of Leviticus or the songs of the Psalms were well suited. I AM said they were. He prescribed a precise form for worship which kept the promised Messiah clearly before the eyes of His chosen. In ceremony and sacrifice God was well praised. His Son, the Lamb, was well portrayed.

How startling, by contrast, is the New Testament in the area of divine prescription for worship. There we find prescription replaced by description. Worship form is free of divine detail and is placed by the Spirit into the arena of Christian judgment. The specific directives of the Old Testament give way to the basic principles of the new, as illustrated by the following passages.

“The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24¹).

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).

“Then those who gladly received [Peter’s] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42).

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Heb. 13:15).

Various passages in the pastoral letters intended primarily for leaders (e.g. *“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine”* [1 Tim. 4:13]).

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).

Through these and other New Testament passages the Spirit’s objectives for corporate worship are clearly set forth:

- that the worship of God is conducted spiritually and truthfully
- that the people of God are assembled regularly
- that the gospel of Christ is preached
- that the word of God is read
- that the praise of the Lord is sung
- that the prayers of the saints are offered
- that the sacramental means of grace are administered
- that all is done decently and in an orderly fashion

That’s ‘What?’ What about ‘How?’

We simply aren’t given much on that question. “In this respect there is a vast difference between the Old and the New Testament. In the Old Testament the Ceremonial Law prescribed in detail all the sacrifices which God required on certain occasions, as well as the ceremonies connected with such

sacrifices. It even prescribed the official vestments of the priests. But in the New Testament we look in vain for a single precept regarding the external form and arrangement of Christian worship.”² It’s a unique situation. Through the conscious act of omitting specific directives for New Testament worship, the Holy Spirit has revealed that there is no form for worship which is indisputably superior to others, nor is there one which is necessary for faith. If there were, it would have been prescribed also in the New Testament.

This is an area of Christian life in which there are no absolutes. The basic principles which Scripture provides on the subject certainly must be kept in the forefront. But the application must be kept within the framework of Christian judgment.

The placement of worship forms into the sphere of Christian judgment results in a sobering sense of responsibility as well as a joyful sense of freedom. We take very seriously the question of how to structure the worship service so as to meet the Spirit’s objectives. But we also rejoice in the freedom of form which the Lord has given us as we gather about His word and sacrament, and do ourselves a great disservice if we ever lose sight of that freedom.

Oddly, Christian liberty is more challenging than is divine prescription. Areas of Christian judgment are often approached nervously.³ Even defensively!⁴ But with the Spirit’s guidance and influence, the structuring of God’s praises is exciting; the magnifying of His name, inspiring!

II. Being Lutheran About Worship

With a door so widely opened by the freedom of the gospel, the question of how we ought to structure worship looms large. Were we to be isolated from history and heritage, the question would be truly daunting. The ways of structuring worship are numerous, as evidenced by the variety of worship forms which exist in Christendom today.⁵ Which does one choose? Which should one follow?

Happily, we are inheritors. We have been blessed with traditions which spare us the difficulties of starting out fresh. A foundation has been built – albeit by frail human hands – which remains in place. The identification of ourselves as Lutherans instantly says something about our approach to worship.

One hesitates to speak of worship in denominational terms. What we desire, above all, is that our worship is Christian. Of primary interest is that our assemblies resemble the gatherings of those converts mentioned in Acts, who studied, sang, ate and drank in joyful praise of their glorious Redeemer. This, perhaps, is the reason the editors of the new WELS hymnal put *“Christian Worship”* on the cover, reserving *A Lutheran Hymnal* for the inside pages. But *Christian Worship*, especially in its liturgical section, is clearly Lutheran in at least one respect: it bears all the textual and musical markings of worship forms which have been used for centuries by those who identify themselves as Lutheran.

Bearing all the markings of the worship of previous Lutherans—is that what it means to be Lutheran about worship? Is the worship of Christ made “Lutheran” by virtue of its outward structure? Are we being truly Lutheran about our worship when we merely imitate and perpetuate the ceremonies, rites, texts and tunes of our spiritual forefathers?

Should “being Lutheran about worship” even be a concern?

There is great benefit to “being Lutheran about worship.” We have inherited something quite wonderful and helpful. The most significant part of this inheritance, however, is not a collection of texts or tunes or of a certain liturgical form. We have, for the taking, **an approach, a perspective.**

It’s easy to jump to the conclusion that we are being Lutheran about worship when we “follow

page 5,” or something similar. But Luther and his fellow workers saw things differently. They exhibited a unique approach to the Christian worship service. They made use of tradition, but were far from being traditionalists. They sensed, no doubt, the dangers of following a tradition merely because it was established and familiar. Warnings against blind traditionalism are necessary.

The following was written by J. P. Meyer in connection with doctrine. But it is relevant for any discussion in which tradition is a big player.

Our fathers thoroughly searched the Scriptures and expressed their findings in certain phrases and propositions. These propositions may, moreover, have received their coloring from certain errors against which our fathers had to battle and which they tried to ward off by their formulations of the truths they found in the Scriptures. If we, their children, now content ourselves with simply repeating the terms our fathers coined, we may appear to be in complete agreement with them, while in reality, because we fail to mine those doctrines ourselves from the Scriptures themselves, we are virtually in basic disagreement. We accept the phrases and propositions as handed down; we accept them on the authority of our fathers, not because we have ourselves become sure of them out of the Scriptures. Traditionalism has then taken the place of unreserved submission to the Word of God. There may seem to be a world of difference between traditionalism and unionism, but under the skin they are twin brothers.⁶

Regardless of the aspect in the Church’s life in which traditions play a part, they need to be handled cautiously and consciously. The moments which a congregation shares in assembly are too few, too precious, too vital for anything to be done simply because “that’s how it’s always been done.” The brief time for corporate worship will be used most effectively when every element in the service is included on the basis of careful consideration and evaluation.

The Lutheran Reformers exercised balance. They approached the structuring of worship in full view of their heritage, the traditions of the Church and the freedom of the gospel. They forged an approach to worship which was faithful, sound, balanced, Lutheran:

- **They addressed the situation in which they found themselves**
- **They assessed the forms which were in place**
- **They possessed the best of all that was available**

Ironically, the very *un*Lutheran approach is to cling, without review or assessment, to a form which is thought to perpetuate the worship practices of the Reformers (especially when one realizes that certain aspects of Wittenberg worship are no longer even followed!).⁷ In actuality, we are being Lutheran about worship when we address, assess and possess, as did they.

III. Being Lutheran About Texts

We know that no word is more powerful than that of the gospel. Sword-like in its ability to pierce and peer into the soul, dynamite-like in its ability to break open and enliven the stoniest of hearts, honey-like in its ability to bring sweet assurances to the spirit, and beacon-like in its ability to lead us to life, God’s word is at the center of the Christian service.

The texts of a Christian worship service are of utmost importance. Many of the texts used are direct quotations from Scripture; others are paraphrases of Bible passages; others are hymn verses which poetically present the truths of God’s Word. Their use is intended to proclaim faithfully the full counsel of God.

A. Addressing the situation in which we find ourselves

1. Timeless elements

One of the glories of the gospel is its global nature. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19a).

Another is its timeless quality. “Jesus Christ – the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

“The word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Pet. 1:25).

The challenge of determining the structure of worship is eased dramatically by these two principles. The Scriptures were written for the entire world by a God who does not change. His Word is never in need of adjustment for place or time. It is the changeless basis for the dialogue which takes place between Christians and their Lord.

Liturgical Texts

A primary objective of the liturgical texts in worship is to communicate the universality both of man’s sinfulness and of God’s grace. Bible passages are employed (e.g., Ps. 32:5) and ecclesiastical canticles are perpetuated (e.g., Gloria in Excelsis) in order to rehearse the central message which the Spirit has sent to the world: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-24). The human need for salvation is as desperate today as ever; the grace which God extends is as great today as ever. Liturgical texts, where used, therefore, need to offer the same timeless message.

Hymn Texts

Insofar as hymn texts are clear reflections of Scripture, they too are timeless in content. Biblical teachings which emanate from the central message of Christ crucified are expressed poetically in the hymns of the Church. Hymn texts which delineate the life and work of Christ, as well as those which address various aspects of sanctification, have direct application for the lives of believers in every age. The spiritual needs of daily life are unchanging, even as the assurances of the Lord are unailing.

The fact that the spiritual needs of God’s people are unchanging through this New Testament era, however, doesn’t mean that shifts in emphases are not called for. One can’t help but be struck by the immediacy of Luther’s hymns to the issues and concerns of his times. The unbelieving Turks were threatening western Europe. Luther, therefore, taught the congregation to sing, “Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort Und steur des Papsts und Türken Mord.” Other hymns of the Reformation hammered away at the Roman teaching of work-righteousness by forcefully presenting the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Paul Gerhardt could not help but address in his hymns the staggering struggles experienced by many who lived through the 30 years war. In the strong doxological themes which permeate the 20th century hymns of Martin Franzmann it seems that he felt a need to reassert the identity of the only true God.

Congregations and hymnals should make room for fresh and contemporary hymnic resources that speak the old truths in today’s language and apply age-old Gospel to modern problems. Hymns composed for a rural, European society feel strange and out of place in an industrialized and computerized space age. . .

The rapid blurring of the line dividing church and state, the increasing reliance on government and civil laws to determine moral decisions for society, the plague of addictions of all kinds, the despoiling of nature, the cheapening and wanton destruction of life, hedonism and the idolization of celebrities, the competition for the hour of worship—all demand a scripturally sparked response by religious poets who can write the psalms of today with all their passion and profundity.⁸

In other words, there are also timely elements.

2. Timely elements

That times and situations can call for variations and alterations in one's worship form was recognized by the Reformers. Luther wrote concerning the Mass,

This is the way we think about the Mass, but at the same time taking care in all such matters lest we make binding things which are free, or compel those to sin who either would do some other thing or omit certain things; only let them keep the Words of Consecration uncorrupted, and let them do this in faith. For these should be the usages of Christians, that is of children of the free woman, who observe these things voluntarily and from the heart, changing them as often as and in whatever manner they might wish. Wherefore it is not right that one should either require or establish some indispensable form as a law in this matter, by which he might ensnare or vex consciences. When also we find no complete example of this use in the ancient fathers and in the primitive church, save only in the Roman Church. But if they have appointed something as a law in this matter, it should not be observed; because these things neither can nor should be bound by laws. Then, even if different people make use of different rites, let no one either judge or despise the other; but let each one abound in his own opinion, and let them understand and know even if they do differently; and let each one's rite be agreeable to the other, lest diverse opinions and sects yield diverse uses, just as happened in the Roman church. For external rites, even if we are not able to do without them, —just as we cannot do without food and drink—nevertheless, do not commend us to God, just as food does not commend us to God. But faith and love commend us to God. Wherefore let this word of Paul govern here: The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Thus no rite is the Kingdom of God, but faith within you, etc.”⁹

One aspect of worship texts which calls for change from time to time is found in the linguistic expression which is used. One of Luther's primary concerns was that the language of worship be a language that would be readily understood by the worshipers. For ages the common man had been left in the dark because the word of the Lord had been spoken only in the language of the highly educated. Where the educated gathered for worship Luther was content to retain the Latin (*Formula Missae*). Elsewhere it had to be different. It had to be the vernacular (*Deutsche Messe*). And as vernacular as possible.

