



Worship the Lord

No. 40, January 2010

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Articles on key worship concepts may be valuable for analysis in a pastors' study group, board of elders, or worship committee. As WELS parishes work with these concepts, our worship will be enriched for the sake of both members and guests. It will be faithful to Scripture, to our Lutheran heritage, and to our challenges and opportunities as 21st century followers of Jesus. Johnold Strey, the AZ-CA district worship coordinator, serves Gloria Dei, Belmont, CA (near San Francisco).

Catholicity: Beyond Our Borders

By Johnold Strey

Several years ago, I taught the WELS worship curriculum, *Come, Worship Christ*. Lesson six posed the following question:

Agree or Disagree, and Explain. It would be best if our Wisconsin Synod order of service were so different from anything other churches are using that a WELS member would know instantly if he were in a non-WELS church.

One participant exclaimed, "I think our services should be very different. I don't like the song, 'O Taste and See.' It sounds just like what the Roman Catholics sing!"

I didn't know how to respond! The words of the canticle in *Christian Worship's* Service of the Word come directly from Psalm 34. The music did not originate with a Roman Catholic publisher, but with Martin Luther College's own Prof. Kermit Moldenhauer. The words were scriptural, and the music was synodical. I don't know what made the canticle seem "Catholic" for this person, but two things were clear: She didn't care for the song, and she didn't want anything that felt too "Catholic."

Catholicity

The worship word we are considering in this article is *catholicity*. The term immediately poses a problem. Many of our lay members and perhaps some of our called workers equate *catholic* with *Roman Catholic*. We have done a good job warning our people about the false teachings found in the Roman Catholic Church. They know that, doctrinally, we're not Roman Catholic. Consequently, they don't want to look or sound too Roman Catholic. As a result, they might also be wary of anything that is catholic.

The adjective *catholic* and the noun *catholicity* (both with lower-case c's) do not refer to unique practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, *catholic* and *catholicity* point to church practices that are in some sense universal. A practice may be catholic because it connects us with the church of ages past. A practice may be catholic because it connects us with other Christians around the world. Striving for catholicity in worship says that the Holy Christian Church is greater than our local congregation. Striving for catholicity testifies to the invisible church. It comforts us with the knowledge that the Spirit uses the gospel to bring other souls to faith and sustain them in faith (Isaiah 55:10,11) despite their churches' heterodox confession. It acknowledges the truth that "we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). It takes to heart the encouragement to "remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).

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Catholicity

WORSHIP WORDS TO WRESTLE WITH

Purpose

Sacraments

Tradition

Variety

Catholicity

Accuracy

Excellence

Contemporary

Time

Love

Evangelism

Culture

Luther and Catholicity

If anyone had reason to avoid any appearance of catholicity, it was Luther. Given the doctrinal decay in the church of his day, one might suspect that Luther would make a clean sweep, throw out anything that remotely smacked of the Roman Catholic Church, and reconstruct the church's worship from the ground up. It is interesting and instructive to see that Luther did not take this approach. When the radical reformation movement tried to take such an approach, Luther stood his ground:

There are very many who ... turn [the freedom of faith] into an occasion for the flesh and think that now all things are allowed them. They want to show that they are free men and Christians only by despising and finding fault with ceremonies, traditions, and human laws; as if they were Christians because on stated days they do not fast or eat meat when others fast, or because they do not use the accustomed prayers, and with upturned nose scoff at the precepts of men, although they utterly disregard all else that pertains to the Christian religion.¹

Contrary to the spirit of the radical reformers, *Luther's worship reforms honored the principle of catholicity*. In the preface to his Latin service, Luther stated that his goal was never to start anew, but to preserve what was good and to eliminate the bad. "It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use."² Since there was really nothing objectionable in the basic outline of the Mass, and since the gospel could be proclaimed through a purified liturgy, Luther retained the liturgical flow of worship – and, consequently, a connection with the lower-case catholic church.

The Lutheran Confessions often cite the early church Fathers. The plethora of these quotations emphasize that the Lutheran Church is not a new sect, but is in harmony with the historic, lower-case catholic church. Similarly, Luther's worship reforms deliberately retained much of what had been handed down from the past. Luther's services communicated in practice the very same thing the Confessions communicated in words: we are not a new sect, but a part of the church catholic, the universal church that spans time and space.

