

## 6 Theses on Worship

During the 1995-96 academic year, the following theses on worship were prepared by faculty and Board of Regents representatives of Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, Wis., and later adopted by the board. These theses were developed to give direction to the worship life of the campus. The clarity of expression and the practicality of the theses suggest that they might be useful well beyond the confines of one of our college campuses.

Originally the CUW Board of Regents adopted the first five theses. More recently a sixth thesis on the environment of worship was approved by the Board of Regents. Members of the committee that developed the theses included Dr. John Behnke; Rev. Dr. Wayne Braun; Rev. Dr. Paul Grime; Dr. Kenneth Kosche; Rev. Dr. Timothy Maschke; Rev. Dr. Paul Naumann; Rev. Harold Senkbeil; Dr. Gaylund Stone, and Rev. Dr. Edwin Suelflow.

### **Thesis 1**

WE CONFESS that worship (Gottesdienst) is our triune God's service to us, and our faithful responses always direct us back to God from whom all blessings flow.

WE DENY that worship is primarily a human activity, which is constituted by contrived efforts at emotion-centered adoration and praise.

What does this mean at Concordia?

Worship at Concordia is always centered in our triune God's actions—thus the hymns, liturgies and messages must always convey God's work and not be seen as human activities. The hymns, liturgies and messages are to be evaluated on how well they bring an awareness of God's gracious activity into the consciousness and appreciation of the students and faculty and staff.

Worship is by and for those who have a living faith. It is therefore a faith-strengthening activity for the campus community as God comes to His people through the means of grace, resulting in evangelism activities by those who hear the Word of God and keep it.

Because worship is the central activity in the life of the Christian, daily chapel services flow from and lead toward Sunday worship and participation at the Lord's Supper.

Trinitarian creeds and catechetical statements should be regularly incorporated into the chapel program of the campus so that the ecumenical nature of worship is appreciated, yet the clarity of our Lutheran focus is evident.

Worship practices or messages, which are designed to manipulate students, faculty, and staff emotionally are inappropriately geared toward the worshipper and not to the One being worshipped.

Likewise, Concordia's worship will not be an entertainment event for the audience or a popularity contest for the message-givers. While worship is edifying, engaging, and attractive, the focus must always be on that which is above and beyond the temporal and mundane.

## **Thesis 2**

WE CONFESS that worship flows from the Gospel. At the heart and center of all worship is Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice for sin. In worship, the living and saving Lord comes to give us life.

WE DENY that worship is based on the Law, namely, that our feelings or gifts supplement the work of Christ.

What does this mean at Concordia?

Our orders of service (liturgy) as well as our preaching must include God's Word of Law and Gospel. Most prominent will be the saving Gospel which offers the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

When we gather for worship, our focus will be on God and not on ourselves. We will avoid going through the motions of the liturgy (ancient or contemporary) as if by such a work we merit God's favor.

As we strive to engage the hearts and minds of the worshippers, we will try to avoid worship becoming mindless recitation, while valuing meaningful repetition of the Good News of God's gracious activity.

## **Thesis 3**

WE CONFESS that in the liturgy God's Word and sacraments are proclaimed and administered. Through these means, God dispenses forgiveness, life, and salvation.

WE DENY that the liturgy is a mere form to produce the desired responses in worshippers.

What does this mean at Concordia?

We recognize the great gifts of the liturgy, which have been handed down to us over the centuries. This liturgical tradition includes both the historic service of Word and Sacrament (the Divine Service) as well as the many prayer offices (such as Matins, Morning Prayer, Vespers, Evening Prayer, and Compline) that can provide a framework for our Sunday services and daily prayer. Our campus community will gain an understanding and appreciation of the variety of the Church's worship life and practice as we explore and experience these services.

We use the historic liturgies because they have proven to be a reliable way to ensure the centrality of the forgiveness of sins, rather than merely for historic or aesthetic reasons.

#### **Thesis 4**

WE CONFESS that the purpose of music in the church is to bear the living voice of the Gospel.

WE DENY that music is present for purely aesthetic reasons or for the satisfaction of personal tastes of worshippers or worship leaders.

What does this mean at Concordia?

Appropriate music and art is based on the church year and is in agreement with Lutheran theology. We seek to incorporate all elements of worship-including hymns, attendant music, and readings-into such a cohesive whole.

Worship must be thoughtfully prepared and skillfully presented. Student assistants must receive careful guidance and direction before serving in campus services.

Although musical styles change, worthiness and craft, skill and suitability are qualities consistent with our desire to bring God our very best.

The use of the visual and performing arts, in particular the use of instruments (brass, bells, winds, strings, etc.) are to be encouraged and cultivated.

The pipe organ remains the best instrument for one person to lead congregational song, because it is a wind instrument which breathes like a singer and produces a variety of sounds.

We stress that the choir's primary function is the teaching and leading of the congregation's singing of the liturgy and hymns.

Because our worship is directed to God, the location of the choirs and instrumentalists should encourage congregational singing without attracting the primary focus to themselves.

## **Thesis 5**

WE CONFESS that worship is catholic (that is, universal). The gathering of God's people around Word and Sacrament reaches across cultural and social barriers to transcend both time and space.

WE DENY that worship is defined by the tastes and preferences of an individual or group of worshippers.

What does this mean at Concordia?

Worship at Concordia will be shaped by the historic liturgical rites of Christendom, signifying that students and faculty of various Christian confessions are included in the corporate prayer and praise of the church.

All services of daily chapel, Sunday morning, and other occasions at Concordia are public worship and will be conducted in accordance with the doctrine and practice of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Orientation will be provided new students and faculty on the scriptural principles of the LCMS regarding pulpit and altar fellowship for the sake of genuine Christian unity.

Concordia's chapel is a teaching chapel. The academic and musical resources of the University will be utilized to teach students the theology and practice of worship and to introduce them to the rich treasures of Christian liturgy and hymnody.

The celestial dimensions of worship, which unite us with "angels and archangels," should be clearly demonstrated through the selection, explanation, and use of appropriate liturgical texts.

Responsibility for planning and evaluating worship rests with the campus pastor in consultation with the theology and music faculty. All rites, ceremonies, and music used in worship at Concordia will be evaluated according to the public teaching of the LCMS.

Sermons or Bible messages in chapel will normally be given by those called to preach in the church. Exceptions are made for male church work students and faculty who have been trained by the campus pastor or other appropriate faculty.

## **Thesis 6**

WE CONFESS that the environment of worship should be theologically sound, aesthetically pleasing, and spiritually edifying.

WE DENY that art and architecture are neutral factors in a setting for worship.

What does this mean at Concordia? The architectural setting and artistic elements utilized in our worship experiences and environment will conform to Lutheran theology and practices.

The centrality of Word and Sacrament will always be evident in the worship settings of our community-the altar (or table of the Meal) and pulpit (or table of the Word) are equally prominent, with the baptismal font demonstrating its use as the site of our initiation into the Christian community.

Christ Triumphant will always be depicted as the incarnate Christ crucified in accordance with our Lutheran theology of the cross.

The furnishings of the chapel, including the seating, paraments and vestments, will be used to enhance a sense of holy awe, reverent wonder, and spiritual adoration.

Imagery drawn from the patterns, precedents and motifs of Scripture (e.g., Exodus 25 and 31) will be crafted using the natural objects of God's creation by His skilled people to celebrate His saving work in Christ our Lord.

While tastes may vary, only the best will be incorporated into the worship life of this community. The best will be prepared by skilled artisans (students or professionals) supervised by the faculty of the art and theology departments.

Soli Deo Gloria