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A Newsletter for those who Appreciate and Participate in Worship and the Arts

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## Worship Should Transform Culture, Not Mirror Culture

Churches are casting about for new ways to get through to seekers. Like the line in a hymn, we ask, "What language shall I borrow . . .?" Let's **be cautious** what we borrow since *quasi-religious forces* lurk everywhere in secular culture, and may jeopardize our witness. They creep unexamined into our perceptions of self and our habits of heart—and eventually end up in church. Although any style of music—including rock—can be used to witness or worship, beware of the packaging. Inappropriate "borrowing" is illustrated by the Christian rock band whose lead singer entered the assembly by descending on a platform from on high amid a cloud of dry ice. His *music* may glorify God, but his *entry* glorified the individual—himself!

I offer two secular forces that are especially insidious. First is a **psycho-culture** of "self-help consciousness". It started life as psychology, but is now a *substitute-spirituality* for modern folks. Unfortunately, psycho-culture preaches primacy of the *individual*, a faith centered on *Me First*. Experiences are measured by how well they establish *oneself*; so, commitment to *community* gets low priority. Second, is the overwhelming, in-your-face **market-culture** that sells our institutions on borrowing both the mind and the mode of market-sell if they wish to "succeed". Unfortunately, market success is measured in *numbers*, not faithfulness.

Worship is "measured" in faithfulness. Liturgy has always borrowed from culture. But liturgy is not *merely* a creature of culture; it's a *re-presentation of the gospel of Jesus*. It means *content* in liturgy comes from *outside* of human culture—from Jesus, or God "in flesh". Indeed, God still comes mysteriously in our ritual Story, but **faithfulness to its content** is vital. So, liturgy based on Jesus' Word *should* feel alien because its perspective comes from *outside* our familiarity with cultural

norms—especially the parade of trivia in today's market culture.

Secondly, church liturgies are like musical scores to an orchestra. They allow an assembly to act as one; to send and receive a symphony of grace like they were one voice. That's how liturgy enriches our faith—by making worship a "**communion**" of the people gathered. An experience of worship is most edifying when worshipers *participate in reciting* the Story and *risk sharing* in the liturgy's mutual acts of caring. Regular attendance helps one become familiar with liturgy—and soon one stops relying on strokes for the private ego.

The purpose of worship is to **re-form** one's spiritual orientation back to Jesus' vision, and away from culture's profane vision. Each encounter of Christian liturgy exudes **tension** between *secular conditioning* that besieges our culture and *Christian formation* that attends good liturgy. Moreover, Jesus' **invitation** bids us to re-order our lives in sync with Jesus' proclamation of God's Reign. But anxieties about filling pews tempt clergy to erode both the tension and the invitation. Thereby, we sacrifice vital content in Christian worship for greater cultural familiarity. (Cont.)

### PLEASE SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER

with worship leaders in your congregations

- Pastor(s)
- Organist(s)
- Choir Director
- Worship Assistants
- Worship Committee
- Sunday School Teachers

## ADORAMUS

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## WORSHIP and CULTURE (cont.)

We woo liturgically illiterate folks into church, but inhibit them from meeting the Christ of God.

Psycho-culture's subversion of the gospel is seen in the way its "idolatry of self" is absorbed into popular faith. Absorption with self erodes one's openness to the mystery of "Other" and one's moral obligation to community. Surely, the aim of spiritual quests is to get us *out* of ourselves, not *into* ourselves. Yet consider the numbers today who participate in church *only* to the extent that it resonates with their *private* spiritual musings.

That's who St. John's Lutheran was wooing when it placed an ad in their local San Francisco paper. They offered a "90 day, money-back-guarantee" called *God's Guarantee*. The promotion invited people to come and worship at St. John's for 90 days. If after 90 days they did not receive a blessing, they got their offerings back. Is St. John's just using a "neutral"

marketing gimmick to attract church shoppers? Or is St. John's profaning God's Word by coddling the private faith of psycho-culture? They misrepresent Christianity by suggesting that worship is a *transaction*, a consumer exchange of notions that makes God's Word merely a *muse* for individuals.

Worship is a  
*transformation*  
experience, a life-  
changing *commitment*  
that binds individuals  
to the Person and  
Body of Christ.

Think about it. Would St. John's church also offer their pastor's eligible daughter to potential suitors with the same money-back-guarantee?

Marketing success in pop culture seduces churches to turn worship into *pop-entertainment*. In many churches now, professional-like performers play to passive-like audiences. Worshipers have become consumers with well-conditioned wants, and they *expect* a "good performance". As actors up front become more polished, people in the pew participate less.