Catholicity and WELS

Until recent decades, catholicity in worship was simply not a consideration within the Wisconsin Synod. Our synod's first English hymnal with widespread use, the 1917 *Book of Hymns*, deliberately moved the *Agnus Dei* out of its historic place in the communion liturgy, and attached it to the confession of sins. Only one Scripture lesson was included – and this was claimed to be a wise move by those who promoted the *Book of Hymns*! Although the Common Service was included, rare was the WELS congregation that followed a full liturgical service.³ The worship scene in early WELS history caused our first efforts for worship renewal to be efforts toward reclaiming our Lutheran liturgical heritage that had been lost in the dark days of pietism and rationalism. This was a worthy goal in itself!

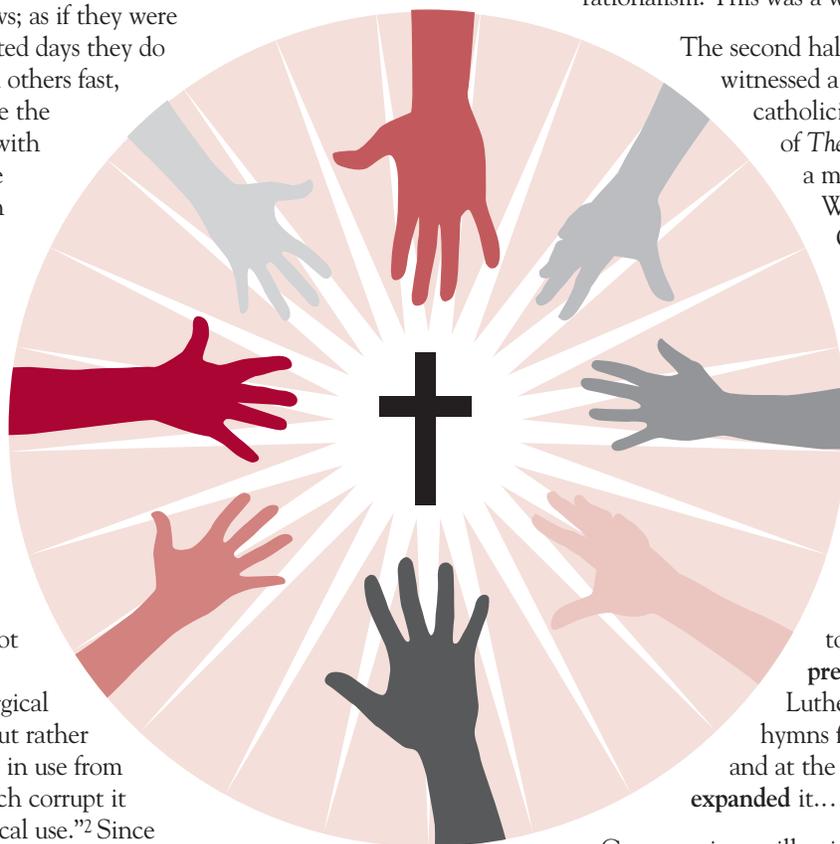
The second half of our synod's history has witnessed a greater consideration of catholicity in worship. The adoption of *The Lutheran Hymnal* in 1941 was a major turning point; many WELS congregations adopted the Common Service and became familiar with a wider body of hymnody. Kurt Eggert, project director for *Christian Worship* (CW), encouraged a move toward catholicity. In the introduction to CW, he writes:

The phrase "new/revised" in the synodical resolutions [for the production of the synod's own hymnal] was interpreted to mean a hymnal which **preserved** the Christian and Lutheran heritage of liturgy and hymns from *The Lutheran Hymnal* and at the same time **improved** and **expanded** it....

Congregations will enjoy a greater variety of hymns than formerly. In addition to Lutheran chorales and traditional English hymnody, a wide selection of plainsong hymns, spirituals, folk hymns from Appalachia, Wales, Ireland, and elsewhere, gospel hymns, and contemporary hymns in different styles are included....

The overall intent of those who prepared *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* was to produce a Lutheran hymnal that was at once forward-looking and also enriched by the faith and worship experience of the whole Christian church of the past.⁴

In more recent years, WELS national worship conferences and Schools of Worship Enrichment have pointed congregations to the benefits of catholicity, while simultaneously promoting Lutheran distinctiveness and healthy creativity.