Many of those who love the Lord seem to feel that the Most High will be shown the highest level of respect when His worship is conducted in a language which is different from everyday speech. But the Spirit's own example suggests a different approach. When the Spirit inspired the Scriptures, He used the language of the day, the *koine*, rather than classical Greek. He used that which would communicate most directly to the people. Had He intended that the praise of the Lord be expressed in terms other than those of everyday speech, it's likely He would have developed a special language for worship and used it in the biblical record.

Personal tastes in matters of speech can be very difficult to dislodge. For years, many Lutheran worship services in English-speaking America were conducted in German. This was necessary, at first, because German was the *lingua franca* for the immigrants that were being served – as may still be the case in certain pockets of this continent. But for some time German services continued to be conducted even after the members became fluent in the language of American society: English. It literally took a World War to get some people to switch.¹⁰ When English was brought into the picture, however, it still wasn't the common language of the day. Those who formulated much of the Lutheran worship materials in America in the early 1900s borrowed heavily from materials that were already in English – Elizabethan English. As they quoted freely from *The Book of Common Prayer* and other sources, they were quoting speech which was already outdated by several hundred years.¹¹

Still, might there be something slightly more reverential about such Elizabethan elements as addressing God as ‘thee’?

In Elizabethan English, God is addressed with ‘thee’ and ‘thou.’ Quite naturally everyone came to believe that these are reverential terms of address reserved for God. Actually, that is exactly the opposite of what was intended. In Elizabethan English ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ were intimate and familiar forms of address. Within the family, members were addressed with ‘thee’ and ‘thou.’ Outside the home and with close friends the form of address was ‘you.’ Today, ‘you,’ once a formal form of address, has become the familiar and everyday form. There is in fact no formal form of address in the English language.¹²

Here again, however, setting and situation can make a considerable difference. Anyone who has witnessed a worship service conducted with Elizabethan English in an Anglican cathedral will likely admit that it is not only fitting, but majestic. The antique language seems an integral part of the vaulted ceilings and stone statues which are also hundreds of years old. Yet, even in such a grand setting as that, one has to wonder if the most communicative way of speaking is being employed. And if there’s some question as to the validity of such speech in an English cathedral, what conclusions can be drawn about its use in the small, humble, carpeted structures so commonly used in our mission fields? Or in the straw huts of Africa? Or in the tents of the Apache?

Because the Church is free to choose its own forms, it is able also to vary them to suit times, circumstances, and even the temperament of the people involved. This makes demands upon individual initiative and imagination. But the results when necessary departures are made are frequently exciting and therefore stimulating; refreshing and therefore delightful.

Nothing can kill the native joy of the faith in a person more surely than unsuited worship form. The mission among the Apaches in Arizona would have floundered completely if the early missionaries had not soon realized that it would be folly to try to force the worship life of the Indian into the rigid mold of our ultra formal liturgical service and our slightly ponderous chorales. Casual services held in the open round the camp fire are another thing. The formalist could never be happy working under conditions which do not even allow for a stable ‘membership’ list.¹³

Liturgical Texts

When differences in style are deliberately employed together, they are described, with positive inflection, as “eclectic.” When differences in style occur without deliberate forethought, the result is often described as “awkward.” Perhaps everyone needs to decide for himself which of these adjectives is most appropriate for the situation frequently found in our circles, when the versicles are read in Elizabethan English and the lessons are read in modern English. It seems that all the good reasons for using modern translations for the reading of the lessons would be just as applicable for other liturgical portions of our worship.

Of greater concern than potential awkwardness, however, is the matter of comprehension.¹⁴ The difference in meaning for certain words is dramatically different in Elizabethan English than in modern English. “Prevent” in the King James Version of I Thess. 4:15 serves as the classic example.¹⁵

Hymn Texts

The matter of updating language is a trickier matter when applied to the poetry of hymn texts. The editors of *Christian Worship* present a valid point when they observe that the poetic flow and elegance of certain hymn texts lose their graceful flow when the original Elizabethan speech is replaced by the modern. A notable illustration is found in “Christ, the Life of all the Living.” “Thousand, thousand thanks are due, dearest Jesus, unto you.” pales next to “Thousand, thousand

thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee.” They wisely decided not to tamper with the texts that would suffer greatly by such alterations. But the number of such hymns is small. By and large, hymn texts have been updated with remarkable success. Their poetic integrity is maintained, and the clarity of their message is heightened.

B. Assessing the forms in place

1. Appreciating the treasures

The dual usage of liturgical texts and hymn texts in the worship of God has a long history among Christians. Fragments of both types of text were widely used in the earliest of New Testament worship services, for Paul covers both categories with his sweeping directive for the Church to teach and admonish “with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” In addition to the many quotes from the Psalms which are found in the New Testament, there are sections which are believed to be portions of early New Testament hymns.¹⁶ Christians throughout the centuries have praised God by using both types of texts.

Liturgical Texts

The use of liturgical forms. Looking to the parts of a service which are neither hymn nor sermon, one might say that there are essentially two approaches to worship found in Christendom: liturgical and non-liturgical. Some denominations adhere to regulated orders of worship while others consciously avoid them. Though neither approach can claim to be more Christian than the other, the liturgical form is better positioned to claim a rich and long-lasting heritage.

God Himself prescribed a fixed order for temple worship in Old Testament times. Though no such prescription was set down for this New Testament era, the early Jewish Christians of the apostolic period apparently retained elements with which they were familiar (both at the temple and in the synagogues) as they gathered together.¹⁷ The Western Church of subsequent centuries, under the leadership of Rome, cemented in place certain liturgical forms for its monasteries and cathedrals, the very forms which were perpetuated to the time of the Reformation and beyond.

This element of continuity was of particular interest to Luther. He and his coworkers were continually accused of being sectarian and schismatic. Opponents were anxious to charge that they had broken ranks with the true Church.

“Very early in the Reformation years, 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 the churches that followed his lead were teaching what true believers had always taught. . . . If the church was, as Luther believed, the continuity of the Christian 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, we can understand why Luther chose the historic Christian rite for the worship of Lutheran Germany.”¹⁸

There is something to be said for maintaining ties with the medieval Christian Church by means of similar rites and ceremonies. And many make this a primary reason for retaining the historic structure. Our situation, however, is noticeably different from what it was in Luther’s day. Living, as we are, nearly 500 years after the Reformation, we need not fear that bearing the name “Lutheran” will brand us as a mere sect. It’s unlikely that the use of a new worship form in our midst would cause outsiders to conclude that we had drifted from true Christian roots (as they might have concluded in the case of Luther, who was surrounded by suspicion.) Millions of professing Christians worldwide use alternate forms without risk of such a misinterpretation.

Even apart from that particular concern, however, there are elements to be appreciated in the structure of a liturgical system. Liturgical worship is one way to satisfy the directive of the apostle Paul, that all things should be done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). There’s no question that liturgical worship is orderly. It is the very essence of liturgy to assign specific items to specific places in worship, thereby disallowing anything from happening haphazardly or by chance.

At the same time, it wouldn’t be fair to categorize all non-liturgical worship as *disorderly*. A former member of a Pentecostal church was speaking to this point and made the observation that certain things which might strike some Lutherans as somewhat disorderly (such as the spontaneous shouting out of an “amen”) would not seem the least bit out of line to a Pentecostalist (nor, apparently, to St. Paul; 1 Cor. 14:16). Personal perceptions do play a role in determining what is or is not “decent” and “in order.” Nevertheless, liturgical form does provide a certain guarantee that public worship will be free of the disruptive type of chaos described in 1 Corinthians.

Of greater significance, perhaps, is the way in which carefully structured liturgical worship assures a proper focus for worship.

The rite that the early leaders of the Christian church arranged for the church’s worship assembly accomplished what the believers intended. It presented a weekly review of those teachings of Scripture that fed faith and fostered the Christian life, and it presented that review with all the gifts, both spiritual and physical, that God had given. . .The liturgy does today exactly what it did for Christians of ages past: it focuses the attention of worshipers squarely on the words and works of Jesus. It does this by reviewing the principle teachings concerning Christ’s work of salvation (the Ordinary) every Sunday and by reviewing Christ’s life and ministry (the Proper) every year. It also presents to the believers a regular opportunity to receive the holy sacrament instituted by Christ.”¹⁹

Liturgical elements such as the church calendar and pericope systems aid the ministers of the word in avoiding the danger into which they can slip all too easily: developing too narrow of a focus or dwelling on ‘pet’ issues and themes.

Another perspective which is set forth as a reason to cherish the traditional liturgical approach is that which sees different worship forms as a reflection of differing theological emphases. This conclusion is drawn chiefly when comparing Lutheran emphases with those of the Calvinistic churches.

The focal point of Lutheran and Calvinistic disagreement centered on the use and value of the means of grace.

Calvinists rejected. . .the teaching that the gospel in word and baptism could miraculously create faith, and they rejected the teaching that the gospel in word and supper could miraculously strengthen faith. To them the sacraments were nothing more than divine obligations. This explains why their worship service was not patterned after the Christian communion service, but after the medieval preaching service.

Considering their theological emphases, it is easy to understand why Calvinism repudiated the historic liturgy that Luther had retained. For exactly the same reasons Luther valued liturgical worship, the Calvinists repudiated it. The liturgy made the gospel predominant; Calvinists emphasized the law and God’s sovereignty.

The challenges of Calvinism to the worship principles of Martin Luther and to Lutheran liturgical worship were, in reality, challenges to the gospel itself. The differences between the worship of the Reformed and that of our Lutheran churches should not be seen as simply the result of different traditions or emphases, but as a difference in theological spirit and understanding.”²⁰

The conclusion is that nearly everything done by a congregation will be a reflection of its theological perspective. Interesting premise. At the same time, if one applies too vigorously the principle that the use of the historical liturgy ‘makes the gospel predominant,’ it becomes very difficult to explain the deplorable lack of gospel understanding in the highly liturgical Catholic and Anglican churches. Both of these bodies are rigidly traditional in their liturgical worship. Yet they are riddled with misconceptions and misunderstandings. The Anglican Church is much farther afield today than it was in the years of its earlier beginnings, despite the perpetuation of its earliest worship forms.²¹ With regard to the Catholic Church, the fact that the church of the Antichrist is highly liturgical immediately challenges the suggestion that a liturgical approach to worship is somehow more closely allied with the gospel than are other forms.

On a somewhat more practical level one can see the beneficial way in which a structured order of worship provides stability. Worship that is completely unstructured can also be unnerving. The children of God want to feel comfortable in their Father’s house, and comfort is a valid desire, provided things don’t become too comfortable.

It is through the eyes of visitors that other benefits of a liturgical form are brought to our attention. Among them is an observation made by those who are acquainted primarily with non-liturgical church services: that forms such as ours convey a sense of awe in the presence of the Holy God. The stateliness of highly structured worship, when properly carried out, can mirror the orderly adoration and awe of the angels in heaven (Isa. 6) and the elders in white (Rev. 14).

Though it is possible, apart from liturgical worship, to remain in spiritual unity with Christians of previous generations, to conduct worship in a decent and orderly way, to proclaim the full counsel of God, and to maintain a proper emphasis on the means of grace, liturgical form is a marvelous tool, carefully designed to make those objectives all the more easily realized. And it remains, therefore, the form of choice for millions.

The liturgical texts themselves. Insofar as the texts of the historic liturgy are a mixture of biblical quotations and human expressions, the different parts need to be assessed differently.

