

# The Shaping of the New Hymnal

By Kurt J. Eggert

[This essay was prepared for the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum.]

## Part I: History and Organization

At the August, 1983, convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod it was resolved to produce a “new/revised” hymnal. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod was invited to participate in the project and has indicated its intent to do so. Before us lies a task of considerable dimension and unusual importance. The hymnal is our major resource and guide for congregational worship. It is a book for all the people, used week for week by all our worshipers. It is a real “Bible companion.” It is almost a Bible in music and song. It would be interesting to search out the number of Bible doctrines which are not reflected in its liturgies or hymns. Surely their number is few.

The preparation of such a book poses considerable challenge, and we have no specific experience in producing a hymnal. However, we trust the Lord will provide sufficient talent and ability, willingness and dedication, to produce a hymnal for our Christians of today and tomorrow which will constitute a significant improvement over our present hymnal.

### Brief history of the project

For the WELS Commission on Worship at least, the hymnal resolutions culminated a long-awaited and often-interrupted project. In 1959 the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod extended an invitation to the members of the Synodical Conference to share in a revision of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. In 1965, when the work was nearing completion, the Detroit convention of the LC-MS decided on an alternate course and invited all Lutheran bodies to participate in the production of a “pan-Lutheran” hymnal. Ultimately, four church bodies participated in the project. The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW) was formed and in 1978 was ready with a comprehensively new hymnal. The Missouri Synod, however, declined to share in the publication, primarily for doctrinal reasons. So the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW) was published by the others and Missouri began its own revision of LBW, which was completed and published by Concordia in 1982. In addition to the changes which satisfied the doctrinal concerns of the LC-MS, the new book, called *Lutheran Worship* (LW), included a revision of the “page 5/15” liturgy of TLH and added a number of hymns from that book. One fact that should be added to the above concerns the *Worship Supplement* published by Concordia in 1969. This 253-page supplement contained much of the new materials prepared for the original TLH revision begun in the '50s and substantially influenced both the LBW and LW hymnals.

The unpredictable series of events listed above led to some frustration on the part of the WELS Commission on Worship. With hope that the LBW and later the LW might be suitable for use in the synod, it waited and spent the time in working on a new non-Communion service (Service of the Word) and in revising some of the Propers for trial use. When it became apparent that the LBW would not serve our congregations, the synod resolved to publish its own supplement to the hymnal, *The Worship Companion*. This project was derailed when Missouri’s decision to publish LW gave renewed hope for a hymnal suitable for our use. However, when study of *Lutheran Worship* by the conferences and congregations of the WELS met with negative reaction, the synod finally decided to publish its own “new/revised” hymnal.

### Organization of the hymnal project

In its convention resolutions on the hymnal, the synod provided for the calling of a full-time project director to “organize, administer, coordinate, and bring to completion the production of a new/revised hymnal.”

It also provided for the appointment by the Conference of Presidents of “committee members deemed necessary” for the development of the hymnal. The project director began his work on June 1, 1984, and the appointment of the committee members soon followed.

The organization of the project called for the appointment of a Hymnal Committee of 12 individuals which in turn divided itself into a Hymn Committee and a Liturgy Committee. As the work progressed, these two committees divided into sub-committees: Hymn Texts, Hymn Music; Major Liturgies and Rites, Other Liturgical Materials.

Planning also calls for the formation of a “hymnal task force” of perhaps 40–60 people. The purpose of this group would be to provide opinion and reaction for the people regularly working on the hymnal from a group particularly knowledgeable in worship. It would also provide specialized talents which may not be present in the Hymnal Committee and would assure a wider representation and cross section of the synod’s varied worship needs and desires.

When the committees were in place and the organization completed, the ELS representatives were invited by the Commission on Worship to participate in the project. Overall planning and direction of the project is shared by the Commission on Worship and the project director.

### **Flow chart and timetable**

Timetables for the project are difficult to project until a flow chart for the project has been developed and until we have some experience with the work-pace of the committees. In general, our goal is to complete the hymnal in six years—four years for the preparation of materials and manuscripts and two years for the publishing process. That may well prove to be overly optimistic, but would bring the publication date to the middle of 1990.

The present flow chart for the project includes four phases:

- I. Overall planning and organization
- II. Preparation of materials and manuscripts
- III. Publishing process
- IV. Introduction of the hymnal to the congregations

### **Part II: Goals, Guidelines and Areas of Concern**

Our goal is to produce a book which represents *a significant improvement over The Lutheran Hymnal* as a worship guide and resource for our synodical membership.

The synodical resolutions have defined the goal by describing the new/revised hymnal as a book

- a) scripturally sound,
- b) reflective of the larger perspective and mainstream of the Christian church,
- c) in harmony with the character and heritage of the WELS, and
- d) judged highly satisfactory for devotion and worship by a majority of our membership.

The synod also provided an overall guideline for the hymnal work by describing the book as a “new/revised” hymnal. This unusual description we interpret to mean:

- 1) that the new hymnal will be based on *The Lutheran Hymnal* and that the starting point for the project will be a review and consideration of our present hymnal; and
- 2) that there will be considerable flexibility allowed in adding of new materials, both hymnic and liturgical, and in making substantive changes where it is deemed necessary or highly desirable.

## **Areas of concern in *The Lutheran Hymnal***

No hymnal is, or ever will be, perfect. The present hymnal is no exception to the rule. Like its Missouri successor, *Lutheran Worship*, our hymnal is probably “neither as bad as its detractors would allege, nor as great as its enthusiastic supporters would maintain.” Whatever our assessment, the fact remains that there are substantial areas of concern with TLH. We can summarize them under four general headings:

### **1) Hymn texts, tunes and harmonizations**

A hymn is a really unique form of verse/song. St. Augustine defined a hymn as: “A song of praise to God.... If it be praise but is not sung, it is not a hymn. And if it be sung but does not praise God, it is not a hymn.” Though this is likely too narrow a definition for us after the passing of more than fifteen centuries, it does point up the two important dimensions of hymnody and the interdependence of text and tune. We would normally consider the text of a hymn to be the principal ingredient, but there is little doubt that the tune generally determines the popularity of a hymn. At any rate, both text and tune need not only to be worthy in their own right, but also need to be mutually supportive. “A Mighty Fortress” and “Behold, A Host” are both inspiring hymns, but to try to sing the text of the former to the tune of the latter would result in a truly memorable experience, but not one that would bear repetition.

There are some worthy texts in TLH which languish forgotten and unsung because they are illegitimately or at least unfortunately wed to an alien or unpopular melody. The reverse is also occasionally true (poor text, good tune).