Some of the best creativity in worship today comes when creativity is combined with catholicity.

Catholicity in Practice

The New Testament sets no laws regarding the form of public worship. This reality, however, does not negate the benefits of common forms that connect us to one another, to the church of the past, and to the church around the world. In comments connected to his German service, Luther suggested, “As far as possible we should observe the same rites and ceremonies, just as all Christians have the same baptism and the same sacrament [of the altar] and no one has received a special one of his own from God.”⁵

Four services among current WELS worship resources are versions of the historic Christian liturgy: CW’s Common Service and Service of Word and Sacrament, and the supplement’s Divine Service I and II. Two settings of Matins, one setting of Vespers, and two settings of Compline in WELS-produced resources find their roots in the historic series of prayer services called the Daily Office. These rites say to members and guests alike that we belong to a church that is bigger than our sanctuary’s four walls or our nearly 400,000-member synod.

Psalms, hymns, and services can be performed in a wide range of musical styles appropriate for worship. Rather than limiting a service to one musical genre, these styles can be brought together in one service as a testimony to the church catholic. At the congregation I serve, last year’s Pentecost service included a traditional Lutheran Chorale for the opening hymn, a contemporary musical setting of the Gloria done with piano and three wind instruments, an arrangement of Psalm 51 in a style that combined jazz and Taizé concepts, and a hymn with Spanish origins from *Christian Worship: Supplement* before the sermon. A wide array of musical forms within the same service says that the church is not bound to the cultural makeup of our congregation or synod, but it extends to every “nation, tribe, people, and language” (Revelation 7:9).

Catholicity is a useful principle in worship, but it is not the only principle that drives worship. Catholicity does not trump the gospel. We rightly preach in a distinctively Lutheran manner, with specific law and gospel and a prominent focus on Christ crucified and risen for our salvation. Catholicity is not synonymous with a false ecumenicity. We rightly practice closed communion, testifying that our confession will not tacitly condone false doctrine. Catholicity does not prevent creativity. Some of the best creativity in worship today comes when creativity is combined with catholicity. The popularity of the gathering rite concept is one example of this: the invocation, confession and absolution, *Kyrie*, and Prayer of the Day are brought together under a common musical theme, merging the rite’s catholicity with the composer’s creativity.

On the surface, *catholicity* may appear to run contrary to other worship words in this series, such as *variety*, *contemporary*, or *culture*. In reality, these worship words and concepts are woven together in a healthy tension. If catholicity were the only driving principle in worship, then we might as well turn our churches into liturgical museums. But when the connection we enjoy with the church catholic is combined with healthy variety, fresh musical styles, or unique cultural contributions, the end result is worship that confesses, “We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church” – a Church that is here and now, even as it spans time and space.

¹ LW, Vol. 31, p. 372.

² LW, Vol. 53, p. 20.

³ James Tiefel, “The Formation and Flow of Worship Attitudes in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” in *Not Unto Us: A Celebration of the Ministry of Kurt J. Eggert*, ed. William H. Braun and Victor H. Prange (NPH, 2001), 152-153.

⁴ CW, pp. 8-9. Emphasis in the original.

⁵ LW, Vol. 53, p. 61.

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Celebrating the Climax of the Church Year By Steven Lange

Holy Week is the climax of the Christian year. Everything prior to Holy Week leads up to Holy Week. Everything that follows Holy Week flows from Holy Week. During this exciting and exhausting week, God’s people have the opportunity to relive symbolically some of the most important events in the history of the world. Since a symbol is useful only to the degree that it is understood, it is important to explain the meaning of symbolic acts. Pastoral discretion will determine how much to introduce in a given year. Many of the ceremonies described in the following paragraphs are elements that my parish has been working on for almost a decade. The richness we now enjoy during Holy Week did not spring to life full-grown in one year. Rather it happened through the slow and dedicated work of many people, especially those serving on our Worship Committee and on our outstanding Altar Guild. I pray that our experience will provide inspiration and ideas to adapt for your congregation’s celebration of this climactic week.