Those texts which are taken directly from Scripture, of course, are timeless and fitting, as mentioned previously. Some question might be raised as to whether the most appropriate selection of passages has been made over the centuries, especially since relatively few of the ‘basic’ verses used in catechetical instruction are included. Nevertheless, the long-term use of these selections reveals a general satisfaction that they adequately rehearse the basic tenets of God’s law and gospel.

It is necessary to give careful scrutiny, however, to the many parts of the liturgy which the hands of believing humans have written.²² Most of these, also, have the support of long-term usage, and have weathered centuries of review.

Overall, (and apart from the discussion of translation/language mentioned earlier) the selection of Bible passages and the attending portions of human origin serve well to communicate the message of sin and grace, and are, therefore, worthy of retention. Following in the footsteps of the Lutheran Reformers, we continue to use the many useful texts of the medieval rites.

‘Luther felt that much of the existing service proclaimed the gospel. 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.”²³

Many of the liturgical texts familiar to us are permanent fixtures in the Church’s liturgical

services. The *arrangement* of those texts, however, has been treated somewhat flexibly. The *Kyrie* serves, perhaps, as the best illustration. The simple plea of the *Kyrie* can be and has been used in different ways. As a result, it has been used in different places; sometimes as part of the confession of sin, and at other times, as an all-encompassing prayer for God's gracious response to the needs of people everywhere. There are historic precedents for both.²⁴

The fact that many of our liturgical texts have received the endorsement of history and have survived the Church's scrutiny verify that they are fitting spiritual food for the nourishment of God's people, and that they retain their edifying qualities even when slight alterations in their arrangement occur. Many are the gems to be treasured.

Hymn Texts

Many, also, are the hymns of great value. How effectively, succinctly and powerfully well written verses summarize the messages of Scripture. As sermons in miniature, hymn texts capsule Christian doctrine in poetic, metric fashion, by which they readily become part of the worshipping community's collective memory.

The editors of *The Lutheran Hymnal* saw to it that the users of that hymnal would have in hand many of the greatest hymn texts of all time. And nearly all times of the New Testament Christian era are represented. From Clement of Alexandria (200) to Francis Cox (1850), the well-crafted words of many Christians are available to edify, encourage, and enlighten.

Next to the Bible itself, no book is more spiritually influential than a hymnal.²⁵ Through their repeated singing, hymns quickly imprint theological images which serve as an ongoing source of instruction and growth. Because of the highly influential nature of hymn texts, they need to be selected with great care. They need to be clear soundboards of biblical thought and must fit squarely within the parameters of the analogy of faith.

Space does not allow for even the most limited list of excellent examples which are part of the hymn collection in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. For the most part, the words of our 660 hymns are solidly built on the word of God.

From children's bedtimes to elderly deathbeds, our hymn texts have been of inestimable benefit in rehearsing God's salvation and reaffirming His love.

2. Acknowledging the difficulties

The mere suggestion that there are difficulties in some of the liturgy and hymn texts with which we are familiar might spark some strong responses. After decades of using certain materials, the sentiment which can arise quite spontaneously is that "It's worked this long . . ."

There appear to be few, if any, congregations in the CLC., however, which adhere absolutely to the texts, directives, and rubrics printed in our hymnal. The rather widespread practice of deleting, substituting, and editing some of the texts of the liturgy and hymns testifies to a general perspective that alterations are legitimately made for a variety of reasons.

This too is part of the helpful example handed down to us by our Lutheran forefathers.

Liturgical Texts

Luther did not hesitate to discard. He was anxious to rid the service of those elements which blurred and obscured the true message of God's grace in Christ. "The service now in common use

everywhere goes back to genuine Christian beginnings, as does the office of preaching. But as the latter 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.”²⁶

Luther inherited a liturgy which had been severely polluted over the span of several centuries. A considerable amount of spiritual rubbish had sneaked in. There was much, therefore, that needed to be tossed out. Happily, little which we’ve inherited raises questions.

As indicated above, we tend to be involved more with adjustments than outright deletions. Consider the familiar *Introit*. Though it appears to have been discarded in some recent Lutheran liturgies, it has, in reality, experienced a type of adjustment.

The *Introit* has been a puzzler for some time. The word means ‘entering,’ which is what used to take place during its singing. Historically, it was the part of the service designed to occupy the assembly while the pope made his way from changing room to cathedra.²⁷ In the Anglican tradition, meanwhile, it functions as the music which is sung as the choir members go to their stalls. In both cases an entering of one kind or another is taking place. By the time the *Introit* occurs in our service, however, the only ones entering are those who didn’t get to church by the bell. Perhaps for this reason, certain revisions, such as the alternate liturgical forms in *Christian Worship*, transfer the simple *Introit* to the beginning of the service and identify it as an entrance hymn, designed to usher the assembly into its worship of the Lord. (Luther dropped it altogether in the *Deutsche Messe*.) When this is carefully done, there is, in actuality, no reduction in the amount of Scripture presented; the Scripture of the *Introit* is included in other parts of the service, chiefly as part of an expanded reading of a psalm.

Other difficulties have been detected with the liturgical prefaces and prayers supplied for use with the liturgies of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Historic collects don’t always seem to be well-suited to the overall theme of the Sunday or service. Many a seminary student has wrestled with the challenge of finding unifying themes in some of the ancient pericopal selections still in use. In other cases, a concept which is perfectly suited to a season might suffer by means of word-plays which obscure more than explain. It’s interesting to hear even mature thinkers explain the meaning of the Preface for the *Sanctus* routinely read during Lent.²⁸

Hymn Texts

The directness of the Spirit’s speech in Scripture serves as the model for every proclamation of divine truth. On occasion, however, that model is not closely followed, especially when the demands of poetry or a flare for the abstract complicates the hymn-writing process. Vague expressions and phrases not easily understood (e.g. “Angelic pinion,” “sultry glebe,” “Savior, breathe an evening blessing Ere repose our spirits seal.”) can be found in a variety of our hymns. Little is gained, of course, by words which baffle.²⁹ Even less by words which might leave the singing worshiper with an incorrect impression. Unfortunately, there seems to be no hymnal in print which is completely free of them. Some are even found in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Over the years that have followed its publication, the wisdom of including certain segments has been questioned,³⁰ all of which encourages the one who selects hymns for worship to do so judiciously.

C. Possessing the best available

The Spirit who created the universe, inspired prophets, emboldened disciples, energized apostles, and enlightened reformers, is no less creative, inspiring, emboldening, energizing and enlightening today. The Church of the 21st century can joyfully expect an abundant outpouring of spiritual gifts.

Wherever faith is found there will invariably flow spirited expressions of praise and thanksgiving. “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Wherever faith is found God’s people praise; His witnesses bear witness. There always has been and will continue to be a grand variety of expressions with which to worship God.

1. The element of variety

Variety is everywhere. In God’s creation. In God’s people. In God’s word! It’s an amazing thing to see the various ways in which the Spirit Himself has made use of variety, even in presenting the invariable Good News.

As we hear Him proclaim the central message of forgiveness in Christ, we can’t help but marvel at the variety of ways in which He has chosen to communicate that concept. Such variety of expression would, apparently, not have been absolutely vital. He could have supplied us only with the 5th chapters of Romans or 2 Corinthians, and we would have had plenty for our salvation. But in addition to those succinct proclamations of the gospel, He also communicates that message by way of illustration [*scarlet sins becoming white as snow; weighty sins being cast into the depths of the sea*], by way of parable [*the prodigal son; the forgiven debt*], and even by way of the abstract [*as far as the east is from the west*].

By His own example the Spirit of God shows that human beings benefit greatly from a variety of expressions and that there are any number of ways to communicate the truth.

Applying the concept of variety to Christian worship prompts the concern in many that variation in worship will destroy the element of familiarity. Variety, however, need not be viewed as the antithesis of familiarity. They are not mutually exclusive, as the Scriptures themselves reveal. The message of our salvation is but one message, yet how variously presented by the Spirit! The messages of worship are the same. Might it not be wisest to follow the Spirit’s own example?³¹

Liturgical Texts

As in other aspects of worship, if there is too much variety in liturgy, variety itself becomes the only constant element. In that case confusion and discomfort steal the day. Just as numbing, however, is a regimen that requires no thought and allows those present to go through the motions with little attention paid to God’s marvelous details. Certain liturgical expressions are so familiar, we can say them in our sleep – and sometimes do. Recitations which are mindlessly spoken due to overly repetitive use are unsatisfying for the human spirit as well as the Holy Spirit. From Luther³² in the 16th century to even the most ardent defenders of traditional liturgical worship in the 20th,³³ there’s a broad recognition that a certain amount of variety within liturgical worship form is extremely important.

It is true that a certain amount of variety exists within even the most rigidly followed worship forms. The Propers, the Lessons, the sermon and the hymns all vary from service to service. But what about the central message? The very message which the liturgy is designed to preserve, the central message which needs to be conveyed most forcefully—that of Jesus Christ and Him crucified—is often the most challenging to absorb because the listener is not aided by variety of expression. Perhaps this is the very place to make the most of the Spirit’s own example of variety. How wonderfully the words of absolution, for example, are enhanced by tapping into the myriad biblical pictures and expressions which He has made available.

In addition to the various quotations of Scripture, a variety of well-worded liturgical statements have been written as reflections of God’s word. God’s people write as they experience. They express what they live. They see their utter failure to fulfil the various dimensions of God’s will as those aspects are revealed throughout the church year.

These and other written elements are easily incorporated into the worship of a generation which, happily, possesses the literary skills needed to use them. Unlike the period of the Reformation, when the laity was largely illiterate, we are blessed with congregations or well-educated individuals who do not need to rely on memory or tradition to participate, but who can follow variations and adjustments without being distracted from the overall flow of the message.

Hymn Texts

It would have been impossible for 50 years of Christian life to have passed without new Christian poetry being added to the rich treasure of the Church's song.³⁴ The years which have passed since the 1941 printing of *The Lutheran Hymnal* have seen the type of poetic productivity one would expect from the Spirit's guidance. A number of 20th century Christian poets have penned some wonderfully dynamic hymns which are receiving wider and wider circulation. Christian poets have always been reflectors of their times and situations. They apply the timeless principles of Scripture to the unique circumstances which surround them. Recent hymnals and hymnal supplements offer an abundance of worthwhile variety.

2. The element of freshness

Closely related to variety is the element of freshness. We all know what it means to have a fresh start on a project, and we all know how invigorated we can feel from a fresh approach. How wonderful when our worship also breathes freshness!

This does not occur naturally in a system of firmly established forms. Conscious effort is required to breathe fresh air into established structures. "Yet another disadvantage of having a vast treasure of fine forms is the fact that it does not encourage creativity. It can be assumed, we hope, that no one will accuse us of advocating the creation of new doctrine. We dare also to assume that all agree with the proposition that creativity in theology is not only desirable, but necessary if things are to stay alive. Mimicry is not mastery."³⁵

Varying degrees of freshness can be experienced in something as simple as making a conscious effort to speak the existing texts as meaningfully as possible.³⁶ It can involve the "upgrading" of a tired expression with one that communicates more meaningfully, or of designing words in a way that encourages consideration of a new dimension. It can mean incorporating a phrase that has 20th century significance, or varying the nature of congregational involvement.

Liturgical Texts

Consider, by way of example, replacing less-than-lofty liturgical signals with sturdy biblical assurances. One opportunity to do so presents itself in connection with the statement often made at the end of a Scripture reading. Some have found that a positive pedagogical goal is achieved by dropping "Here ends the reading" with "This is the word of the Lord!"³⁷ Another response to the reading of Scripture which has found its way into the worship forms of various Lutheran churches is the frequent use of the all-encompassing declaration of John, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31a).