More important, there is a fairly large body of worthy hymns, both contemporary and from the past, which are not included in TLH. It is safe to say that many of these would be well-loved and sung enthusiastically if they were available in our hymnal. This is a strong reason why hymnals need to be updated from time to time. If we had not changed hymnals in 1941, hymns such as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” “For All the Saints,” “All Glory, Laud, and Honor,” “Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus,” “Built on the Rock,” “A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing,” “God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage,” “Christ, the Lord, Is Risen Today,” “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” “Spread, Oh Spread, Thou Mighty Word,” and others would be unknown to our congregations today!

There are also a number of more technical concerns, relating mostly to the “settings” or harmonizations of the hymns. One of the problems concerns the way in which certain hymns are metered. This has direct importance for our organists, but also indirectly for our congregations. We cite one other of these concerns: TLH has a strong tendency to fit all hymns of whatever type or genre into the “chorale” mold. Most of the time this works reasonably well, but some tunes, notably the plainsong melodies, will not be well sung or properly appreciated if they are so harmonized. *Lutheran Worship* has been severely criticized for using too many “linear” instead of “chordal” settings, and perhaps with some justification. However, a conservative improvement in this area is needed.

### **2) Liturgical concerns**

It would really not be unfair to say that for the majority of worshipers, our hymnal is a “book of hymns,” with a few pages of something called “liturgy” thrown in to sort of round out the worship. As worship leaders, however, we need to be concerned about liturgies and related materials, since the historic liturgies are the very framework of our worship, and assure congregational participation in the worship dialogue between God and his people. It is the Sunday liturgy in particular which links us to Christian worship through the centuries. It also turns the wheel of the church year, focusing our annual attention on the life and work of the Savior through the Propers. The liturgies also retain some of the great liturgical songs for congregational use.

For our present purpose, it will be sufficient to list a few of our concerns with the “page 5/15” liturgy of TLH.

In the first place, I am surprised at the number of pastors and congregations who are making rather major changes in their Sunday services. This is both good and bad. Rigid uniformity in the use of the liturgy is not necessary nor even desirable. But neither is widespread use of personal, home-made, local liturgies which become the regular tradition through extended use. For a rather long number of years there seemed to exist in the WELS a reasonable consensus in the use of the Sunday liturgy. Yes, there were changes (“We use the liturgy just as it’s written, except . . .”). Many pastors, however, are going considerably beyond that today, or at least so it seems to me as I review the service folders and liturgical materials sent to me.

Perhaps this is a result of a resurgence of interest in worship, particularly by our younger pastors. It may also be an outgrowth of our growing use of a Bible translation in today’s English. The wide use of the new three-year lectionary and the felt inadequacy of the Propers (Introits and Graduals) as given in TLH may also in a sense be forcing changes. Much of the liturgical material in TLH remains a mystery to many congregations, as it has in the past. But in the case of the Sunday service at least, our use is outgrowing the printed forms. To put it another way, our present page 5/15 does not provide comfortably for the changes which more and more pastors are finding desirable. In some instances creative changes are being made with good understanding and balance. In others, the results may become detrimental to the unity of our synodical worship. At any rate, it seems to indicate the necessity for a most careful review of our major liturgy and to publish it in a form which will take care of some practical problems and encourage a general uniformity in the Sunday worship within our church.

A brief list of areas of concern and needed study in page “5/15” would include:

- The place and function of the Kyrie (cf. old WELS “Book of Hymns”)
- An alternate liturgical song for the Gloria in Excelsis (?)
- Revision of Collects for the Day and the Prayers (pp 102–110)
- Provision for the use of the 3-year lectionary (Old Testament reading)
- Revision or new types of responses for the readings
- Revision of the overly long and verbose General Prayer or new type of prayer
- Inclusion of a prayer of thanksgiving before the Lord’s Prayer and Words of Institution
- Combining of our present two liturgies (p 5/15) into one service
- Regular use of the Psalms in the Sunday service

Throughout the liturgical section there is the constant concern about the present language and music used. These we need to treat separately.

### **3) Language**

Since our synod seems to be fairly committed to the use of the New International Version of the Bible, at least for the foreseeable future, and since our pastors are increasingly praying in today’s English and our children learning their Bible stories and Catechism in contemporary language, it would seem to be sensible and natural to update also the language of our worship in the hymnal. The claimed advantages have often enough been cited and there is no need to rehearse them here. The pain of change for those of us who have grown up with the King James Bible and memorized our Bible passages in that translation is also predictable and inevitable, although the trauma may well be less for all of us by the time the new hymnal comes into use in our congregations. The fact that our present language will sound increasingly anachronistic to our children, new confirmands, members from other Lutheran bodies, and perhaps to us also as we look 10, 20 or 40 years into the future simply seems to override other considerations.

The real challenge for the hymnal preparation is rather in providing new worship language with the dignity, rhythm and grace that befits the nature and content of our worship. Worship in today’s English does not have to mean casual, trendy, awkward or irreverent. We are in the midst of a fairly traumatic change in our worship language, and times of transition are difficult. Both LBW and LW give evidence of valiant effort to

approach the style and grace of our present liturgy but were not notably successful. But a beginning must be made. Unfortunately, our people as well as we come into contact with excesses carried on in the name of language renewal. Recently a worship leader (not Lutheran) exhorted a group of mature women in this stimulating fashion: “Think of it, ladies ... We’re kids of the King! Isn’t that neat?”—No, not really.

The matter of updating the language of the *hymns* is particularly difficult. The determination of the authors of LW to adhere rigidly to the principle of updating all the hymns (with a few notable exceptions) led sometimes to net loss. Our intent at present is to tread very carefully among the hymns, remembering first of all that they are a type of poetry, and secondly, that in our synod with its large number of day schools there is much in the treasury of hymns which has been memorized and imprinted in the minds and hearts of people. In cases of hymns which are less well known updating can often be done more successfully and acceptably.

#### 4) Music

In the words of Luther, “Music is a fair and glorious gift of God,” and has been a nearly constant dimension of worship, both in the Old Testament and in the Christian era. Its power to affect the emotions and to light up or reinforce a text or truth make it a natural companion for worship.

We have a rich variety of hymn tunes available for the hymnal, and our chief task will be to select them with discrimination. The liturgical music, however, presents some real challenges.

The challenge of writing successful liturgical music for the *congregation* should be enough to strike terror in the heart of the most gifted church composer. Consider, he must produce music that will be used by all the people, young and old, musical and unmusical, most of whom do not read music. He must set music for a prose text, sometimes quite lengthy, and so cannot use a hymn tune repeated over and over again in a definite metrical pattern. He must also make it melodic enough to be learned and remembered, but not so catchy that it becomes tiresome, since it may be sung every Sunday for 40 years!

