



## Viewing “Renewing Worship” Broadly

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**R**enewing Worship (RW) is a project of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It grew out of the ELCA’s churchwide assemblies, beginning in 1997. In 2000 it was funded and took its current name. Though it has produced a series of provisional materials and in October 2006 will provide a new book of worship and hymnal along with electronic and other supplementary resources, it is not conceived as a set of documents but as an ongoing process of deepening the church’s worship.

Before commenting about it, I should indicate my association with the first phase of the project. I was one of approximately one hundred people called together in 2001 to formulate principles about worship. We were divided into four groups, each of which was assigned a topic: language, music, preaching, and worship space. I was in the group on music.<sup>1</sup> *Renewing Worship 2: Principles for Worship* resulted. It naturally took as its foundation a Lutheran confessional stance via the ELCA’s one official document on the topic of worship, *The Use of the Means of Grace*,<sup>2</sup> which was adopted in 1997. The group I was in did not start its conversa-

<sup>1</sup>The names of these participants are listed in *Renewing Worship 2: Principles for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002) xiii.

<sup>2</sup>*The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*, adopted for guidance and practice by the Fifth Biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 19 August 1997 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

*The ELCA’s Renewing Worship materials represent a responsible, constructive, and comprehensive attempt to help the church renew its worship. While not perfect, they deserve to be welcomed gratefully.*

tions there, however. We started by expressing various perspectives about music in worship. I relish such conversations, but I was dubious about what we would accomplish. Our assignment was to provide principles. I wondered if we would voice opinions without consensus. Zesty multiple opinions about music in worship characterize our period and are easy to find and stimulate, but they are hardly principles.

After virtually every posture one might imagine was recorded in a huge array of notes, the group began discussing and editing this material over the next months so that it could be published in 2002. It was not easy work and took considerable time and effort,<sup>3</sup> because a genuine attempt was made to make sure every voice was heard and represented fairly. Much to my surprise, deep coherences were uncovered. The outcome was a constructive set of Lutheran principles about the church musical responsibility in our time and place.

Since then I have had a very minor role, responding from time to time to hymns and tunes that were sent to me for review. I have no idea how comments from me or others were handled or what decisions were made about anything we reviewed. I can only say that when I worked on the first phase of the project I was impressed, first, by the serious attempt to enlist the widest possible variety of opinions from across the church and, second, by the care with which they were forged into a constructive set of Lutheran principles for worship in our time and place.

#### PROVISIONAL RESOURCES

By October 2005, RW had produced eight 7" x 10" paperback volumes of "provisional resources intended to provide worship leaders with a range of proposed strategies and materials that address the various liturgical and musical needs of the church...to assist the renewal of corporate worship in a variety of settings."<sup>4</sup> Each book is supplied not only with ample explanatory detail, but with evaluative response forms. These forms relate to one of the goals of the RW project—to hear congregations' and leaders' responses to the use of these materials.<sup>5</sup> The forms have invited participation.

Here are the eight volumes with brief descriptions of their contents:

*Renewing Worship 1: Congregational Song: Proposals for Renewal*<sup>6</sup>

a 103 page collection of some new, but mostly older hymns in revised translations, with music laid out variously in both harmonized and unison versions,

<sup>3</sup>I was one of several people who at one point along the way tried to edit the material for the music group into a coherent content and a manageable size. I probably spent between forty and sixty hours on some of the most difficult editing I have ever done. The task was to represent the sense of the meeting as fairly as possible, not to express my opinions. The final document does not look very much like what any of us did individually in our editing because its various versions continually passed through a broadly representative grid that kept pushing it into a communal piece that none of us alone would have written.

<sup>4</sup>*Renewing Worship 3: Holy Baptism and Related Rites* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002) iv.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>6</sup>*Renewing Worship 1: Congregational Song: Proposals for Renewal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

to test “various strategies and possibilities...for renewal and to elicit response and evaluation.”<sup>7</sup>

*Renewing Worship 2: Principles for Worship*<sup>8</sup>

154 pages, as described above, which includes *The Use of the Means of Grace*.<sup>9</sup>

*Renewing Worship 3: Holy Baptism and Related Rites*<sup>10</sup>

122 pages, services of Holy Baptism, the catechumenate, Affirmation of Baptism, and Confession and Forgiveness.