Hymn Texts

The Holy Spirit is never exhausted. He continues to gift His people with the ability to praise the Son poetically. And there's something about many contemporary texts that provides a breath of fresh air. Such freshness can be found in a metrical version of a Biblical event which has not previously been written as a hymn (*Long Before the World is Waking*), or in a new imagery which

sharpens the understanding of a biblical concept (*“Thy Strong Word”*), or in a perspective which challenges the singer to think of a familiar concept in a new way (*“God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It”*).

IV. Being Lutheran About Worship Music

The element of music is worthy of our careful consideration because of its acknowledged impact and effect on the human psyche and emotions. Both the Scriptures and the secular world set music forth as a powerful enhancer, in light of its ability to intensify the mood of a message and to help the mind absorb words.³⁸ Luther was quick to give currency to the biblical accent on music. “Music is an outstanding gift of God and next to theology. I would not want to give up my slight knowledge of music for a great consideration. And youth should be taught this art; for it makes fine, skillful people.”³⁹

A. Addressing the situation in which we find ourselves

1. No timeless elements

Unlike the consideration of worship texts, in which it was recognized that Bible passages are timeless and sacred by virtue of the Spirit who inspired them, no claim of inspiration can be made for music. Speaking of music, without any text being involved, it has to be acknowledged that there is no such thing as “sacred music.” We can refer to music as “sacred” only on the basis of a sacred text which accompanies it. No sequence of pitches nor pattern of notes ever descended from on high. It is true that certain musical styles have come to be associated with the church and corporate worship. But it’s nothing more than an association. In and of themselves, no musical elements can claim to be more godly or more pure or more lofty than any others. Broadly speaking, therefore, musical elements of worship are not timeless. More to the point, not a single musical phrase in our hymnal can be traced to biblical times. (If there were such a relic, it would likely be used very little.)⁴⁰

Liturgical Music

There has been a continuous effort on the part of some, however, to create an element of ‘timelessness’ for the music of the Church, especially in the area of liturgical music. Some evidence exists that antiphonal chant of one type or another has played an ongoing role in the worship of God’s people from Old Testament times onward. When the New Testament Church was born it consisted mostly of Jews. As with liturgical texts, these early Christians instinctively retained much of the liturgical music which was familiar from the synagogue. It is the desire of some to continue such a form in the hopes of maintaining some sort of external link with the past. But maintaining external links with the past runs the risk of communicating (to outsiders, especially) a disconnect with the present.

We don’t want to appear liberal, lest we discourage those seeking solid spiritual ground. We dread offending any who earnestly try to be kept steadfast in the Word. So we incline to hold to the traditional forms with their attendant image as long as we possibly can. At the same time, we don’t want our message to suffer from the stigma of being obsolete and antiquarian. We want the restless youth of our jet age to know that our message is as modern as missiles. We want the unchurched prospect to know that everything about our Christian faith is not only up-to-date but capable for the future as well, so we would like to look as contemporary as our message is! In this dilemma, as in most dilemmas, the indicated course is apparently one of moderation.⁴¹

If medieval music of the church is retained and used in the 21st century, it should be done so

on the basis of affirmative answers to such questions as, ‘Is this music sufficiently ‘timeless’ so as to communicate relevance for today’s worshiper?’ ‘Does this music aid the participant in giving voice to God’s word?’

Hymn Music

The twin passages from Ephesians and Colossians reveal that the early church was familiar with a variety of musical forms and was poised to employ them all. The different terms used by the Spirit (hymns, spiritual songs, odes) reveal, at the very least, the pleasure He finds with a variety of musical forms in His Church.

Once again, we are in the dark when it comes to the musical forms of those early hymns and odes. Fragments of the text we have; fragments of the music we don’t. Worth pondering, once again, is the Spirit’s silence. Through the conscious act of preserving nothing musical for His Church, might not the Spirit be directing believers to be conscious of the situation in which they find themselves and to respond by using the best of all that’s available at a given time and place?

2. Many timely elements

Whether conscious of it or not, people reflect their place and time in history through their music. Music is a window into the makeup of a culture or organization. As cultures come into contact with other cultures, unique musical elements are shared and absorbed.

The music of the church of the Lutheran Reformation is very reflective of the culture in which it found itself. Its melodic contour and rhythmic structure are characteristic of northern Germanic Europe of the Renaissance period. The music which Luther and his co-workers provided for the church conformed to the musical language of the people. There was no musical hurdle to overcome. The music was timely. Is ours?

Liturgical Music

Over the centuries the dimension of worship music which has been affected the least by changes in time and place is the music of the historic liturgy. This is due, perhaps, to the fact that the texts of the traditional liturgy have changed very little. Even so, certain changes have occurred as significant events have unfolded.

The Reformation is one of those events that had an impact on liturgical music. The understanding of the Reformers regarding the universal priesthood of believers affected the music in use. Prior to their time the liturgical music was a very stylized chant which only the trained choirs of the monasteries could sing well. The laity had essentially been shut out of any participatory singing role. Luther, however, changed that. He vigorously pursued a type of music which would enable the members of the congregation to participate fully.⁴² That was the hymn. He did away, by and large, with the chanted music of the liturgy as far as the congregation was concerned. A fuller treatment of the reason for such a shift will be undertaken in part B; for the purposes of this section, however, it serves as an illustration of how anxious Luther was to make changes – even radical changes, if necessary – to encourage the singing participation of the people. In doing this he used musical materials which were most directly accessible to the members of his congregation. And it worked. The Lutheran church was soon dubbed ‘the singing church,’ a designation which we want to keep in place.

Hymn Music

In addition to hymn paraphrases of the sections of the liturgy, Luther also saw great value in hymns which paraphrased the psalms (“*A Mighty Fortress*”), hymns which were written for specific seasons of the church year (“*Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands*”; “*From Heaven Above*”), and hymns which detailed Christian doctrine (“*Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice!*”). He appreciated the ability of hymns to ‘sing the gospel into the heart’ – a benefit which remains in our own time. He also would have appreciated – it seems safe to say – the variety of hymn music which has entered the picture.⁴³

Unlike the music of the historic liturgy, the music of the Church’s hymnody has evolved significantly over the centuries. By way of illustration, compare the jagged and angular tune NUN FREUT EUCH (“*Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice!*”) of the late Renaissance period with the smooth and elegant EVENTIDE (“*Abide With Me*”) of the late Victorian era. Musically, they are quite different. And the musical features which typify European hymn writing from 1600 to 1900 are well represented in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. The music of the Church has been enriched through the influences of Baroque precision, Classical symmetry and Romantic richness. That, however, involves only Europe (and, to a much lesser extent, America).

Aren’t we missing something? Virtually every culture has unique musical ingredients to offer. When utilized, they can bring even further enrichment to the church’s song and help to bridge the cultural gaps which can, so easily, hamper a sharing of the gospel.

Luther and his fellow reformers used northern European hymns. They were perfectly suited to a society which consisted entirely of northern Europeans. To what extent is hymn music of purely northern European origin suitable for a society such as ours, which is a cultural melting pot of the highest order?⁴⁴

Given the premise that music is a language with unmistakable ethnic/cultural overtones and associations, it appears that a passage which comes into full force in this matter is 1 Corinthians 9:22, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

Truly inspirational is the example Paul presented in his ministry, that of doing everything in his power to minimize or remove anything that might prove to be even the slightest obstacle to his communicating of the gospel. Paul made full use of his freedom in Christ to adjust lifestyle, custom, habit, and cultural identity in order to get as close to people as possible. Perhaps the most dramatic example is found in Acts 21, where he willingly went through the motions of a devout Jew in Jerusalem so as to keep any wall from rising between himself and those whom he hoped to reach with the truth. It doesn’t seem to involve the slightest stretch of the imagination to envision Paul saying, “I’ll sing any kind of music if it means someone will not be put off by a cultural sound which makes no sense to him or her.” Such a sweeping sentiment is tempered by other valid concerns about to be considered. But, as a basic principle, Paul establishes a marvelously free-spirited standard when it comes to the implementation of whatever it takes (or doesn’t take) to reach people with the gospel.

Hymns are an amazingly flexible, adaptable musical genre. They easily absorb elements of culture and time. They can be clothed with a host of variables which reflect various cultures -- different melodic contours, unique rhythmic patterns, unusual instrumental accompaniments -- and they remain hymns, the wisely chosen and wisely maintained medium of musical expression in the Church.

B. Assessing the forms in place

1. Appreciating the treasures

Music, one has to admit, is largely a matter of taste. Musical taste, moreover, is shaped by a

broad spectrum of influences: one's type of background, level of exposure to the arts, forms of instruction in school, and cultural surroundings. In a diverse society such as ours, this means that musical tastes will be wildly different. Virtually every style of music in our culture will be the favorite of someone in a congregation. To find a style of music which is equally cherished by all is impossible.

Perhaps this is why a common denominator, of sorts, has continued in the form of that which is casually referred to as "church music." There are certain types of composition which have been used for so long in corporate worship services (in many denominations) that they have taken on a certain air of appropriateness. In addition to hymns, there are other spiritual songs and choir pieces which fit this general mold.

The firm clasp with which we all hold on to certain pieces of church music reveals the deep attachment which we feel for those melodies which have expressed our joy and calmed our fears. We all have our favorites which we would hate to be without, and which we shouldn't be without. There is much to hold on to with good reason.

Liturgical Music

Due to the subjective nature of any such assessment, one looks to any outside perspective that might aid in arriving at a more objective judgment. Perhaps this can be found in the extra-liturgical uses of certain pieces which are part of our tradition. The fact that two of the liturgical settings in *The Lutheran Hymnal* have been printed as separate choral publications⁴⁵ verify that these are truly exquisite compositions which are able to maintain their powerful effect even through frequent use.

Other musical jewels (such as *The Te Deum Laudamus*, p. 35) are also included in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, but fall into a different category of music by virtue of the fact that they are composed as Anglican Chant (to be discussed briefly later).

Hymn Music

With hundreds of hymn tunes in our hymnal to consider, suffice it to say that the editors of *TLH* included some of the very finest. Every musical era of Western music up to the current century is well represented. And "the greats" do emerge quite naturally. Were we to list our favorite tunes, it's likely that much overlapping would occur. How easily a pastor can envision a higher decibel level when selecting a hymn melody that is recognized to be a favorite!

2. Acknowledging the difficulties

It is good to retain much of the worship music we've inherited, because much of it is well crafted and has become dear over years of use. We sing a good deal of our inherited song with profit. At the same time, it's important to recognize that singing is like any other physical activity: participation is encouraged or discouraged by the easiness or uneasiness with which it is done. For this reason, there's value in considering, also in connection with worship music, which aspects of our musical tradition may help rather than hinder.

Liturgical Music

The topic of liturgical chant, mentioned earlier, is one of considerable scope and breadth, spanning, as it does, nearly 2000 years of Christian worship. Categorizing styles in the simplest possible way, it might be said that they fall, musically, into two categories: those designed to be sung by the choir, and those designed to be sung by the congregation. Many have been successfully composed for the first category; very few for the second.

When the momentous task was undertaken of shifting American Lutheran worship from German

to English, a good deal of Anglican music was borrowed in addition to Anglican texts. It was, after all, English worship ready made. Among the things borrowed was a sizeable amount of musical chant of the style known (appropriately) as Anglican Chant. It was transferred from Anglican orders of worship and put into American Lutheran liturgies.