Historically, the problem has been solved mostly by giving liturgical music to the choir. Luther solved the problem of giving the congregation a part in the liturgical songs by refashioning them into a new type of hymn, the chorale. Our present hymnal has restored the traditional liturgical texts to the congregation by providing music adapted mostly from Anglican chants. This type of chant is designed to be sung four-part, by a choir, and uses a reciting note to accommodate a varying number of syllables, and a cadence at the end of the phrase (cf. the Gloria Patri, TLH p 32, the Venite p 33 etc.). This type of chant can be beautiful and satisfying when sung properly by a trained choir, but it is really not a comfortable thing for the congregation. Chants such as the Nunc Dimittis and Gloria in Excelsis are usually sung in a fashion that distorts the musical character of the chants. Of course we sing them, in our unique fashion, and think little about it because they are by now so familiar. But this does not alter the fact that the Anglican chant continues to present a stumbling block to hearty participation by the congregation.

Even if we retain the present music for the major liturgies there are other needs for liturgical music. If we add new liturgies, or if we choose Psalm sections for the Introits, or add music to one or the other canticles which presently have no music in TLH, we will have to face the problem of what kind of liturgical music to supply. The recently published Lutheran hymnals have developed a new type of liturgical music for the congregation which in some cases seems very promising. It remains to be seen how long it will take to learn some of the chants, and in the case of those which have achieved instant popularity, whether they will wear well.

Before we leave the matter of music, we should mention one problem of which nearly everybody is aware: Many hymns and also the liturgies in general are pitched too high for the comfort of altos and basses. This is one problem that is rather easily remedied and will be.

### **Part III: Developing Guidelines for the New Hymnal**

What is to be the shape of the new hymnal? We need to have a clear mental picture of the kind of book we need and want. But how are we to arrive at that point? It would not be difficult to list a hundred factors which ought to be carefully weighed and considered. This we intend to do, and on the basis of that careful study establish general and specific guidelines for the production of the hymnal.

I hope it will not be too tedious if we take the time here to consider some of the factors involved and so provide a sampling of such guidelines. Let us recall a few of the dimensions of Christian worship, briefly review four principles of Lutheran worship and at least list a number of other important considerations relating to the hymnal.

#### **Some dimensions of Christian worship**

##### **The faith dimension**

The essential ingredient of Christian worship is faith. Without Spirit-worked faith Christian worship does not exist. Such faith seeks communion with God, both to receive from him and to respond to him. Worship grows out of faith and faith is itself the first and basic act of worship. God is glorified when we come to trust in him and his Word.

- Guideline: The new hymnal will be prepared primarily for use by the community of believers.  
 Guideline: The new hymnal will make full provision for the nourishing of faith and for the expression and response of faith.

##### **The Scripture dimension**

God's Word and faith are the Siamese twins of Christian worship. They belong together because God's Word informs and nourishes faith. Specifically, it is the gospel in Word and sacraments which creates and builds up faith and energizes the expression and response of faith. Corporate Christian worship in its fullness is a blessed dialogue between God and his believers.

- Guideline: Christian worship revolves around God's Word and sacraments. The new hymnal will make full provision for the proclamation of the Scriptures and in particular, full provision for the hearing of the gospel and the participation in the sacrament.

##### **The corporate dimension**

The term "corporate worship" refers to group worship (usually congregational worship) as contrasted with individual or private worship. When the Christian congregation comes together for worship, however, it is not just another "group." It is not simply an organization drawn together by common interests, ideals, social causes, desire for togetherness or even the shared purpose of worshiping God. It comes together because it is a *unique body*, the Body of Christ, created by the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Head and we are the members of his Body, united with him in a mystic union that defies exact description and goes beyond our understanding. But this union is more than a metaphor. It is a blessed and marvelous reality.

There are a number of implications here for our worship and the new hymnal. One of them relates to the presence of Christ in the midst of the worshipping congregation. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). We should value the hymns, for example, which emphasize this amazing and comforting truth for worshipers and help them to know that each service is a new and real meeting with Christ (eg. TLH 4: "God Himself is present, Let us now adore Him and with praises come before Him." Or TLH 467, v.3: "We are God's house of living stones, Buildded for His habitation.... Were we but two His name to tell, Yet He would deign with us to dwell, With all His grace and His favor.").

Another implication of this unique “corporate” nature of Christian worship relates to *our function as members of the Body*. The Spirit has given each of us spiritual gifts and a particular function as members in the Body. The Apostle Paul says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Each worshiper has a function and responsibility in the worship, not only to serve and glorify the Head, Jesus Christ, but also to strengthen and edify the Body. As Paul writes to the Colossians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16). It is true, of course, that the Body of Christ does not cease to exist when Christians are scattered to their individual lives and work during the week. Nor does the individual member of the Body of Christ cease to function in serving Christ or his fellow members in the Body. Nevertheless, it is when the members come together for congregational worship and share in the means of grace that they can most fully realize their identity as the Body, the communion of saints. Here is the fullest opportunity for the members of the Body to use their spiritual gifts to strengthen and edify one another. This is the special privilege and glory of Christian worship: All the members functioning together for the upbuilding of the whole Body. Our new hymnal should emphasize this inner corporate dimension of our worship to make worshipers more aware and to guide them to fuller participation in the group worship. All too often one hears in our congregations, “My worship is between me and my God!” This is true, of course—no one worships by proxy. But the conception is all too common among us that the Sunday worship is a personal and private activity between God and the individual, carried on almost incidentally or even by necessity with others.

I would like to mention just one more implication of this corporate dimension of worship because it demonstrates how important is the careful consideration of these fundamental things in making practical decisions for the hymnal. It relates to the need to keep the materials oriented to the whole congregation. I have already received a number of requests to devote a section of the new hymnal to “songs for small children,” and also songs suitable for “youth and youth activities.” We need such songbooks and worship materials, but the congregational hymnal should not become merely a collection of songs and scriptural material for all sorts of groups and activities within the congregation. Such “hymnals” have often enough been produced in the church, particularly in the era of Pietism, but they have not generally served the church well and sometimes even become in a sense divisive.

We can afford some accommodation in this area, of course. But we need to be wary lest such accommodation dilute the primary function of the hymnal as a book to serve the orderly administration of the means of grace and the worship of the Body of Christ as it is normally constituted in local congregations shepherded by the called ministers of Christ.