*Renewing Worship 4: Life Passages: Marriage, Healing, Funeral*<sup>11</sup>

103 pages, the services that are listed in the title, with allied detail.

*Renewing Worship 5: New Hymns and Songs*<sup>12</sup>

353 pages, the longest of these provisional resources, a hymnal accompaniment edition with 300 hymns and indices. The congregational version of this hymnal is 253 pages, called *Renewing Worship Songbook*.<sup>13</sup> It is 6" x 9" to fit in pew racks for congregations to use, printed on cheaper paper to make it inexpensive enough to be bought in bulk. “New” in the title means not currently in the primary ELCA hymnals, *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*<sup>14</sup> or its supplement, *With One Voice (WOV)*.<sup>15</sup>

*Renewing Worship 6: Holy Communion and Related Rites*<sup>16</sup>

169 pages, Holy Communion, Word and Thanksgiving, with music.

*Renewing Worship 7: Daily Prayer*<sup>17</sup>

192 pages, Evening Prayer, Morning Prayer, Night Prayer, pattern and examples for personal and small group prayer, psalms for daily prayer, daily lectionary, and service music.

*Renewing Worship 8: The Church’s Year: Propers and Seasonal Rites*<sup>18</sup>

289 pages, calendar, propers, rites for Lent and the Three Days.

A ninth volume on “Ministry and the Church’s Life” is still to be published.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., v.

<sup>8</sup>See note 1 for the full reference.

<sup>9</sup>See note 2 for the full reference.

<sup>10</sup>See note 4 for the full reference.

<sup>11</sup>*Renewing Worship 4: Life Passages: Marriage, Healing, Funeral* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).

<sup>12</sup>*Renewing Worship 5: New Hymns and Songs* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

<sup>13</sup>*Renewing Worship Songbook* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

<sup>14</sup>*Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978).

<sup>15</sup>*With One Voice: A Lutheran Resource for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

<sup>16</sup>*Renewing Worship 6: Holy Communion and Related Rites* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

<sup>17</sup>*Renewing Worship 7: Daily Prayer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

<sup>18</sup>*Renewing Worship 8: The Church’s Year: Propers and Seasonal Rites* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

Since November 2004 a list of hymns has been available in hard copy or on-line.<sup>19</sup> Anyone can see and respond to the proposed texts, how they have been altered if there are alterations, why the alterations have been made, and what tunes are used. According to the current list of 614 hymns, 53% of them come from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 20% from *With One Voice*, 21% from *Renewing Worship 5: New Hymns and Songs* (listed above), and 6% from other ELCA hymnic resources.<sup>20</sup>

## TWO IMMEDIATE REACTIONS

The most obvious characteristic of these materials is their scope. The entire round of the church worshiping activities has been considered, first with principles and then with proposed worship materials for baptism, the weekly Sunday eucharistic festival, daily prayer, occasional services, hymnody, and music. This is a comprehensive set of documents. It is not surprising that worship leaders in other denominations have remarked gratefully that they can learn from and use what the ELCA has provided.

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A second characteristic reflects a typically double-sided Lutheran motif: the church present and past worship life has been deeply respected, and there is an equally deep respect for trying to figure out what the circumstances of our time and place call for. That means there are those on both ends of the spectrum who are likely to be displeased—displeased either that too much or too little of the old has been retained, or that too much or too little of the new has been added. Whatever the details of these objections may be and whatever opposite directions they may take, it surely cannot be said that the framers of these materials were irresponsible or sought to push certain agendas. What we find here are responsible and constructive attempts—spread over a number of years so that ample time has been available for access and for comments by the whole church—to contribute to a continuing renewal of worship by means of these elements: a Lutheran lens (with God’s action primary but our response not eviscerated), an ecumenical vision, an invitation to everybody to respond with suggestions, and a system of checks and balances.

<sup>19</sup>See <http://www.renewingworship.org/about/proposal/pdf/Hymns.pdf> (accessed 10 December 2005).

<sup>20</sup>*This Far by Faith: An African American Resource for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999); *Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998); and *Worship & Praise Songbook* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999).

## EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP IN A BROAD VIEW

The work that has been done on RW was affirmed at the churchwide assembly of the ELCA in the summer of 2005, along with a mandate to press forward. The provisional materials will now be edited into numerous print and electronic resources. The most visible of these will be a book of worship, called *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, scheduled for publication in October 2006. Though other resources will also be available, the book is contemplated to contain everything a typical Lutheran congregation needs for its worship: introductory materials; calendar; propers; services for Baptism, Communion, the Word, daily prayer, life passages, prayers, Lent and Holy Week; a complete psalter; hymns and service music; daily readings; and Luther's *Small Catechism*. This is all to be compressed into 1,000 pages or so. Though this book will contain everything a congregation might need, its intention is somewhat different from past hymnals, which were considered to be comprehensive. This one is intended to be a primary core of materials to which additions can easily be made.

We could analyze numerous details, though analysis of each volume of the liturgical materials is well beyond the scope of a short article. It might be more possible to analyze the hymns—their translations, the tunes that go with them, and whether they will be laid out with unison lines or harmonizations or a mix. One could ask if chorales are represented fairly and comprehensively, or the Scandinavian heritage. Is the balance of new and old right, or any other balances one might consider? What about restoring originals, splicing of stanzas together, and concerns for inclusiveness and clarity? My own sense at this point is that the editing is by and large responsible, for both the liturgical and the hymnic proposals.<sup>21</sup> All these details, however, are more appropriate to analyze after *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* has been published and used. A general article like this suggests a focus on broader matters. Here are some of them.

First, Lutherans in 1978 produced the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Whatever Monday morning quarterbacking has been done about its mistakes, its framers courageously and constructively worked at their assignment. They created a book that led the way for much of the Western church in the United States and to some extent in Canada. The round of hymnal publication by other denominations that followed the *LBW* came to a conclusion near the end of the twentieth century. Many groups were part of it, almost all of whom benefited immensely from the groundbreaking work Lutherans had done. That Lutherans are now in the forefront of another round points to their important ecumenical vocation. The production of a worship book and hymnal is possibly the most visible symbol of this vocation. It should not be overlooked. It is critical to the whole church's being,

<sup>21</sup>Which specific hymns are and are not present—and their meanings—probably caused the editors a monumental struggle. Numerous reactions to this very difficult work will surely be evoked. Here's one that is not likely to be raised. Is "When Long before Time" correct (now #799 in *WOW*)? Was there ever a time "when all was deep silence and night reigned supreme" (1.3), or has there always been the "communal music" of the Trinity? (See Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume I: The Triune God* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997] 236.)

well-being, integrity, and responsibility to the world in our period. We are dealing here with weighty matters that extend well beyond the Lutheran fold.

Second, future historians will probably look back on our period and think that we were fighting about superficial and secondary matters—like musical instruments and their styles, almost always skirting the vocal essence of the church or deeper ethical concerns. Hymnal editing is invariably responsive to its context. It is likely that many of the hymnals and worship materials produced in our period will be snared by our superficiality. We cannot see what those who come after us will be able to see, but we might get glimpses. Here is one possible glimpse.

Fred Gaiser, the editor of this journal, was recently asked to give a speech about eco-justice, a difficult concern the church has to face in our period and one that will almost certainly reverberate well beyond us. He wondered where this concern shows up in our liturgical life and surmised its most direct reference to be in one of the *LBW*'s Offertory prayers: “With them [these gifts] we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made.”<sup>22</sup> He found less than that in a quick perusal of other denominations’ worship books and also less than that in the new *RW* materials. Regarding the orders for worship (not the hymns), he observes that “we get praise of the creator and creation’s praise..., but I don’t see anything about our ecological response or responsibility.”<sup>23</sup>

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This is a complex issue, as Gaiser himself knows. Both he and I think that trying to put idiosyncratic words in people’s mouths on the premise that we all believe the same thing about complex matters like this or trying to use the liturgy to preach at us are counterproductive evils.<sup>24</sup> But we also know that the church is not excused from the big ethical issues we face; nor are we excused from their faithful and genuinely liturgical embodiment in our worship materials. *RW* may have successfully enfolded this matter, not only in the surprisingly prophetic historic liturgical texts, but in its hymnody. I have not checked to see, and usage—not checking—will finally tell this tale. My point here is this: the superficial moment tempers our judgment; its clatter and glitz can easily blind us to what is more important. No doubt

<sup>22</sup>*LBW*, p. 88. Gaiser quoted this prayer in his address: “‘No one comes to cut us down’: God, Trees, and Human Beings” (keynote address at the regional conference, “Tending the Garden, Cultivating the Commons: Faith-Based Approaches to Shared Environmental Challenges,” presented by the Eco-Justice Program of the National Council of Churches and Eco-Justice Ministries, Denver, Colorado, 4–5 November 2005). Available online at [www.luthersem.edu/fgaiser](http://www.luthersem.edu/fgaiser).