Unfortunately, Anglican chant was never designed or composed for congregational singing.⁴⁶ It is choir music, written for choral groups which can rehearse and eventually master the intricate placement of syllables within an often challenging four-part harmony.⁴⁷ Examples in *The Lutheran Hymnal* include *The Nunc Dimittis*, *The Venite*, *The Gloria Patri* of the Matins Service, and *The Magnificat*. Inherent difficulties for congregational use lie in the singing of many syllables of text over sustained, non-rhythmic, non-metrical pitches. While one would have to grant that a certain measure of success can be achieved over decades of congregational practice, the singing of Anglican Chant in a congregational setting often includes an element of frustration due to the uncertainties it entails (“Am I singing the syllables at the correct speed?” “Will everyone arrive at the next note on time?” “Which numbered line am I on, anyway?”)

There is reason to marvel at the insights of Luther, once again. As mentioned previously, he paraphrased portions of the historic liturgical texts so that they could be sung by a congregation as a hymn. He seems to have sensed, instinctively, that the goal of maximizing congregational participation in the liturgy would best be accomplished by delivering the singers from the challenges of (Gregorian) chant and by using the simple forms of the hymn. Syllabic singing (essentially one syllable per note) aided the church of the Reformation in singing with full-throated joy.

A question which invariably challenges any editors of Lutheran liturgies is that of the proportion which should exist between the musical and non-musical elements in the forepart of the hymnal. The proportions found in *The Order of Morning Service* and *The Order of Holy Communion* of *TLH* are particularly interesting. In the sections which are designed to be dialogues between the leader (pastor/cantor) and the congregation, *The Lutheran Hymnal* has less music than the primary liturgy of *The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (ELS, 1995) and more than the liturgies of *Lutheran Worship* (LC-MS, 1982) and *Hymnal Supplement '98* (1998). Normally, having more than one and less than others would mean that a comfortable balance has been achieved. Not in this case, however.

Both of the directions taken by the ELS and LC-MS reflect approaches that are more historic and more logical than the approach we've inherited. Historically, liturgies were designed to have both parties in the dialogue dialogue in the same way. If the leader chanted, the responding congregation chanted; if the leader spoke, the congregation spoke. It was probably a matter of accommodation for those pastors who were uncomfortable about singing that the editors of *TLH* dropped the chanting for the pastors;⁴⁸ it was likely out of deference for the parishioners who became attached to the chanted responses that they retained the chants for the congregation. The result, however, is a liturgical hybrid with little, if any, historic precedent and with even less encouragement for participation. When minuscule musical interjections dot the liturgy, a certain guessing game regarding timing and pitch exists.

Apparently as a corrective measure, the ELS, in opting to retain the responsive chants of the congregation, resurrected the preparatory chants. These provide the context needed by the congregation to sing them freely and confidently. Used in this way, the familiar musical responses in *TLH* seem more fluid.

The LC-MS addressed the awkwardness of the “hybrid” by taking the matter of simplification one step further. In most of the dialogue which takes place between leader and assembly, both parties speak the text. One result is a satisfying form of directness and immediacy.

Hymn Music

Those in our congregations who have, on occasion, given up in their attempts to sing certain tunes in our hymnal might be the ones best suited to offer thoughts for this section. The very fact that such surrendering takes place indicates that difficulties in our hymn music do exist.

Thankfully, we have hundreds of hymn melodies which are wonderfully singable. But we also have had passed down to us tunes which, from a purely musical standpoint, are terribly difficult to sing and which provide little satisfaction once they are conquered. Some elements which occur in the music of some of our hymns inhibit rather than enhance full-throated singing: sustained endings on high notes (e.g., ST. JOHN, *TLH* #380); melodies that meander relentlessly (e.g., ES WOLL' UNS GOTT GENADIG SEIN, *TLH* #500); awkward melodic leaps (e.g., DIES SIND DIE HEIL'GEN, *TLH* #287)

Those of us who have been born and bred on German Lutheran chorales can keep up to a certain extent with that musical style. But some of the tunes are laborious even for the most seasoned. And for those who have not been raised on a steady diet, they can be foreboding and disconcerting. When one considers, moreover, the fact that it is difficult for a worshiper who is struggling with awkward music to absorb and meditate on the important texts, he will be quick to exercise care in selecting hymn tunes for worship.

C. Possessing the best available

Even as the Spirit continues to inspire wonderfully crafted texts for worship through the pens of uniquely skilled believers, so also does He continue to bless the Church with new songs composed by Christians. Many musical jewels have appeared also in this 20th century.

1. The element of variety

Once again the element of variety comes quickly into focus and plays as big, if not a bigger role, than in the area of texts. Musical variety is so important because most music, like most other things, wears out when used perpetually. Unlike God's word which never tires, human compositions, generally speaking, do grow old. That which largely distinguished the music of "great" composers from that of all others is its durability factor. The genius of the music of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart is what enables us to hear it over and over again with pleasure. But how much of our worship music can claim to fall into that category?

Liturgical Music

In the liturgical section of *TLH*, not much. Apart from a few musical sections which are broadly recognized as true musical "classics," there is little that has the musical integrity, grandeur and genius required to weather decades of constant use. The variety which is evident in the hymn portion of our hymnal didn't reach the opening pages. Yet, the reasoning behind the use of variety in hymns seems to be just as applicable to the sung portions of the liturgy. Here too the human psyche can be benefited enormously from variation. And a considerable amount of liturgical music has emerged to meet that challenge.

In most cases, hymn melodies are transferred to the liturgy section and are united with liturgical paraphrases in order to provide variation in the singing of such texts as the Gloria or Magnificat. In other cases, the texts are left intact and are given hymn-like melodies.

Hymn Music

The presence of hundreds of tunes in *The Lutheran Hymnal* might suggest that adequate variety

is already in place. In some respects it is. There is variety in number. But there's very little variety with respect to differences in origin. The richly varied culture in which we live has yielded a grand array of hymn music. The global reach of God's gospel is reflected in melodies which are flavored by the musical spices of nations round the world. The exciting rhythmic vitality of African music has given a number of hymns enormous appeal. The smooth flow of Irish ballads has found its way into the hearts of millions. A number of wonderful melodies are also American-born and reflect the refreshing diversity of American culture.

Also newly available are classic, familiar hymns which have been slightly altered in some musical fashion in order to make them more singable. An alteration as simple as replacing a half note with a quarter note can facilitate ease of singing and breathing. Another alteration which has been found to be of assistance to the congregation is the lowering of a pitch by a half or whole step. And, in the hopes of encouraging greater participation, other editors have printed familiar texts with new hymn melodies.

2. A question of style

Related to the element of variety is the question of musical style. Is variety best kept within the framework of "church music" or should it be achieved by including every type of music known from secular society?

The key word which comes into play here is "association." We have far more musical styles today than in any previous generation. And every one of them has certain associations. Musical styles are, on occasion, actually designed to be a means of communicating a certain ideology, lifestyle or political perspective. It is generally very difficult for people to disassociate various mental images or connotations when they hear certain styles of music taken directly from the entertainment industry.⁴⁹ Images which the secular world deliberately tries to convey are often in direct conflict with those of Scripture. To maintain musical links with that world during worship services is to risk a distraction factor which could inhibit thoughtful praise. Even associations with purely innocuous styles of secular musical entertainment can get in the way of a worshipful focus.

Luther is often brought into this particular discussion by virtue of a statement which he supposedly made regarding good tunes and the devil. But the quotation is difficult to validate, and the musical scene in which Luther operated was vastly different from our own.⁵⁰ What is remarkable about Luther, once again, was his ability to be radically different and startlingly bold while avoiding potentially distracting associations. "Both in his hymns and in his chants [Luther] neither disdained the use of older liturgical materials nor shrank from revolutionary changes in the interest of German speech rhythm and popular appeal."⁵¹

Popular appeal, of course, is a wonderful thing. There's great benefit to using music that people like. The principle is simple: people will sing more enthusiastically and energetically when they automatically like (or learn to like) the music. And music which is carefully chosen and evaluated on the basis of sound musical principles can be expected to be liked.

There seems to be little basis for the notion that our young people will only respond in church to music which is similar to the style of music playing on their car stereos. Young people often seem perfectly willing to maintain a certain style of music for worship as distinguished from music designed for entertainment. A pleasant observation which has emerged for this choir conductor after a decade of working with teenagers is that young people don't need pop or rock music to get excited about singing their Savior's praises.⁵² Hymns and spiritual songs are sung with spirit and enthusiasm. The music, however, does need to be singable, and it does need to incorporate accessible melodic and rhythmic elements. Fortunately, there is much that is now available.

V. Being Thoughtful About Implementation

Sentiments not uncommonly expressed with regard to changes in our worship include “If people are satisfied, why change anything?” and “Changes will upset the elderly in the congregation who have been worshipping this way for forty-five years.”

A legitimate response to the matter of present satisfaction is the observation that such people might very well become even more satisfied with another form. It happens in many aspects of life that we come to appreciate and cherish things that would have remained unknowns had someone not broadened our horizons. It’s a matter of encouraging growth in worship, even as we encourage growth and development in other areas of Christian living.

With regard to the second concern, it may be true that an element of discomfort would be experienced by those who resist change and have grown deeply accustomed to a certain custom. But, after years of watching worshipers and hearing comments, this observer, at least, feels confident in suggesting that for every member who wants to distance himself from variety there is at least one member who yearns for it deeply. Favor one entity over another? No. Strive for a balanced approach which addresses both concerns? Of course.

But who? And how?

1. The “who” of implementation

The marvelous biblical principle of the universal priesthood of believers affects every dimension of the church’s activity. The keys, the call, the administration of the sacraments, as well as the liturgy belong to the people. The Lutheran confessions are bold to assert, therefore, “We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its own circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God.”⁵³

The confessions also hint at the public vs. private realm of the liturgy in the *Apology*, when they state, “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief. . .”⁵⁴

On the basis of such statements which mention the public dimension of the liturgy stern and solemn warnings are sometimes expressed in an apparent attempt to steer worship leaders away from “tampering” with the liturgy or service. But even though the order of service technically belongs to the entire congregation, the congregation needs guidance. It is the pastor’s responsibility to lead the sheep in a variety of ways. And it is not uncommon that a flock looks to its shepherd for leadership also in the way of its worship. Perhaps it was this aspect of the ministry that the confessors had in mind when they also wrote, “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.”⁵⁵

Certainly no pastor would be serving well were he to “railroad” changes or insist on his narrow way of doing things. It is necessary that there be compliance with the people who have called him to serve on their behalf. Consequently, an involvement of the people in the planning of worship is of enormous value.

Interaction and inter-workings between pastor and congregation exist in a number of vital areas. This is evidenced by the existence of boards. The board of education works with the pastor to meet the educational needs of the flock. The board of elders works with the pastor to assure a faithful operation of congregational affairs. Why not develop a worship committee which works with the pastor to make

every dimension of the service as meaningful, edifying and satisfying as possible? Such committees have become regular features in congregations of other Lutheran synods, and apparently with great success.