We have been overlong in discussing this “corporate” dimension of Christian worship; let us draw the guideline:

Guideline: The new hymnal will strongly emphasize the primary use of the hymnal as a *congregational* book, and the inner corporate nature of the congregational worship as the worship of the Body of Christ.

There are other dimensions of Christian worship which will need to be studied, as e.g. the three-fold *time* dimension of worship (past, present, future), the *vertical/horizontal* dimension, the “in the world but not of the world” dimension, the *Christian freedom* dimension, and others. But the foregoing will illustrate the manner in which we intend to develop guidelines for the use of those at work on the hymnal and by which we can begin to sketch the outline of the shape of the new book.

#### **Four principles of *Lutheran* worship**

There is another set of factors which need to be studied. These focus on the “distinctively Lutheran” character of our worship.

They are the following:

- 1) Lutheran worship is GOSPEL-CENTERED
- 2) Lutheran worship is LITURGICAL
- 3) Lutheran worship is CONGREGATIONAL
- 4) Lutheran worship is APPRECIATIVE OF THE ARTS

### **1) Lutheran worship is gospel-centered**

The proclamation of God’s Word and the gospel is not unique to Lutheran worship. But the perspective of the *gospel as heart and center* of our worship *is*, or at least ought to be as we remember our roots in the Reformation and particularly Luther’s liturgical reformation. Luther’s first concern in reforming the worship was to restore the proclamation of God’s Word. Preaching in the Roman church of Luther’s day was notable mostly by its absence, and when it was present it consisted mostly in legalistic homilies and anecdotes from the lives of the saints. Even after the evangelical church was established, Luther was concerned about the preaching and published his series of sermons lest inept preachers return to old ways and once again preach about “blue ducks.” But Luther’s essential concern was that the *gospel* be preached, and that meant CHRIST! God justifies the sinner out of love and by grace *for the sake of Christ*. All the changes which Luther effected in the liturgy were motivated by his concern to bring the worship into conformity with the gospel.

By God’s grace our church body can almost take this for granted, but in the preparation of the new hymnal we must exercise constant vigilance to assure that our new book will be in all its contents, hymnic and liturgical, truly gospel-centered.

### **2) Lutheran worship is liturgical**

Lutheran worship, in contrast to most other Protestant denominations, is liturgical. That is, we worship normally through that orderly path of worship developed in Western Christendom over the centuries of the Christian era. This liturgy enables us to do the things which we need and want to do in our worship. And it assures us, through the use of the church year, integral to that liturgy, the proclamation of the full counsel of God and a yearly focus on the life and saving work of Christ.

The many facets of our historical liturgies will need to be studied carefully, especially where changes seem to be necessary or highly desirable. Luther’s principle will stand us in good stead: Retain that which is good; be bold to change what is necessary.

### **3) Lutheran worship is congregational**

Luther’s concern that the gospel “be set going among the people” and that their faith have opportunity for vocal expression in the worship led him to his liturgical reforms. His understanding of the church as the priesthood of all believers enabled him to restore to the congregation a rather full participation in the worship. This was a bold step in a time when the congregation was merely a spectator of the drama of the mass.

In our new hymnal we will observe this congregational principle by endeavoring to make sure that the worship materials are intelligible for the whole congregation and that there is full provision for its substantial participation. This should not be interpreted to mean, however, that everything in the worship needs to be *done* by the congregation or that nothing dare be included which demands effort or learning from the congregation!

### **4) Lutheran worship is appreciative of the arts**



Lutheranism's historic attitude toward music and the arts and also its rich heritage of organ music, choral music and congregational song are the direct result of Luther's personal convictions. These convictions were rooted firmly in his theology and reinforced by his respect and love for the arts, particularly music. For him, music was God's good and wondrous gift and, like all of God's good gifts, to be used and enjoyed. It was a natural step for Luther to view music as a strong ally for the congregational worship. He put music and the gospel together in the mouths of the congregation that they might joyfully "proclaim the wonders He hath done." Zwingli and Calvin, as we all know, feared the power of music and virtually banned its practice in the congregational worship. Luther's attitude is best summed up in the well-known quotation which may bear repetition one more time: "I am not of the opinion, as are the heterodox, that for the sake of the gospel all arts should be rejected violently and vanish, but rather that all arts, particularly music, be employed in the service of him who has given and created them." Luther's personal and dynamic leadership, his burning concern for the gospel, his equally fervent pastoral concern for the congregational worship and his own creative talent paved the way for an explosion of Lutheran hymnody and church music. And "distinctively Lutheran" worship and attitudes toward music and the arts flourished to about the end of his century.

As we look forward now to the preparation of a new hymnal, and particularly as we look back at more than four centuries of church and worship history, we must say, "Thank God for *The Lutheran Hymnal!*" Somehow we have survived the gradual descent into the valley of Pietism and the plunge into the abyss of Rationalism and made our way again to a high plateau. The fruit of Lutheran worship principles and tradition, theological, liturgical, congregational, and including also Lutheran attitudes toward music and the arts, lie explicit before us in the pages of our hymnal. The way back has been fairly long and somewhat painful, although most of us are not consciously aware of that.

We might remember that American Lutheran hymnals around the year 1830 were virtually indistinguishable from Reformed hymnals. All of the historic Lutheran liturgies, along with the church year observance, had vanished. Only the German hymns remained, along with a few directions to the pastor for conducting the service. And the hymns that were sung were not the old church year hymns that emphasized, eg., the resurrection of Christ. Easter hymns that proclaim the resurrection are not popular when there is no longer firm belief in that fact! The sacrament had also ceased to be a normal part of the Sunday worship and was celebrated infrequently. In short, both hymnals and worship reflected the destruction and loss of the preceding two centuries. And that included the historic Lutheran appreciation for music and the arts.

About the middle of the 1800's a restoration began, but it was not until 1917 that the historic Lutheran liturgical worship was fully restored to American Lutheranism. In the WELS this was not accomplished until the publication of *The Lutheran Hymnal* in 1941. In addition to the Sunday liturgy, which was drawn from a consensus of the 16th century Lutheran liturgies, most of the old Reformation age chorales and melodies in their original rhythmic form were restored. Included also was a sifting of most of the best hymns from the whole history of Christian worship. So, comparing our present hymnal with the past, we might say that Lutheran worship tradition is alive and well, including historic Lutheran appreciation for music and the arts...at least on the printed pages of the hymnal.