Similarly, fast-food markets lead churches to deliver *fast-food worship*. It means half-hour services that offer one Bible lesson, often just one verse. Sermons become brief anecdotes laced with neat slogans, hymns reduced to choruses, and sacraments abbreviated, if included at all. So, with less participation from the pew, worship has at least the *look* of *efficiency* and *quality*—like today's markets.

However, a *look* of quality can be deceiving, as folks ordering TV promotions soon discover. Polished, fast-action spectacles may be appropriate for circus acts where illusion is supreme. But communion

with God is done with neither haste nor professionals. Circus-style worship can not draw "watchers" into *experiencing* the power of God's Story. When *participating* in liturgy, ritual allows God's Spirit mysteriously to *instill Jesus' vision* into the heart and *redeem one's life* from brokenness and sin. But circus-style worship, instead of *transforming* warped lives, ends up keep-ing and affirming folks in addicting and crippling consumer-patterns—which have enslaved them and their parents for decades.

Clearly, we need **other venues** to equip seekers for liturgy; and we need **discernment** when borrowing from culture to shape new liturgies. Inappropriate use of a medium in worship distorts the Gospel at its core. Well-honed liturgy practiced on Sunday morning is the only microcosm of God's Reign experienced anywhere. The worship hour is a *model* by which we learn to *transform* woeful patterns of self-seeking in other social units of culture—beginning in our faith community and our family.

## Bibliography of Books on Worship and Culture

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2. Ellul, Jacques (1986) *The Subversion of Christianity*. Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
3. Keifert, Patrick (1992) *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
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by Rev. Rolf Nosterud

## A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

They came from within and without the city of Medicine Hat. Anglicans, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics gathered in the awesome gothic St. Patrick's Church to celebrate the fifth year of the Signing of the Covenant in Calgary by the three bishops of the respective churches. It was Sunday afternoon, October 21st.

The service resembled a Lutheran hymn sing. Check it out for yourself! "Lift High the Cross", "Shine Jesus, Shine", "Gather Us In", "Here I am, Lord", "Go, My Children, with My Blessing." The only one not in our hymnbooks was "Let There be Peace on Earth" and maybe we could include that for a future edition. We discovered a unity in the hymns as we all sang from the same page of the program. These hymns belong to us all.

Representing the three church bodies were a number of lay persons and clergy. Bishop Henry of the Calgary diocese of the Catholic Church delivered the homily. Pastor Barrett Scheske, Dean of the Southern Conference of the Alberta and NWT Synod represented the Lutheran Church, while The Venerable J. Barry Foster was there on behalf of the Anglican Church. Arriving late he was not part of the formal procession, he was not able to vest, so he spoke from the podium in his leather jacket! This did not detract from the very fact he was there and his presence was very much appreciated.

Selected lay persons of all three churches gave the prayers of the people, and the covenant bearers also presented the signed covenants from the local churches.

As impressive as the service was, with music supplied by the St. Patrick's choir and organist, as well as the formal part of the service, the most telling moment was relayed to me by one of our members. Standing behind a Catholic couple in the exchange of the peace, the man turned to face him with tears running down his cheeks and he said, "I never thought I'd see this moment when we could gather and worship together." To this my friend said, "And I wish my Catholic in laws could see this as well!"

It is said that the true theology of a church is revealed in the hymns that they sing and in the prayers that they pray. Just perhaps in a service such as this where we all shared our hymns and our prayers, we are more one than we can possibly know. Just perhaps for those who are concerned about our hymns, our liturgies, and our prayers as a worshipping community, that is where unity will come and where true unity already is.

*Submitted by Rev. Sid Nelson*



## FOR CHILDREN

Today I am going to show you how I can draw. (Draw a picture making one large mistake; continue drawing to finish picture. Ask them what they think of the picture, what is wrong and how could we correct the picture.)



Now that we have erased that one line, our picture looks good and we can pretend that we never made that mistake.

Do you ever make a mistake in your life? Do you ever do something that makes you feel bad—something you know is wrong?

Do you know what you should do when you've done something wrong? You should go to God and ask Him to forgive you.

When we go to God in prayer, with our mistakes or things we have done wrong, he hears our prayer and will forgive us. As far as God is concerned, the mistake is erased.

We felt much better about our picture once we erased that line, and we will feel much better about ourselves when God forgives us and helps us to correct our mistakes.

Just as I took this eraser and fixed this picture, God will hear our prayers and pretend it never happened. God forgives us.