The liturgy of the church is the service that the people of God joyfully perform in response to His life-giving grace. As such, our worship does not belong to any one person--not the pastor, the musicians, or any persons with special interests. Rather, the liturgy is the act of the whole body of Christ with Christ as its head and each member of the body actively contributing his or her gift. All of the members of the body, therefore, need to be considered in planning worship. Their need to hear and address God must be respected. Involvement by representatives of the congregation is much to be desired. Congregations should consider establishing worship committees. Such a committee should represent not only those with professional or specialized interests--the pastor, choir director, and organist--but members of the congregation chosen from various constituencies. . .Corporate worship implies that all worshipers have some part to play.⁵⁶

The same could be applied to the synodical level. Great assistance could be given to the worship leaders of the CLC by a Worship Committee or Commission on Worship which would keep pace with emerging materials and provide assistance in worship planning. Much could also be accomplished by making worship-related topics frequent parts of pastoral conferences. Many aspects of our worship life, which often proceed without much thought, could be discussed with benefit.⁵⁷

2. The “how” of implementation

Perhaps the most important word to remember in the implementation of any change in worship is “slow.” In those churches where some variation is the norm, the worshipers will be able to accommodate to adjustments rather rapidly. But in those situations where little or no change has occurred for decades, even the slightest adjustment will take some time.

The most useful tool to use in bringing new music to the attention of one’s flock is the choir. They are in the best position to initiate the process of making unfamiliar tunes familiar, of expanding the church’s song. “Start with the church choir. One of the most important functions of any church choir is to help and stimulate the congregation as they learn new hymns. Be certain that any new hymn to be used in worship has been learned by the various choirs so that they are able to lead effectively when the hymn is first used by the congregation.”⁵⁸

Concluding Thoughts

The following are the words which conclude a substantial book on the topic of Lutheran worship. They seemed germane to this discussion as well:

Contemporary church music is in need of the element of innovation, but not of the wrong kind. Innovation has no value for its own sake but is significant and meaningful only when it is rooted directly in a real tradition—and in a profound understanding of and appreciation for that tradition. Without tradition there is nothing to be innovative about. . .

Tradition is most meaningful when it is allowed to manifest itself in ever-renewing creative expression—when it is carefully balanced with innovation. Like tradition, innovation can take many forms. Using traditional, and familiar, music in a new worship context can be innovative. But like tradition, innovation can be used to excess. When a congregation is always confronted with new hymnody, new worship materials, unfamiliar liturgical forms, and when it is constantly assaulted with strange new musical idioms, the virtue of newness wears thin and is reduced to the level of meaningless novelty. . .

It is by such constant renewal that parish music comes alive and stays in touch with the

worshiper. Not a preoccupation with either tradition or innovation, but a creative and imaginative drawing from both, and a resourceful application of the available repertory to an ever more meaningful liturgical action. That is the ultimate challenge in parish music today. . .

The church is likely to continue to be what Carl Halter has described as 'a cultural vestige' surrounded completely by a secular society. And its main problems will continue to center on questions of Christian faith. Church music will always be no more and no less than the church itself. When our practices of music and the liturgy are deeply rooted in that faith, we can be free to accept what is useful in all of our tradition, but, like Luther before us, we will not be afraid to alter it or to add to it.

The renewal of music and liturgy in corporate worship as it has been described here, and the creative application of its fundamental principles, is a reaffirmation of the faith. It is evidence of a continued concern for music's viability and expressibility as an art in the service of worship in praise of the Creator of all, and, with all its challenges, offers to church music in our time the most productive course for a creative future."⁵⁹

NOTES

¹ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Dierks, Theo., *Order of Service*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1952) Forward. He continues, "Christ merely commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel to every creature, to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and regarding the Lord's Supper He merely said, 'This do!' But in what manner, how we should externally arrange the public worship, and what ceremonies we should observe when administering the Sacraments – that is nowhere prescribed in the New Testament."

³ "In our weakness, in our natural quest for a secure feeling on our choice of methods, we often desire to be under such law. The slave, or the army man with his manual in hand, has – in a certain sense – the ultimate security. He need not exercise his own judgment. His decisions are made for him. Do we desire to be under law in any sense of that word? According to the flesh we do (as Galatians teaches us). But the Spirit of God dwells comfortably in freed men. Where that Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. That same Spirit of the Lord would deliver us from the temptation to make of His Gospel revelation a 'nova lex.'" (*Freedom and Form; Our Work in the Gospel from the Standpoint of Christian Liberty*. Rollin A. Reim. 1964, 4.)

⁴ "Much controversy has been stirred up when churches have sought to change the form of worship. It is almost easier in many congregations to change the doctrines of Scripture than to change the form of the liturgy... There are many who have been conditioned to think that any change in the liturgy or the language reflects a sellout to liberalism. ... This sometimes is encouraged by short cuts and overstatements that pastors make in defending the teachings of God's Word and in warning against false teachers who come in the sheep's clothing of modern English. Cause and effect are easily confused." (*Keeping Balance in the Exercise of Freedom and Form: A Law Gospel Perspective*. John Schierenbeck, 1995, 12.)

⁵ "Despite its long history and its Christ-centered content, the liturgical order of service is not the only form of worship that Christian congregations use. Lutherans must be sure to understand that God has not given explicit directions about the form the church's worship should take. The apostles, especially Paul, made it clear that the forms of public worship should remain in the realm of the church's Christian liberty." *Christian Worship: Manual*, ed. Gary Baumler and Kermit Moldenhauer (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1993), 21.

Consider the statistic that only three of the major denominations of western Christianity are characterized as liturgical: Catholic, Anglican (Episcopal), Lutheran. Millions who identify themselves as Christians worship in non-liturgical settings.

⁶ *Essays on Church Fellowship*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1996), 65. "Unionism" by John P. Meyer.

⁷ Speaking of efforts to recover for Americans in the 20th century certain liturgical features from Luther's time: "The long-standing and deeply-held fear of liturgical richness and variety, fueled by fears of liberal or Catholic encroachment, hindered efforts to reclaim fully the principles that Martin Luther had established for the Lutheran church. Many of the liturgical practices that seemed decidedly Romish in 1950 (e.g., vestments, chanting, processions) had been decidedly Lutheran before the age of Pietism. Innovations

that seemed to come directly out of Rome' s Second Vatican Council (e.g., a freestanding altar and an every-Sunday Communion) were suggestions made by Luther himself. The sad fact was that many of the ceremonies and practices that had been cherished by Christians and Lutherans for hundreds of years were rejected as soon as they were suggested." *Christian Worship: Manual*, 39.

Many are the worship forms which have been developed by Lutherans since Luther' s time. "Loeche says that he looked through 200 old agendas in order to arrive at a consensus of best usage." *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 84.

⁸ *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, 493.

⁹ *The Works of Martin Luther*, The Philadelphia edition, Vol. VI (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 92-93.

¹⁰ "This [English] hymnal could hardly have appeared at a more propitious time, for in 1914 World War I confronted the [Missouri] Synod with serious challenges. In some parts of the nation, for instance, it was assumed that German Lutherans were pro-German. Occasional acts of mob violence against congregations broke out. With German haters in abundance, it took some doing to demonstrate the difference between being a Lutheran and unpatriotic. The impact of the war, however, hastened the switch to the English language in many localities, a process that was eased by the ready availability of the new *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-book*. Thus, what had first appeared as a foreboding aspect of the war, became a blessing in disguise as English worship attendance as well as church membership gradually increased. Indeed, the time had come to reach out to the unchurched neighbors, irrespective of their ethnic background." *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, 99.

¹¹ "In its language and, to a certain extent, in its music, *The Common Service* was influenced by the character and quality of the Anglican' *Book of Common Prayer*. They expressed the same churchly feeling in forms of comparable literary value. This English connection turned out to be a mixed blessing for American Lutheran congregations. On the one hand, the American churches regained much of the liturgy and many of the hymns that previous generations had disavowed. On the other hand, congregations lost the opportunity to move directly from the language of their native lands to the language Lutherans actually spoke in America. While they lived through the age of the automobile, the age of space, and the age of computers, most Lutherans in America worshiped with the language and music of eighteenth century England." *Christian Worship: Manual*, 38.

¹² *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, 99.

¹³ *Freedom and Form*, 5.

¹⁴ "What do you suppose goes through the minds of worshipers and – for that matter – liturgists, when they say in the General Prayer (which, according to the rubrics, ' shall follow') that God has preserved ' the sacred ordinances of Thy house' ? Why not say, ' The Holy Sacraments' and let it go ~~what~~? Must not the dignity of a traditional form yield to the weightier matter of intelligibility?" *Freedom and Form*, 8.

¹⁵ See also the use of "prevent" in Psalm 79:8 (KJV).

¹⁶ Some scholars believe that the following passages may be fragments of early New Testament hymns: Eph. 5:14b; 1 Tim. 1:17; 3:16; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Rev. 4:11; 5:9-10; 5:12-13; 11:17-18; 15:3-4; 18:1-19:4; 19:6-8.

¹⁷ "Although Greek pagan religion gave an important role to hymns, it seems that this early pagan hymnody had little, if any, influence on early Christian worship. Rather it was the psalmody of the Old Testament, as it was used in the temple and in the synagogue, which played a much more significant role. Psalms were a prominent part of synagogue worship. Most early Christians had been members of Judaism and continued to worship in the temple at Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12) and in the synagogues of Palestine and the Diaspora after they became Christian (Acts 6:9; 13:14; 14:1). Psalms were appointed for different days of the week, particular festival occasions, and there is some indication that the 150 psalms were read over a three-year period on the Sabbath." Carl Schalk, *Praising God in Song* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 12.

¹⁸ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 24-25.

¹⁹ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 16-17.

²⁰ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 29-30.

²¹ A recent play which focuses on current events in the Anglican Church reveals a sad reason behind the fervent retention of the historic liturgy: namely, the perspective that the liturgy is the only remaining "glue" which holds together a fractured body of widely differing beliefs. The church leader named Southwark declares in debate, "Oh yes, it' s cruel. I do understand that. I am not unfeeling. But I also have a charge. I am duty-bound to decide where the line must be drawn. (*Nods.*) No two people will ever agree on theology.

It's not possible. You can't make decrees about the meaning of Holy Scripture. But you can insist that, whatever our beliefs, we assemble together and perform the same rituals." Later, "Yes. I know you think that. (*Looks at him thoughtfully.*) But what else can we do? Truly? (*Shrugs.*) People *are* different. It's a fact. They hold different views. We cannot comprehend God. If we could, we would not be here. When we understand him, we shall be in heaven. (*Pauses a moment, thinking about it.*) So meanwhile we must rely on formulae which have served men well for two thousand years. No, more than rely on them. I have begun lately to realize we must fight for them as well." David Hare, *Racing Demon*. (London: Faber and Faber Limited © David Hare, 1990, 1991), 75-76.

²² The Confession of sins, the Absolution, the Gloria Patri, the major portion of the Gloria in Excelsis, the Salutation, the Collects, the Prefaces, the Creeds, the Prayers.

²³ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 25.

²⁴ Regarding the liturgical services found in *Christian Worship*: "In *The Common Service*, the people conclude their confession of sins by singing the threefold plea to the triune God: "Lord..., Christ..., Lord, have mercy on us.' In the *Service of the Word and Sacrament*, on the other hand, the *Kyrie* is used as a congregational prayer for the needs of all people. Both uses of the *Kyrie* have historical precedence." *Christian Worship: Manual*, 169-170.

²⁵ "Interestingly, early in the Christian era the discovery was made that popular religion was molded by the thoughts expressed in hymns. Sermons may fly over the heads of people at times; prayers may fail to capture hearts and minds; but religious songs sink into the memory, color thought, and fashion theology, perhaps more than deliberate instruction. This fact did not escape Luther, as witnessed by his hymn output and that of his followers. Rightly did Lorenz Blankenbuehler, at one time professor of English at Concordia College, St. Paul, state, ' Of all the books written by man, with the exception perhaps of the Catechism, no book is so universally used in the church as the hymnal, and some would not even except the Catechism...since next to the Bible and our Catechism, there is perhaps no spiritual tool so valuable as the hymnal for the furtherance of God's kingdom on Earth and for the heightening of spirituality.' *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, 137.