However, history has left its mark. We are both victims and beneficiaries of our history, as well as inevitable products of our own time. As we begin a careful review and assessment of our worship history and traditions (and that is one of the valuable byproducts of hymnal change), we need to consider not only the published hymnals of our synod, but also our worship *attitudes* and actual congregational *practice*. This is all the more necessary in the area of music and the arts, since our attitudes and practice are not directly reflected in the pages of the hymnal, especially in the area of choral and organ music.

We have inherited much in the use of music and art that bespeaks our Christian and Lutheran roots. We do use choral and organ music of some artistic dimension, we do use distinctive church architecture, altar and chancel appointments, symbolism, and to some degree painting, sculpture and other arts in connection with our worship. So we do seem to reflect Luther's principle that "all the arts, particularly music, should be employed in the service of him who has given and created them."

The question is, how securely are we rooted as a synod in this Lutheran principle? It is doubtless good that we continue to make use of the arts “in the manner to which we have become accustomed.” It is not only better, however, but necessary that we use them with a firm sense of purpose. The open Bible and the Lutheran Confessions are our heritage, but we know that each generation must come to possess these truths for itself. Likewise, our sound tradition in music and the arts needs to be appropriated by purposeful teaching and learning in all our congregations. We need to remember that each congregation makes its own decisions in the use of music and the arts. “*What* are we doing, and *why* are we doing it?” are questions that need constantly to be asked as we prepare an order of service, choose organ or choir music, sing a liturgy, order altar paraments, publish song books, form a choir, plan a new church building, use an Advent wreath or hang a banner.

Luther’s answer would be two-fold. First of all, he would say that we ought to value, nourish and thankfully use the arts because they are marvelous gifts of God’s creation, endowed by him with extraordinary power to affect the spirit and emotions. Secondly and more important, Luther would tell us that we ought to cherish the arts, especially music, because they can serve Christian worship by proclaiming the gospel and helping believers to express their faith. These two theologically based attitudes are eloquently expressed by Luther in a foreword to one of the publications of the printer-musician, Georg Rhau. Concerning the gift of music and particularly the contrapuntal art-music of his day, he writes: “Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world....Our dear fathers and prophets did not desire without reason that music be always used in the churches. Hence we have so many songs and psalms. This precious gift has been given to man alone that he might thereby remind himself of the fact that God has created man for the express purpose of praising and extolling God....However, *when natural music is sharpened and polished by art*, then one begins to see with amazement the great and perfect wisdom of God in music....When one voice sings a simple melody, and around it sing three, four, or five other voices, leaping, springing about, marvelously gracing the simple part, like a folk dance in heaven with friendly bows, embracings, and hearty swinging of partners—then he who does not find this a marvelous creation of God must be a clod-hopper indeed!”

We have quoted Luther at some length because of the uncomfortable conviction that there is a widening gulf between Luther and our own synodical attitude and practice. We tend to applaud Luther but do not much follow him, or perhaps we have not really understood him. At any rate, there is a marked contrast between Luther’s enthusiasm and promotion of the arts and our own relative unconcern in this area.

There are a number of tell-tale signs that could be cited. For brevity’s sake we will mention only two.

1. Although various facets of music are discussed with some regularity in our midst, we have given fairly scant attention in either our pastoral essays or our synodical journals to a broad or in-depth consideration of historic Lutheran attitudes toward the arts or a contemporary application of these attitudes to our worship.
2. We have often failed to appreciate and nourish artistic talents in our midst. Because Luther valued the arts he also valued the artist. The two necessarily go together. We have over the years lost a good number of talented people to other Lutheran bodies. Without attempting at all to defend the actions of individuals, we ought at least to ask ourselves why this is so. Somehow we seem to fail to encourage artistic talent or to find a place for gifted persons to use their God-given talent in the service of the gospel in our synod. A kind of bottom-line evidence for this attitude on the congregational level is our reluctance to provide adequate compensation for organists and choir directors or even to include money for the purchase of good choral music in the church budget. The poor organs used in many congregations are not always a true indication of financial inability; frequently they merely reflect a low priority. Often enough, when new churches are built, the organ is considered only after such “necessary” items as carpeting, padded pews and stainless steel kitchens have been provided. If we are serious about tapping the real power of music for our worship and not just vaguely “beautifying the service,” then we will count the cost a very worthwhile investment. We need to remember that music, unlike the other arts, needs to be re-created each time it is used. A painting or stained glass window can stand alone and make its contribution to the worship, but a quality organ composition cannot “come alive” and have its intended effect on the hearers without a competent organist and an adequate instrument. Frequently expenditures of money for organists and organs are opposed because “we ought to be using that money for mission work.” Most of the time we can do the one and not neglect the other. Surely no one will accuse Luther

of not being interested in spreading the gospel, but that did not stop him from cherishing and promoting the use of art music in the church. In fact, it was precisely because of what music could do *for* the gospel and the faith of the people that he valued music and the musicians so highly! And Luther followed through by encouraging and recruiting musical talent, and by strong personal efforts to secure financial support for the music programs at Wittenberg and elsewhere. We have much to gain by following him.

### **Balancing the four principles of Lutheran worship**

None of the four guiding principles of Lutheran worship (scriptural and gospel-centered, liturgical, congregational and appreciative of the arts) is unique to the Lutheran church. But the unique characteristic of Lutheran worship at its best has been the *balancing* of these four principles, so that one is not accented at the expense of another. Roman Catholic worship, for example, has always been highly liturgical but not congregational. Most mainline Protestant churches, on the other hand, are congregational but non-liturgical or even anti-liturgical.

Keeping these four wheels of worship properly balanced needs to be an ongoing concern. Hymnals generally *reflect* the doctrinal convictions, the historical traditions and the current worship attitudes of a church body. On the other hand, it is also true that hymnals, as they are used from week to week and year after year, help to *shape* doctrinal convictions and worship attitudes. But historical events and various contemporary situations also impact worship attitudes and practice. Ultimately they also tend to influence published hymnals. It would be wise, therefore, as we prepare a new hymnal, to attempt an evaluation of our current worship attitudes and practice, as well as our present hymnal itself, to see whether these four principles of Lutheran worship are in healthy balance or whether some corrective rebalancing is in order.

Such a careful evaluation would take us beyond the allotted pages of this essay, but we will conclude this area of our discussion with a few preliminary observations and judgments in the matter of “balance” in our hymnal and worship attitudes and practice.

It would seem that when the four principles of “distinctively Lutheran” worship are each strongly represented on the pages of our hymnal and also in the worship attitudes and actual practice of our people, then we can conclude that our worship is well balanced and truly Lutheran. Our overall assessment is that the “scriptural” and “congregational” principles are strongly in evidence. The “liturgical” principle, though well represented on the pages of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, seems much less securely rooted in the worship attitudes and actual use of our congregations. In the widely inclusive area of “appreciation for music and the arts” the situation is mixed, ranging from “encouraging” to “alarming.”