Dear Jesus,  
Help us to come to you, in prayer, with our mistakes.  
Amen

*Submitted by Pastor Chris Najonen*



## BOOK REVIEW

**Marilyn Kay Stulken, *WITH ONE VOICE: A REFERENCE COMPANION.* Minneapolis, Augsburg-Fortress Press, 2000. 150 pp., \$29.98.**

What is a "Reference Companion"? It is a book to accompany a worship book, telling something of the people, stories, origins, and background of each selection in the worship book.

This Reference Companion opens with an eight-page introduction to "*WITH ONE VOICE*", describing its origins and reason for being published, its context as an LBW supplement, guidelines for using the liturgical material, and finally guidelines for the hymn and song section.

In the main section, Stulken describes each selection in the book, beginning with the liturgical selections. She uses the location of these liturgical songs to offer comment on the sources of the texts, and why they are still used in our worship.

The book is full of interesting facts, which make singing of selections from WOV more interesting and personal. For example, we learn (#633) that Marty Haugen serves a United Church of Christ congregation in Minneapolis, and that this hymn can be made bi-seasonal simply by changing "soon he is born" in v. 1 to "now he is born". We hear that "Once in Royal David's City" (#643) has been sung as a processional carol at the King's College, Cambridge, Christmas Service of Lessons and Carols since 1918. We discover that until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a manuscript of the text of #654, "Alleluia, Song of Gladness", was ceremonially buried at the beginning of Lent at Toul in France, with a full Requiem Mass, and that John Mason Neale, translator of the hymn, could read, write, and think in 20 languages. We learn that the tune to #661, "My Song is Love Unknown", was written on the back of a restaurant menu.

We learn that Charles Wesley (#669) wrote over six thousand hymns, Herbert Brokering (#674) wrote over 1000 hymn texts, and Fanny Crosby (#699) penned over 8500 Gospel hymns. You will read about John Ylvisaker, (#698) one of the most elusive and prolific Lutheran Church musicians in North America, and Jeremy Young (#706) composer of Setting Five, "Bread of Life".

There are interesting discoveries about African-American composers. We meet Eddie Bonnemere (#707), a mainstay of the jazz ministry at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City for 30 years. And we learn that #731, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand", was written by gospel hymnwriter Thomas Dorsey (at one time known as "Georgia Tom", leader of the "Wildcats Jazz Band") after the death of his wife and child.

WOV has been justifiably praised for including World Music. You read that #712, "Listen, God is Calling" is often sung before the reading of the Holy Gospel in churches of Tanzania, with the people rising at the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza. You learn that Britt Hallqvist, (#714) wrote the libretto for an opera based on the life of Norwegian Pietist leader Hans Nielsen Hauge. We learn too that #736, "By Gracious Powers", was the last poem written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer before his death in a Gestapo prison in Berlin. And #747, "Christ is Made the Sure Foundation", was sung at the weddings of both Princess Margaret in 1960 and Prince Charles and Diana in 1981.

The list of hymnological trivia goes on and on! The writer of #782, Joachim Neander, comes from Germany's Neander Valley, the place where in 1856 the skeleton of "Neanderthal Man" was discovered. Then you learn that William and Annabeth McLelland Gay, married in 1949, each year write a hymn tune and text as their Christmas greeting to their family and friends, of which #628 is one.

Here too you will find biographies of composers Franz Schubert (#617a), Taize composer Jacques Berthier (#640), Henry Purcell (#747), Julian of Norwich (#769), Gustav Holst (#797), and Charles Stanford (#802), as well as the sad story of 20<sup>th</sup> century German Lutheran composer Hugo Distler (#785).

You will also discover that WOV has CANADIAN CONTENT! Canadian contributions include those of Peter Davison and George Black (#799), Fred Polman (#631), Anglican Roland Palmer (#634) and Sylvia Dunstan, a United Church of Canada minister who died in 1993 (#739).

The Companion is cross-referenced with the Hymnal Companion to LBW, so that when biographies of persons have been included there, they are not duplicated here. And it is fascinating to read biographies of hymn writers, many of whom are still alive.

There are several useful indices at the end: national origins of tunes; original language of the texts; authors, composers & sources; alphabetical listing of tunes; first lines & common titles. For the most part, these complement rather than duplicate the indices in the blue Pew Edition of WOV. This reviewer found one error: at #634, Stulken locates Roland Palmer as being retired at "Victoria City, Vancouver, British Columbia".

Although the price is high, this is a "good buy". Put it in the church library, and use it when you introduce new hymns from WOV, telling the story of the song before you sing. Most of us will sing a new hymn with more interest and excitement if we know something of its writer and composer.

*Submitted by Rev. Don Nevile*