²⁶ Luther's Works, American edition, Vol. 53: 11.

²⁷ "The Introit originally served a necessary function in the papal liturgy of Rome. Psalms were sung as the bishop of Rome journeyed with his clergy from his residence to the church at which he was to celebrate the liturgy. When the pope entered the church, the psalmody ended and the liturgy began. The use of entrance psalmody was imitated in other areas of the church even though its original purpose did not apply." *Proclamations: A Guide for Planning Liturgy and Music*, ed. Barry L. Bobb and Hans Boehringer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 11.

²⁸ "Who on the tree of the cross didst give salvation unto mankind that, whence death arose, thence Life also might rise again; and that he who by a tree once overcame likewise by a tree be overcome." (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), 25.

The re-wording found in *Christian Worship* is only slightly more clear. "...who brought the gift of salvation to all people by his death on the tree of the cross, so that the devil, who overcame us by a tree would in turn by a tree be overcome." (*Christian Worship*, Milwaukee: Northwestern), 21.

²⁹ "The best example of a church's readiness to accept great numbers of changes in its hymnody is *The Lutheran Hymnal* itself. Check the information printed above every TLH hymn text. A text changed in any way from its original version will be marked ' alt.' if one or many words of the original wording were altered; ' ab.' if the original was abridged by one stanza being omitted; ' cento' if the hymn was shortened by omission of more than one stanza; ' tr.' if the text differs from the original by virtue of translation; and ' ad.' if the hymn was adapted to a new flow of thought differing somehow from that in the original. . .

"These numbers provide persuasive evidence of how freely and how frequently a church re-tailors hymns to fit its needs at a given time." *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, 505-506.

³⁰ Examples: "The Church shall never perish! . . . Tho' there be those that hate her, False sons within her pale." (TLH #473); "I gave My life for thee; What hast thou giv' n for Me?" (TLH #405).

³¹ "Think how frequently we sacrifice interest and joy in favor of our accepted forms! How many good sermons haven't gone dead in the process of excessive division and formulation—contrary to the nature of the preacher and the nature of the text! How refreshing it might be to end a sermon with a rousing Hallelujah, for a change or to use a solid Amen after a Gospel declaration in the middle of the second part. We don't, of course, because the worthy Amen has become rather a signal for the congregation to stand up, or wake up, and for the organist to jump to the bench – just in case she wasn't already alerted by the hymn stanza just before the end. We all strive for variety, for change of pace, for something to pick up the spirits

of our people. Usually, though, we discipline ourselves to finding variety within the established routines rather than by changing the forms themselves. We feel a little guilty if we are caught preaching a homily. Aren't we frequently too concerned about what long usage has judged to be 'proper.' *Freedom and Form*, 5.

³² Luther: "The Quadragesima graduals and others like them that exceed two verses may be sung at home by whoever wants them. In church we do not want to quench the spirit of the faithful with tedium." *Luther's Works* Vol. 53: 24.

He also stated that a bishop "should choose the best of the responsories and antiphons and appoint them from Sunday to Sunday throughout the week, taking care lest the people should either be bored by too much repetition of the same or confused by too many changes in the chants and lessons." *Luther's Works* Vol. 53: 38.

³³ From a book which strenuously defends the use of historic Lutheran liturgies: "each congregation should be well acquainted with at least one musical setting of the liturgy, and should certainly strive to learn additional settings in the interest of variety and as a means of focusing attention on the changing character of the various seasons of the church year." *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, 246.

³⁴ "Hymn writers go on creating because the range of glory is inexhaustible, and the Christian's life is an endless series of discoveries. Beyond the mountains already scaled is another and another. There are still subjects to serve as themes for petition and praise. New witnesses and new voices deserve to be heard." *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, 494.

³⁵ *Freedom and Form*, 14.

³⁶ From an e-mail message regarding liturgy sent to Clergy-Talk by Pastor Delwyn Maas: "It becomes more meaningful when it is not done routinely. Then it can make a person stop and think about what is happening. The same thing can be true with certain portions of the liturgy which the minister speaks, for instance at the beginning of the confession of sins on page 6 or even The Lord's Prayer."

³⁷ "At the end of the First and Second Lessons the minister says very simply, 'This is the Word of the Lord.' This sentence is more preferable than 'Here ends the reading.' The congregation knows that the reading has come to an end. What the congregation must remember is that this is the Word of the Lord." *Christian Worship: Manual*, 172.

³⁸ "Psychological studies abound that indicate that music, for instance, more than any other human activity, moves the emotions, affects attitudes, and even influences the activities of human beings." *Christian Worship: Manual*, 56.

³⁹ *What Luther Says*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), Vol. II: 979.

⁴⁰ Apparently some harp music from the time of David and Saul has been reconstructed through archeological efforts. Someone who heard the results was said to have commented: "Saul must have been easily soothed."

⁴¹ *Freedom and Form*, 10-11.

⁴² "To understand Luther's view of congregational hymnody, it is necessary to appreciate Luther's view of hymnody as *liturgical song*. Hymns, for Luther, were not simply opportunities for people to sing during the liturgy, they were the very vehicle by which the congregation could **sing the liturgy**. As one looks at the hymnody of the early Reformation period, one is struck by how much of it is directed toward liturgical purposes: psalm hymns, hymns which could be sung as paraphrases of parts of the Ordinary of the liturgy, church year hymns, for example." Carl Schalk, *Praising God in Song*, 27.

⁴³ Quality hymn writing usually has been the result of a desire to improve what is available and to raise the standards of worship. Although beginners can and should offer God the best they are capable of giving, the worship service should not remain at the level of an amateur night, or a lazy rehash of old favorites that do not stretch the talents God gives in such amazing variety. Luther opened the floodgates to good hymnody with his modest collection of eight hymns, setting a standard for future collections; and Isaac Watts would never have turned the tide and character of the hymnody of his day had he not been dissatisfied with the doggerel to which the English church's hymnody had deteriorated, and had he not set out to compose more than 600 hymns." *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, 495.

⁴⁴ A glance at the "Alphabetical Index of Tunes" in *The Lutheran Hymnal* will reveal the extremely high percentage of hymn tunes which were imported from northern Europe. It appears to this observer that not a single tune originated in the southern hemisphere.

⁴⁵ *The Lutheran Hymnal*: The Offertory, 22; The Agnus Dei, 28.

⁴⁶ "Most of the early ventures in this development consisted of not too successful adaptations for congregations of music originally intended for choral performances. Only in very recent years has the

attempt been made to fashion music for the liturgy that is truly congregational in its conception and realization." Pamphlet, *Music in Lutheran Worship*. Carl Schalk, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983), 8.

⁴⁷ "Anglican chant was of course only an elaboration of Gregorian chant and had been in use since Elizabethan times in the Chapel Royal and intermittently in cathedrals. But now it was being proposed for the first time as a vehicle for corporate worship. The problem of this type of chant, unsolved to this day, is that it requires prose verses of varying length to be fitted to a musical formula that feels as if it should proceed in strict rhythm. Classical music in general creates a very clear association of chord progressions with a regular beat.

"As no Western music asks for chordal progressions to be set to an irregular or haphazard rhythm, to ask a humble congregation to perform the task is to require the unnatural, if not the impossible." *The Story of Christian Music*, Andrew Wilson-Dickson. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 135.

⁴⁸ The editors tried, seemingly, to accommodate various interests. The rubrics often state "May be said or chanted." But by printing some sections with music and others without, they determined, essentially, which practices would become the standard.

⁴⁹ "It can also happen when the artistic form is so closely attached to a non-Christian message that worshipers cannot see through the form to any religious truth. The musical styles of rhythm and blues or rock and roll may have a legitimate place in the musical legacy of America, but it is doubtful that average Christians, at least those of our era, can disassociate those styles from their past and present use and come to see Christ through them." *Christian Worship: Manual*, 57.

⁵⁰ "The statement about not letting the devil have all the good tunes must be far and away the best known of Luther's statements about music, but I have not encountered it in my reading of Luther. Admittedly my reading of Luther is far from complete. But since my reading of him includes what I suspect are the most likely places for such a statement, and since I have not found it referred to in the standard scholarly literature on Luther and music, I have begun to wonder about its authenticity. If it is authentic I am eager to learn its context. Perhaps that will answer some of the questions the isolated statement raises. For example, what are the 'good tunes' he wanted for the church? And who was the devil that possessed them, the secular world or the Catholic Church that Luther was not above calling the devil? Until we know more about the context in which Luther made the statement (if he made it at all), we should refrain from making it an ingredient in Luther's musical thought. *Perspectus*, November 1993, 3.

"It is important to remember what Luther did do. Luther never adopted, but he did adapt. He did borrow from the culture around him, but borrowed excellence only. The borrowed tunes were not the drinking songs of the day. And even when he did take something from the culture around him, he always encouraged modification, revisions, changes – in other words, adapting, not adopting. Another important thing to consider is that the gap between popular culture and traditional (folk) culture was not as wide, if it existed at all, as it is today." *Cross Accent*: John Ferguson. Number 6, July 1995, 29-30.

⁵¹ *Luther's Works* American edition, Vol. 53, 149.

⁵² "Virtually every study asking teenagers what kind of music they like has found that rock and pop styles are overwhelmingly favorites. But new research indicates that some teens judge music for worship differently than they judge music for other contexts. Assumptions that teens prefer rock and pop styles for worship are not accurate. Music in various historical styles can indeed be appropriate to the worship life of young people." From a brochure distributed by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *The National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts*, 1999, 13.

⁵³ *Formula of Concord*, Epitome, Art. 10.

⁵⁴ *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXIV, 79ff.

⁵⁵ *Augsburg Confession*, Art. 28:53,55.

⁵⁶ *Proclaim*, 6.

⁵⁷ A brief list of possible topics might include: The extent to which services should be "outreach efforts"; The effect of Pietism on Lutheran liturgy; The canticles of the church; Rubrics of standing and sitting; Time and Place of Baptism; Frequency of the Lord's Supper; Marriage Ceremonies; Selecting hymns for services; The Hymn of the Day; The Office of Minister of Music; The singing of Psalms; The role of the choir; The suitability of the organ as primary instrument; Pericope systems; Matins, Vespers, Compline services; The use of computers (MIDI) in services; Vestments; Acoustics; The use of chants; The use of visual arts.

⁵⁸ Pamphlet, *The Hymn of the Day and Its Use in Lutheran Worship*, Carl Schalk. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983), 27.

⁵⁹ *A Handbook of Church Music*, ed. Carl Halter and Carl Schalk (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 252-253.

PANORAMA

Problems Today in the ELCA . . .

Based on a reading of *dialog* and *Forum Letter*, one might deduce that the overwhelming problems of the ELCA lie in connection with two pending matters: (1) the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican, and (2) ‘Called to Common Mission,’ the default version of the Concordat of Agreement between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church. In the ecumenical milieu, at least as far as the ELCA seems to be concerned, the desire for some sort of union is overwhelmingly powerful. They evidently believe that Christ’s high-priestly prayer (“That they may all be one”) is to be fulfilled on earth through compromise, not realizing that the fulfillment is coming all along, day by day, as each believing soul is added to the roster, to be finally fulfilled in a visible and tangible reality on Judgment Day. They fail to see that the unity spoken of in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession is not the same as the outward union for which they are willing to sacrifice truth, but is already a reality in the *Una Sancta*. They fail to comprehend the joy of believing in the one holy congregation of believers, where it is truly sufficient to agree on the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and where it is not necessary that all believers have identical rites or ceremonies.