*Scriptural and gospel-centered*—We can be thankful that in this basic and most important area of worship our hymnal is firmly rooted in God’s Word and strongly reflects the centrality of the gospel. We can also be thankful that the texts of our hymns and liturgies reflect the convictions of almost all of our worshipers. The recent *Profiles of Lutherans* shows that our members ranked highest of major Lutheran bodies in their individual faith and convictions in the truths of Scripture.

*Congregational*—The principle of congregational participation in the worship is evident in a general and valued, if not overly enthusiastic, use of hymnody in our congregations. Secondly, the participation of the congregation in the historic liturgies which form the framework of our worship has been assured by the printing of our present hymnal in 1941. The character of early Christian worship as a “family” worship in which all participate has become our normal congregational worship. The growing use of the NIV Bible translation in today’s English and the growing number of prayers being written by our pastors in today’s language are also contributing to the involvement of the congregation in the worship.

*Liturgical*—After 75 years of effort the historic Christian liturgies have been restored to American Lutheran hymnals. In our own synod the Sunday service as we have it on “page 5/15” of TLH is strongly in use in most if not all of our congregations, although the Matins and Vespers are much less known and used.

Our concern here relates to a general and continued *disinterest in liturgy*. There is a widespread reluctance to make use of much of what has long been available in TLH or to pave the way for such use by

teaching and learning new liturgical materials. The recent letter of a pastor who urged us to improve the hymnal by “removing about two thirds of that stuff in the front of the book and giving us some good, singable hymns in a major key” is not an isolated example. Perhaps this attitude is a lingering result of the historical beginnings of our synod. In our early years we did not have a strong or unified worship tradition, especially not in liturgy, nor did we have a C. F. W. Walther to forge one. It may also have something to do with the *music* provided for our liturgies, which is not really very comfortable for the congregation and sometimes seems inadequate to “carry the freight” of exalted texts like the Gloria in Excelsis. In any event, our apathy toward matters liturgical lingers on.

*Appreciation for music and the arts*—An overall assessment in this area is difficult. Cross currents are at work in our synod and there are both pluses and minuses to record. On the plus side, we can say that the general level of choir and organ music in our synod has improved in quality over the last forty years. We owe a large debt to the Lutheran publishing houses, especially Concordia, for their visionary pioneer work in making available not only the best of the old Lutheran heritage, but also contemporary materials of excellent quality, rooted in Lutheran artistic and worship ideals and specifically designed for integration with the liturgical church year. As a result, most of the old “German” choir music with its somewhat bombastic and harmonically tiresome style, and the “English” music of a sentimental “gospel” character have largely passed from the scene. We also note with delight and anticipation that our own Northwestern Publishing House will begin the publishing of church music in the coming year. Another positive influence in the history of our synod has been the faithful dedication of our synodical worker-training schools in efforts to inculcate appreciation for our Lutheran heritage in the arts, at least in the area of church music. For some congregations, at least, the touring choirs have furnished virtually the only exposure to the art music of the Christian and Lutheran heritage. Several other developments should be noted. One is a rebirth of interest within the Lutheran church in the non-musical arts. A new creativity in symbolism, altar paraments, tapestries, paintings, altarware, etc., is on the scene and is making available for the Christian home and church a type of art which is in a sense “distinctively Lutheran.” At least it promises something better than the “romantic” Roman Catholic art and the “commercial” art which our synod has relied on so heavily in the past. Another optimistic note involves the beginning of a creative movement in hymnody and church music in our own synod. So far not very much of worth and real value to the church has surfaced, but as our composers and hymnwriters learn their musical and literary craft, we may hope for a measurable WELS contribution in this area. One final item worth mentioning is the notable change in the character of pipe organ building in the last forty years or so. The newer classical organs are much better suited for the leading of congregational singing and also for the performance of Lutheran heritage music for the organ. The high cost of pipe organs is a problem, but we might note in passing that smaller organs would be adequate in many churches if only there were less carpeting and acoustic tile used. The acoustic demands of a Lutheran church and a bowling alley are quite different. Many congregational building committees have been insufficiently aware of the importance of good acoustics for “live” congregational singing, organ music and choral song. And architects often have not hastened to point it out.

On the minus side, we have already discussed some negative aspects. In general we need more concern in this area on the congregational level, more conscious awareness of what constitutes Lutheran appreciation for the arts and why we need them, and more discrimination in their use.

One rather recent and disturbing attitude relating to choir music seems to be gathering strength in our synod. It is the idea that “as long as the words are soundly scriptural, it doesn’t make all that much difference what kind of music is used.” This trend needs fuller treatment than we can give it here. We will add only that the popular “gospel folk-song” and music of that general character, with its unvarying “beat,” limited harmony and lack of rhythmic variety, make it generally inadequate for the serious interpretation of many scriptural texts. And that is of paramount interest in choral music for the corporate worship.

There will always be a certain tension between the “congregational” and the “artistic” principles in worship. Sometimes a compromise will need to be made in favor of “pastoral concern.” Highly poetic hymn texts and some types of sophisticated music may simply fail to communicate to the congregation as a whole. Generally, however, the problem has been on the other side. Art in the church pays its dividends when there is

some determination to teach and explain and some willingness to learn. In general it must be said that congregations are more willing to learn than worship leaders are to teach. In summary, we can stand considerable growth in the areas of both liturgy and art appreciation before there is an ideal balance in the four principles of Lutheran worship in our synod.

### **Other important considerations**

We have discussed at some length the principles of historic Lutheran worship as they may relate to guidelines for a “distinctively Christian and Lutheran hymnal.” There are, however, a number of other important considerations which relate to other aspects of the new hymnal. These too will need to be studied and guidelines drawn. These we do not intend to discuss here, but we will at least list a number of them:

1. Historical
2. Ecumenical
3. Confessional
4. Sociological
5. Musical
6. Literary
7. Missiological
8. Educational
9. Devotional
10. Ceremonial
11. “Practical”

When our list of guidelines is complete, we will need to develop practical procedures for translating their implications into the pages of the new hymnal.

## **Part IV: The Task Ahead**

### **Planning, production of materials, decisions**

The foregoing discussion has touched only some of the undergirding principles and considerations necessary to preliminary planning. Much more will need to be considered. After that, the table of contents for the hymnal will need to be drawn up and preliminary decisions made about the overall size, format, relative size of the hymn and liturgical sections, etc., for the book. Areas and priorities of committee work will need to be delineated and specific assignments given. At an early stage the Hymnal Task Force will be drawn in for reaction and opinion on the overall planning. As materials are produced in the committees, they will be reviewed for change or approval. Ultimately, manuscripts will be readied for the publication process.