<sup>23</sup>E-mail correspondence from Fred Gaiser, 13 October 2005.

<sup>24</sup>I have tried to get at the potent and prophetic nature of praise versus the more superficial character of preachiness and detailed denunciation in *Let Justice Sing: Hymnody and Justice* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998).

RW shares this infection; the absence of eco-justice, if it is in fact absent, may be one of its manifestations.

Third, though the last point is not to be regarded with impunity, there is nonetheless a remarkable breadth in RW. Perhaps the most surprising thing about these materials, especially in a period like ours that is so controlled by the moment, is that they take with utmost seriousness the church heritage and long-term trajectory. They are certainly influenced by our time and place, but they are not locked into it as if we alone were the only Christians who ever lived or as if we have nothing to learn from those who have confessed and sung the faith before us. Only time will tell whether the RW proportions are wise and faithful, but one cannot miss the balance that has been attempted and for which the church needs to express deep gratitude.

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Fourth, it apparently is not clear how psalm tones will be handled. I take it the RW editors, like most editors, have toyed with the temptation to cast them into a choral style where cadential progressions allow more elegant textual inflections than the ones in the *LBW*. This temptation is apparently being wisely resisted. Let us hope so.

The *LBW*'s system is profoundly congregational. People who may have trouble even singing simple hymn tunes, if they get past irrational prejudices against “chanting,” have been gratefully discovering, even now after the *LBW* is over twenty-five years old, that they can sing the psalms in the *LBW*. That is because it gives psalm tones in their primal simplicity. That in turn gives us some of the most congregational of the church's music.

Any method with multiple cadential progressions and complex pointing that requires puzzling out which note goes with which syllable in every verse is choral in orientation. Congregations cannot make sense of it. It is a tragic congregational miscalculation and a barometer of how congregational a book is. Realizing this takes time to settle in, just as it has taken time for the congregational orientation of the *LBW*'s psalm tones to settle in. We have to hope that *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* will build on the increasingly congregational singing of the psalms that the *LBW* has fostered. This is an important matter, because the psalms are the womb of the church's song and need to be made accessible to congregational participation in ways that extend beyond antiphons. (That is not to lampoon antiphons, which have their rightful place; it is to say that antiphons alone are insufficient.)

Fifth, ten settings of the Communion service are projected for *Evangelical Lu-*

*theran Worship*. The original intent apparently was to find a couple of settings with common melodies that everyone would be drawn to use, each one supplied with multiple styles and accompaniments. Such a system would have solved problems of both unity and diversity by providing a common set of tunes allied to a variety of styles. This was a worthy attempt that seems not to have worked out, so ten diverse settings were chosen instead. That choice raises a number of issues, ones with which, given their initial attempt, the RW editors have probably struggled.

(1) In our current circumstance, where there are so many voices in and out of the church clamoring for so many diverse styles, it may be that the inclusion of many settings is a good thing, or at least the best choice available. Extending the possibilities to stylistic variations of individual settings may also evidence considerable wisdom.

(2) One may ask, however, if ten settings and their stylistic changes make an anthology, not a common worship book. It is unlikely that most congregations will use all ten settings. If most congregations use several of the same ones, as is the case for the first two settings in the *LBW* (and a gradual but less common adoption of the third), a unitive book for the ELCA will have been achieved. If, however, congregational choices are diverse, with little commonality for the ELCA as a whole, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* will have helped to splinter the church more deeply. If the large array of hymns and tunes is added to the settings, plus the electronic resources that will be available, so long as a broadly Lutheran frame is assumed, congregations will be able to fashion from these materials virtually any theological and musical complexion they might choose. That may be an unavoidable hallmark of our period and may not be a bad thing, but it does have the appearance of an anthology rather than a common worship book.