In their ecumenical efforts to bring about an external religious union of some kind among individuals and churches which disagree in their doctrine and practice, where God forbids such a union (Rom. 16:17-18), every effort must be made either to ignore or else deny the disagreement. That is what has taken place in both of the matters that are presently of paramount concern to the ELCA. Regarding the church of Rome, world-wide Lutherans (chiefly in Europe) and the ELCA readily accept the Vatican’s statement that it also teaches justification by grace, but ignore the many egregious illustrations of Rome’s continued teaching regarding infused grace, as well as its regarding Mary as *mediatrix* and its still clinging to all the treaties and decrees of the Council of Trent, none of which have been abrogated in any more recent councils of the Roman church. The ELCA does not appear to proclaim that Rome has changed, nor does it admit that it has changed. Are their members to believe now that if nobody has changed there never was a difference between Luther and Rome? Is the Pope still the vicar of Christ on earth? Is the Pope still able to add doctrine beyond that taught in Scripture, and are his decrees *ex cathedra* still infallible? Are there still meritorious works of supererogation by saints that are available and beneficial for others? Is Mary still regarded as having an immaculate conception? Is there still a purgatory, from which a soul can depart only through meritorious deeds by others, such as the saying of masses? Since this is still all taught by Rome as necessary and vital for salvation, how can any reasonable person believe that Rome holds a true doctrine of justification, when Scripture makes it plain and clear that justification is by grace ALONE? How sad it is that the Lutherans of Europe and the ELCA no longer seem to believe and witness to the true doctrine of justification, as it is taught in Scripture and in Luther’s doctrine pure! If they still did, surely they would not be able to declare themselves in agreement with Rome’s doctrine.

The second effort to bring the ELCA into “full communion” with the Episcopal Church is scheduled to succeed where the first attempt failed. It was predictable. When the first effort failed to pass (a near thing – just 6 votes shy), there was a great outcry, even among many of those who voted against adopting the Concordat of Agreement. The Episcopalians, though no doubt disappointed at the failure of ecumenicity in this instance, declared their willingness to give the Lutherans another chance.

The worst thing about this debacle, sad to say, is that real disagreement among these church bodies, that is, the disagreement over doctrine and practice that one expects to find between Lutheran and Reformed theology, appears to be of no interest to any of the parties. Well, what could we expect? In the same meetings in which the ELCA failed to accept the Concordat between itself and the Episcopalians, they succeeded in sufficiently ignoring or denying the same basic differences in

Lutheran and Reformed theology so as to be able to declare themselves in “full communion” with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. Once again, there was no public statement on the part of any of the church bodies involved in this declaration of “full communion,” at least to this writer’s knowledge, that any of the other bodies had changed in its doctrine. So, then, it can safely be concluded that real agreement on the basis of Scripture, while perhaps a *desideratum*, was not for them the *sine qua non* which God makes plain is the only God-pleasing basis of a God-pleasing fellowship practice (or “full communion”). Or, on the other hand, is it possible that the ELCA has changed its doctrine and now agrees with whatever the doctrine of the other church bodies is? Is the term “Lutheran” still going to appear in its name, or will it follow one of the church-growth suggestions to be more reticent in claiming a heritage from Luther and the Reformation?

One could come to that conclusion from statements made in the May 1999 issue of *Forum Letter* (though not declared in so many words by the author thereof). The only matter of evident significant difference between the ELCA and the Episcopalians was really just a matter of politics, that, is church polity and the ministry that depends upon it. Luther taught that the only way to enter the public ministry of the church was through the reception and acceptance of a divine call. The Episcopal church, however, limits the call to an arrangement through a bishop, who transmits his authority to another through the laying on of hands. Lutherans, historically, were not a part of this tradition, which the Episcopalians retained after the departure of the church of England, under the leadership of Henry VIII, from the church of Rome. Most members of the ELCA assembly appear to be willing to bow to the Episcopalians in this matter and find a way for ELCA bishops to accept their authority through some arrangement with the Episcopalians, so that they too would be operating under the tradition of episcopal succession – not that the Episcopalians demand it for “full communion.” So *Forum Letter* puts it: “We Lutherans claim a certain theological latitude in questions of how the church shall be ordered,” [Actually their theological latitude extends also to matters of doctrine. JL] “although there is not as much latitude as one might expect, given our confessional preference for episcopal polity (*cf.* Article 14, *Apology*). Nonetheless, there is nothing in *Called to Common Mission* implying that we must adopt historic episcopal succession in order to be recognized as a church by the Episcopalians. There is every awareness, though, that we are adopting episcopal succession only for the purpose of showing that we are in full communion with them. Adopting an episcopal polity simply shows how that visible communion is expressed” (3). So, according to this article the ELCA is already in “full communion” with the Episcopal Church, and if it is necessary to accept episcopal succession in order to achieve a public declaration of it, that’s all right too. Well, it may be episcopal to achieve union without confessional agreement, but it’s not Lutheran! Not really.

– John Lau

On “Conflict Resolution” . . .

We used to hear of “soul care,” or even “*Seelsorgen*,” to describe the counseling work of Christian pastors. The buzz word we hear so often today is “conflict resolution.” This new term has also replaced the concept of “discipline” in many churches. Committees to resolve conflicts may have the responsibility, by new synodical guidelines, to handle cases of false doctrine or practice, where in the past there was discipline conducted by conference visitors or district officials, etc. Whether or not such committees will be more beneficial than the older systems remains to be seen. As long as the counsel and discipline itself is solidly rooted in Scripture and follows its guidance, and as long as the system does not detract from or override the responsibility of the called pastor, teacher, or official to his flock, a certain freedom in outward methodology may be allowable.

Those are important qualifications, however, to be sure. A recently received communication from Conflict Resolution Center International, based in Pittsburgh, PA, is hardly likely to cause one to place confidence in its ability to resolve the type of conflicts its enclosed material describes. The

organization seeks to provide helpful materials to publications like our *Journal of Theology* which could be published, with proper attribution, at no cost, to begin with. The topics which the CRCI has thus far identified for future discussion are: changing role of women in religion; conflict as normal; long-standing members vs. new members; business vs. spiritual mission of the religious organization; individual freedom vs. rules of the faith; and more. Previous topics which have generated articles from the CRCI have been: intergenerational conflicts in the congregation, and conflicts arising from inter-faith and inter-church marriages. The two sample articles included in the mailing discussed the latter of these.

Although the issue is certainly a religious one, the articles' author, Abby Mendelson, does not adduce a single passage from either the Old or New Testament from which to gain spiritual counsel. Instead she presents conflict resolution "techniques," as she terms them. These are: (1) Choose one religion and stick to it; (2) Find common ground and build on it; (3) Know what you're fighting about; (4) Mediate with a third neutral party who can calm things down; (5) Accept the participants' decisions and support them; and (6) The best defense may be a good offense.

In (1) a certain Baptist minister is quoted as saying, "I'm very strong on encouraging couples to worship together, even if one of the members has to leave my church." In other words, join a false religion if it helps your marriage stay together. In (2) a Methodist minister counsels, "I invite other spiritual leaders into the church and blend their traditions into the couple's bond and their expression of love." So this technique also uses religious unionism to strengthen marriage. In (3) a rabbi is cited: "The child is not rebelling against theology. More often than not, he or she has been raised without it. On the other hand, parents and clergy often act out of deep tribal needs. That may be an excellent motive, but to the child it makes no sense." We agree with the idea that it's a good idea to know what the issues are. In (4) we go back to the Baptist minister, who says, "My technique is to be open; hopefully, we can spread the canopy of faith wide enough to embrace many different positions and beliefs." This technique adds a third religion into the mix to contend with the other two. If you can thereby prove that nobody's got the right religion, maybe you'll get somewhere! In (5) we return to the Methodist (in "conflict resolution" turn -about is fair play), who says that if it's too late to stop the mixed marriage then accept what the couple wants to do and try to help them. One suggested way is to have the marriage ceremony include passages from the book of *Ruth*, "with its thematic acceptance of people of other faiths" [so Ruth remained of another faith? – JL] "and focus on love as the salve that heals all wounds." And, finally, in (6) the counsel is given: "... to have children or congregants stay in your church, keep your religion strong in their lives. Show them the beauty of your way of life – so that they could not conceive of living or choosing a life partner without it, or a partner who would not become an active participant. Perhaps your congregant's children will marry out, but at least you'll know you've done your best to keep them." Of course, Ms. Mendelson is writing for all faiths, but how much better: "... to have children stay in the Christian faith ..."; "... keep the gospel before their eyes ..."; "show them Christ and His gospel ..."!

Once again, we see compromise and unionism as a recommended tool, to keep marriages together as well as to join church bodies that disagree in their doctrines. The word of God is still the best and only guide for all to follow.

- John Lau

From "Distortion" to "Misrepresentation" . . .

The WELS Home Page contains the Book of Reports and Memorials (BORAM) to be presented and discussed at that church body's convention to be held in July at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota. One of the reports, that of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR), contains the following:

Prof. Armin Panning attended the convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession

(CLC) in Eau Claire, Wis., on June 15-20, 1998. The CICR wants to keep informed about CLC and to maintain some personal contact. We regret that CLC literature continues seemingly to misunderstand and misrepresent our WELS position.

The last *Journal of Theology* article that thoroughly discussed the differences in doctrine and practice that exist between the CLC and the WELS appeared in the December 1996 issue. The article in question, entitled "Once More Unto the Breach," discussed the difficulty we had in dealing with the WELS representatives in the 1987-1990 meetings. They had accepted (as scripturally correct) doctrinal statements which clearly and obviously were in contradiction of WELS earlier doctrinal statements, and yet they refused to accept a preliminary declaration that specifically acknowledged those earlier statements as incorrect. (For a more complete presentation of this situation, the reader is asked to see *Journal of Theology*, Volume 36, Number 4 [December 1996], 32-38.)

The article also included an attempt to put aside an accusation that had been made by Prof. John Brug, of the WELS seminary at Mequon, WI. Prof. Brug had written that we had distorted the meaning of the WELS confessional statement (adopted by WELS at its convention in 1959): "Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail." We had explained that the words simply mean "no further avail – ever." There is no end time or termination in the statement which states or even implies anything else. There was no intent to distort, and we said so. At least "distortion" does not in itself imply an intent to deceive.

Now, however, though ameliorated somewhat by the word "seemingly" (it may only *seem* that way!) we both "misunderstand and misrepresent" the WELS position. Well, it would be understandable if we misunderstood their position; their representatives have stated contradictory things at the same time. However, we do not believe that we have misunderstood. We need only look at the WELS position regarding membership in unionistic fraternal insurance groups to realize that their earlier doctrinal statements represent their current belief and practice.

"Misrepresent" is a term that bears with it a strong accusation. According to our trusty Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary, the word means: "to give a false or misleading representation of usu. with an intent to deceive or be unfair" (emphasis added). The writers of the CICR report (among whom are Prof. Brug and Prof. Panning) may not have intended to judge our heart's motivation in what we have written; but they have certainly let their words make the judgment that it was our intent, in our writing, to deceive. We do not recall such terminology in the lengthy dealings that the WELS had with the LCMS years ago.

- John Lau