As materials are produced and given preliminary approval, the process of review and reaction from the synod can begin. Materials will be reviewed by selected individuals, smaller and larger groups and random samplings of congregations. In the case of major new materials or substantive revisions, all congregations of the synod will likely be involved.

There will also be an on-going need for progress-reporting to the constituency. Present planning calls for the use of convention reports, *Northwestern Lutheran* articles, letters to pastors and to church musicians, and a series of service folder inserts for the congregations.

### **The fourth synodical guideline**

The Commission on Worship is well aware of the four guidelines supplied by the synodical convention resolutions (cf. page 3 of this essay). We have every intent and hope of realizing the first three guidelines. The fourth, however, is of another sort. It asks that the new hymnal “be welcomed and judged to be highly satisfactory for purposes of devotion and worship by a majority of our members.” This is certainly the devout hope of those working on the hymnal, but the degree of clairvoyance available at this point cannot assure that result! A reliable judgment of success or failure will not be possible until at least several years after publication. The reason for mentioning this guideline here is to point up the problem implicit in its words and to suggest several practical steps which may bring us closer to realizing our goal of producing a hymnal “highly satisfactory” to our membership.

### **Resistance to change**

Committees who prepare hymnals for church bodies inevitably find themselves eventually in a “catch 22” situation. What to do when the committee deems certain changes to be necessary and the congregations strongly resist such changes. Unless we are content to produce a virtual clone of TLH{TLH The Lutheran Hymnal}, there will need to be changes. And unless human nature changes, there will be resistance.

People resist change for all sorts of reasons. Some people are constitutionally averse to change of any kind in their lives, be it breakfast menu, daily schedule, wardrobe, worship habits or whatever. Fortunately, this group is a distinct minority. But committed Christians generally have some degree of resistance to change in their worship. This is first of all because it affects things which are precious to them, and secondly because the liturgy and hymns have become so familiar to them. They “like what they know.” Congregations are generally content with their hymnals because they have nothing else to compare them to. It is perfectly understandable that new hymnals do not result from any kind of groundswell from the laity. It would be naive to expect anything else. People may not like some things about their hymnal, but most members tend to feel that the hymnal they know and have represents the best that is available. Therefore, “Why change it?”

There is another understandable but less defensible reason for resistance to change. It lies in the reluctance of many worshipers to make the effort to learn something new. This is a pervasive and troublesome attitude in our worship. Its ultimate result is the embalming of our worship praxis.

Finally, much resistance to hymnal change is rooted in a fear that change will result in loss of one kind or another. Specifically, people may fear that one or more of their favorite hymns will be omitted from the new book. This is, of course, possible. No matter which hymn is dropped, it will probably turn out to be somebody’s favorite. One person’s white elephant is another person’s pride and joy.

Hence, the dilemma. And our problem may be compounded by the fact that it is generally easier to introduce new materials or major revisions in worship than to make *small* changes in what is very familiar. Because of the intended update in language, our new hymnal will necessarily involve a number of “small” revisions, both textual and musical.

In spite of all the foregoing, experience teaches that the majority of worshipers are usually willing to adapt to worship changes if they are strongly supported by the leaders of their church and especially *if they are patiently explained and urged by their own pastors.*

### **The necessity of change**

Change is a necessary and inevitable fact of life. Almost every area of our lives today is changing at a dramatic rate. It is perhaps natural that Christians look to their church and worship services for stability and escape from change. In a sense that is good. But that stability needs to be found in the unchanging Word and truth of our God. Here we will brook no change. But congregations often tend to confuse or equate liturgical forms, familiar worship language or musical style with the unchanging truth which is carried or expressed by these forms. The Lord has not burdened our New Testament worship with ceremonial laws which restrict the manner or forms of our worship. Neither did Luther attempt to do so. Nor should we. From time to time it may

be desirable or even necessary to incorporate changes in our liturgical forms, language or music in order that God's truth be more clearly communicated to the worshipers or that the faith of the believers be more meaningfully expressed. At any rate, it is always important to keep the distinction clear in the minds of worshipers between content and form. An illustration may be helpful. One Sunday in my early ministry I inadvertently began the service of Holy Communion with the Confession on page five instead of fifteen. After the service one faithful and well educated lady member came to me. She was agitated and upset because, as she said, "Pastor, this is the first time in my life I have had to go to Communion without the absolution!" Of course the absolution had been proclaimed, but it just wasn't the right one! Forms can become "hallowed" by invariable use over many years. A certain amount of small variation in the worship and also a change of hymnals from time to time can help keep the distinction clear in worshipers' minds between content and form. The latter is expendable, the former is not.

Most resistance to worship change involves music. But music, more than any other element of our worship, needs to change. Like all the arts, music is by nature creative. It has constantly expanded its horizons over all the centuries of the Christian era. After a thousand years of single-voiced plainsong, the discovery of "harmony" opened a whole new musical world, which culminated in the sophisticated choral music of Luther's day and later the powerful and dramatic polyphony of J. S. Bach. Our twentieth century has seen another revolution in the world of artistic musical creation, involving even the exploration of all kinds of electronic and non-musical sound.

Not all the various developments and styles of music through the centuries have been useful for the worship of the church. The Romantic music of the 19th century, for example, with its highly charged emotional expression and emphasis on the personal artistic ideas and ideals of the artist, was not well-suited for the purposes of Christian corporate worship. Unfortunately, we inherited this general type of music in our synod and clung to it as it was translated for us into "church music" by composers of mediocre talent. Serious composers of first rank had long since departed from the church. In the medieval ages the serious composers of talent produced their art within the church and for the church. With a handful of exceptions, J. S. Bach was the last "great" composer to devote his best artistic efforts to "well-ordered church music."