(3) If such diversity is what denominational worship books can now be expected to achieve, a curious conundrum is released: Does this massive internal denominational diversity suggest the need for a smaller ecumenical worship book and hymnal? That is, do we need some resource that provides a smaller number of core hymns and tunes that we all tend to hold in common, allied to relatively few common settings of the liturgy—all of which many denominations could use and to which they could add their own supplements?<sup>25</sup>

The diversity we face cuts across denominations. So do our common worship materials and hymnody. The shape of our services and their texts are essential parts of this unity, but music can also make its contribution. Does Christ’s call to us to be one point to an ecumenical musical mandate where those who think such a thing is important follow where it leads and where those who don’t simply ignore it? How different would that be from what is at work denominationally? The obvious dif-

<sup>25</sup>I get calls that go something like this: “We want to be good citizens of the church, but we can’t possibly use everything that’s available. What’s worth our time and effort? Give us a reasonable canon of hymns and service settings.”



ference is that what is common would be more broadly shared beyond the bounds of denominational structures. That would not be a bad development. It would not by itself gather us all around a common font, pulpit, and table; but it would not hurt and could help. I have no proposal here and no idea how this could ever be achieved. It will certainly not be achieved by bishops or committees or any top-down directives. The informal networks musicians share are the closest thing to structures that can provide some help here.

Sixth, RW indicates that, for the sake of including more texts, it has reduced the number of tunes, especially those that are unique and are used only once a year for specific festivals.<sup>26</sup> Though this is an understandable move to get more texts in play, it has three negative implications. In actual practice and choices, I don't think RW has actually enfolded these implications, but they need to be pointed out since the principle has been enunciated. (1) It can easily make hymn singing bland by removing interesting tunes that dot the landscape here and there. (2) It can easily treat congregations badly. It is certainly true that hymn tunes need to be congregational, but it is not true that more challenging tunes or ones that are used less often fail such a test. (3) Christmas sounds like Christmas, Easter like Easter, and Pentecost like Pentecost, so long as the tunes used in those seasons carry with them their respective uniqueness to the seasons of their associations. To remove such uniqueness<sup>27</sup> is not only to flatten out the themes of the church year but to mask those themes by allying them all to the same music. Part of the genius, delight, personality, and power of the church year is that it engages all the senses, not just the intellect. We are not served well by subtracting such bodily signs from our common life, not for the sake of an arbitrary or legalistic sense of the church year, but for our understanding of and participation in the wholeness of the Christian faith that it expresses. That is in part a sensuous musical wholeness.

Seventh, it appears the Suffrages are absent. One might ask about the wisdom of that absence. Schools and churches have found these "little offices" useful and in my experience have employed them often. However, the "Pattern and Examples for Personal and Small Group Prayer"<sup>28</sup> may well serve the church better than the Suffrages did. They will certainly be helpful in the home and among small groups.

My impression is that the RW materials represent a responsible, constructive, and comprehensive attempt to continue to help renew worship, made available for

<sup>26</sup>An example would be "Of the Glorious Body Telling," as proposed for *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, where PICARDY is used as the tune in place of PANGE LINGUA. (See [http://www.renewingworship.org/about/proposal/pdf\\_old/Hymns.pdf](http://www.renewingworship.org/about/proposal/pdf_old/Hymns.pdf), #5416. This hymn has been deleted from the final list of *ELW* hymns, but will remain available in electronic form.)

<sup>27</sup>An example of this blurring is Dolores Dufner's communion hymn "What Feast of Love," which at *WOW* #701 is given with the tune GREENSLEEVES, a tune with strong associations to the Christmas text "What Child Is This?" In my experience people find this combination amusing or strange, but not helpful for either text or tune, *unless* the hymn is used at Christmas when it powerfully breaks open the associations at that time of year to new insights. (The RW hymn list includes "What Feast of Love" with the tune GREENSLEEVES.)

<sup>28</sup>*Renewing Worship 7: Daily Prayer*, 28–38.

comments from the whole church over a long period of time, with multiple checks and balances built in. They are not perfect. We will only know after they are in use what flaws they may contain; but they are worthy of our time and effort, and they deserve to be welcomed gratefully. ⊕

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