Palm Sunday

On this day Jesus rode into Jerusalem as our humble Savior while crowds of people praised him with their voices and with palm branches. Why not give the people in your congregation the opportunity to praise their humble Savior in the same way? CW: *Occasional Services* (CWOS) provides a form for a Procession with Palms that my people have found wonderfully meaningful over the years. If you decide to have a procession, order palm branches well in advance (they are available from most church supply companies). And plan the route of your procession carefully to avoid “traffic jams.” With proper planning and instruction, this procession can be a marvelous way to begin your celebration of Holy Week.

The Triduum

From the festivity of Palm Sunday we move to what Augustine called “the most holy *Triduum* of the crucified, buried, and risen

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Lord”: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. Historically, these three days were conceived of as a unit, and the worship of God’s people on these days was seen as a single service. In order to emphasize the connection and continuity of these days, consider printing all three orders of service in a single worship booklet. You can find examples under Quick Links / Service Folders at the Worship Connect site. Printing such a worship booklet requires more work, but it does impress upon people how inextricably intertwined these three days are in God’s plan of salvation.

Maundy Thursday

On Maundy Thursday we travel with Jesus and his disciples to the upper room, where we celebrate with them the holy meal Jesus instituted for his disciples, including us. In reverent joy we approach our Savior’s table to receive from him his body and his blood. And then, when the meal is completed, we strip our Lord’s table, his altar, to remind us of the abandonment he suffered in Gethsemane and on the cross. A form for the Stripping of the Altar is in CWOS. If you include this in Maundy Thursday worship, work closely with your Altar Guild on the procedure for removing altarware and other items. You may want to practice ahead of time so that this ceremony can take place in a dignified and purposeful manner. Since this is but the first part of a three-part service stretching over three days, the benediction is omitted on this night and on Good Friday. The congregation leaves in silence, eagerly anticipating the next portion of the service on Good Friday.

Good Friday

On Good Friday we travel with Jesus to Golgotha where we see him sacrifice himself on the cross as the perfect payment for all our sins. On this day God abandoned his Son. We reflect that abandonment in the starkness of our sanctuary and chancel on this day. On Good Friday in my parish there are no banners, no paintings; there is none of the art that usually adorns our worship space. All that remains is the bare altar and a *tenebrae* candelabra, elegantly constructed out of wood and thorns.

As our Savior suffered on the cross, God brought unnatural darkness on the earth for three horrible hours. We mirror that darkness in our worship. We gradually dim our sanctuary lights until, at the end of the service, the sanctuary is enveloped in complete darkness. Our Altar Guild has sewn black drapes for the sanctuary windows to enhance the darkness.

CWOS includes three orders of service for Good Friday: the Service of the Cross of Christ, the Service of Seven Words, and the Service of Darkness. If you use one of these orders, work carefully with your assistants so that the various aspects of the rites can be performed smoothly.



God’s people exit the sanctuary in silence, looking forward to the upcoming celebration of Jesus’ resurrection.

The Vigil of Easter

Early on Easter morning, while it was still dark, several women gathered and went to Jesus’ tomb, expecting to complete his burial. Early on Easter morning, while it is still dark, we too gather, but not to complete Jesus’ burial. We gather to celebrate his resurrection.

The Vigil of Easter is one way in which we can do this. Historically, Christians celebrated the Vigil late on Holy Saturday. However, for those congregations (including my own) where a late Saturday night service is not feasible, the Vigil of Easter also works well as an Easter sunrise service.

CWOS provides an extensive order for the Easter Vigil. If your congregation has

never had an Easter Vigil before, you will want to instruct your people in advance concerning the abundant symbolism packed into this service. This service is a lot of work for *all* who participate. But the blessings received through this celebration of God’s means of grace in all its forms make the effort involved more than worth it.

Even if you choose not to use the Vigil in its entirety, you can incorporate parts of the Vigil in other Easter services. The Service of Light (which includes the lighting of the Paschal Candle) makes a wonderful beginning for the first service of the day. The Service of Holy Baptism highlights the powerful connection between Jesus’ resurrection and our own baptism.

Regardless of whether you use the Easter Vigil, this is the day to let the glory of the risen Christ shine forth in every aspect of worship. Let the lights shine and banish the darkness! Let the alleluias resound after six weeks of absence! Let art and music fill your sanctuary and chancel, so recently stripped of all adornment! Christ, who once was dead, has risen!

May that risen Christ fill you with joy as you, along with the people he has privileged you to serve, relive his passion and resurrection this Holy Week.

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