But let us return to today's music and the situation within our own Lutheran and synodical church. The Christian churches in general, and our Lutheran church included, have for a long time insisted, unreasonably and to their loss, that composers in the church must simply re-echo and reproduce the music of the past, or more accurately, the music with which we are familiar. Even today in many of our churches a few new chords in the organ or choirloft which are not recognized as "churchly" are enough to call forth not only criticism but dire predictions about the future of the church. Such intolerance of new music, simply because it is new or different from what we are used to hearing, is not consonant with historic Lutheran musical ideals. We ought to cherish the best of the old and welcome the worthy new. And we cannot be discriminating about either until we have listened long enough to tune our ears to the new sounds and develop some objectivity. We are fortunate today in that we have a growing number of composers in the Lutheran church and also in our own synod at New Ulm and elsewhere, who not only evidence considerable talent, but are writing in a style that is rooted in the Lutheran heritage and also demonstrates a newer harmonic freshness and rhythmic vitality. If such music is truly to serve the church, however, it must be played and sung. In short, it needs to be used! The church will never normally be on the cutting edge of the contemporary, nor should it be. But neither should it become a wax museum of the past. The dedicated Christian artist will accept the necessary restriction that art must *communicate* to most of the people if it is to edify and be useful for corporate worship. But it is the very nature of the gospel, as it works in the hearts and lives of Christian artists and composers, to forge its own forms, ever new. The psalmist calls us ever and always to "sing to the Lord a NEW song!" The best of such new songs can serve the church powerfully in its corporate worship and elsewhere.

### **Resolving the dilemma**

So now, if changes are necessary and if congregations predictably resist such changes, how do we resolve the resultant dilemma without either greatly impairing the quality of the new hymnal or greatly distressing the people? The answer is probably that we cannot totally solve the problem. But there are two things we can do which may be fruitful in narrowing the attitude gap between the makers and the users of the new book.

First of all, those who work on the hymnal need to be conscious that the apprehensions of worshipers are real and their resistance to change predictable. They will therefore need to consider each proposed change very carefully to be certain that it is indeed necessary or very highly desirable for the improvement of the book.

On the other side, congregational pastors can help a great deal by realizing that worshipers' attitudes toward worship changes are often rooted in lack of knowledge, sentimental attachment to the familiar, or simple fear of change. Much can be done to allay fears and minimize resistance if they will patiently explain changes as they are proposed to the congregations and present them in an enthusiastic and positive manner (assuming they are themselves in accord).

### **Part V: The Larger Challenge**

Not everything discussed in this essay concerns the new hymnal in a direct way. We have used the opportunity to touch some areas of our synodical worship which have not been much addressed in our synod. Our worship attitudes and congregational practice have been molded to a significant extent by our synodical history. If a "worship history" of our synod were available, it might well reveal that we have been adversely affected by our somewhat fragmentary beginnings, by the weak worship traditions of the era in which we began (particularly in liturgy and music), by the traumatic change from German to English, by our earlier concentration in rural areas where congregations were mostly small and limited in worship resources, and by our necessary preoccupation at various times with doctrinal issues.

But the Lord in his goodness has blessed us tremendously. We have come to a soundly confessional unity which is remarkable in our times. We have experienced growth in numbers and in geographical expansion in our own country, and interest and support for our world mission effort is healthy and growing. We have managed to hold fast to our synodical system of worker-training schools, and our growing number of area high schools are proving a strong ally in recruiting for our colleges. The healthy expansion of our elementary school system continues to pay dividends in the Bible knowledge and faith of our members and in the preparation of lay leaders and the recruitment of our youth for the public ministry. The dissolution of the Synodical Conference provided impetus to develop our own programs for stewardship and other areas of practical church work, and the results have been a strong confidence-builder for our synod. We are beginning to publish as never before and are supplying our own materials for Bible classes, youth work and all kinds of needs in the church and Christian home. Our recent new accent on evangelism and the use of mass media also gives every promise of increasing our effectiveness in reaching out to the unchurched in our home missions program and in our own congregational neighborhoods. And the Lord has capped all of our blessings by moving our members in the very midst of a somewhat panicky time of recession and unemployment to an outpouring of gifts for the "Reaching Out" program which is simply astounding.

In view of the foregoing, it would seem that now is the propitious time for action in the one area in which we have been relatively static, our worship. Considering that our weekly worship is the focal center of our congregational life and the "power center" for our Christian faith and work, we have not given notable attention or thrust to exploring ways to make our worship more fruitful and joyful for our congregations or more sharply responsive to their needs in these tumultuous times. It is a good time to initiate a synod-wide concern for our worship, a good time and high time to restudy our worship traditions and attitudes and to truly possess our Lutheran heritage of hymnody, liturgy, music and the arts.

The opportunity and the opportune time are before us. Our synod emerged relatively unscathed from the social revolution of the '60s and early '70s, which rocked the worship foundations of most mainline churches and led them to question their traditions and worship practices. In a somewhat frantic effort to retain or reclaim



their youth, they resorted to all kinds of hurried experimentation in various extremes of worship, “pop” music and language change. Most of these churches are presently engaged in attempts to rebuild on firmer foundations and are searching out their roots for guidance. We were not, as was said, visibly affected by this upheaval, although the present synodical fears and suspicions relating to worship change may well be rooted to an extent in this harrowing experience of other churches. But there is a lesson here for us all. We need to be rooted firmly, consciously, and on the grass-roots level in our sound Lutheran worship traditions. We can be thankful that we do not need to use these present years for “rebuilding” our worship foundations. But we do not have cause for undue self-applause. There are “softspots” enough in our worship attitudes, and much that needs to be understood and firmly appropriated. Let us rather use this time to possess our heritage and prepare our youth for whatever tests the future may hold for them. It is an ideal time for our synod to act in this area. We are moving ahead again on all fronts, even though budgetary problems continue to nag, and there is a resurgence of interest and creativity in hymnody and worship in the Lutheran church, to an extent also in our own synod.

Perhaps the future chroniclers of our WELS history may point to the '80's as a time in which a general resurgence of interest and activity in sound Lutheran worship was sparked. We hope that the coming hymnal will also be pointed to as an instrument which contributed to a more joyful and fruitful congregational concern with the Lord of grace and glory. But there is a limit to what the printed pages of even the finest hymnal can effect. That we should know from experience. Much more is necessary. Our larger hope is that the new hymnal, even as it is being prepared, may serve as a catalyst and rallying point for a new synod-wide effort to realize more fully the potential of word and music, hymnody and liturgy, for the faith and worship life of our members.

The hymnal project provides both the challenge and the opportune time. We cannot expect, as we have before stated, our laity to initiate such a movement. The challenge is to those who have been trained and bear a natural or called responsibility in this area for the necessary leadership, effort and inspiration. Let these years during which the hymnal is prepared be a time for teaching and learning and for a more enthusiastic concern with our worship. Let it be a time for allaying of fears and inspiring of anticipation, so that the new hymnal may come as more of a culmination and fulfillment of expectations than as a sudden and possibly overwhelming event. Such a synodical program, undertaken now and for the sake of the faith of God's saints and the greater honor of his name, will surely be blessed by him!