

The Use of Scripture in the Language of Prayer and Worship

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments have long been a primary foundation for the language of the church's prayer and worship.

Readings from the Bible using a translation contemporary to the context (for example, New Revised Standard Version) are the most direct use of the scriptures in worship. These readings are framed with an announcement such as, "A reading from..." or "The holy gospel according to..." and concluded with "The word of the Lord" or "Word of God, word of life" or "The gospel of the Lord." This framing sets the public proclamation of the Word apart from other uses of biblical language and imagery in worship.

A second use of the scriptures in the church's prayer and worship is through its adaptation and formulation into texts that serve as dialogue, prayer, and song. The church from ancient times has developed uses of scripture that often move beyond a word-for-word quoting to a wording that is suited to the particular function of the text in worship. Examples:

- 1) In the church's acclamation during the great thanksgiving of Holy Communion, we have long sung, "Holy, holy, holy Lord, . . . heaven and earth are full of your glory..." This historic form of directing speech to God as an act of adoration, is based on the biblical text from Isaiah 6, which was framed as a declaration about God.
- 2) The Lord's Prayer as used in worship, in either the "traditional" or "ecumenical" versions, does not reflect either of the biblical versions in Matthew and Luke precisely, but represents an enhanced combination of the biblical versions specifically for use in the worship of the assembly and in private prayer.
- 3) Particularly in its use of the psalms in the worship, the language of the psalms has been adapted to its various functions in worship, especially as a vehicle for the song of the assembly. The fragments of psalms used, for example, in psalm antiphons or refrains have frequently been recast from third-person declaration to second-person address so that they become the voice of prayer of the assembly, directed to God.

As part of the Renewing Worship recommendation, a number of liturgical texts were proposed that exemplified this second, liturgical use of biblical language and imagery. These texts included canticles in Holy Communion, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer, as well as the singing psalter. The canticle "This is the feast of victory," based on Revelation 5, is carried over from *Lutheran Book of Worship*. The canticles "Blessed are you, Lord," "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord," and "Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace," based on the biblical songs of Zechariah, Mary, and Simeon, use the text of the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC, 1988), consistent with the use of other ELLC ecumenical texts in ELW such as the Lord's Prayer and "Holy, holy, holy."

Background document: The Use of Scripture in the Language of Prayer and Worship

Regarding the psalms for singing, the following was included in the summary information provided to the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council in the fall of 2005. The presentation to the Church Council also included the complete text of the singing psalter in the version that will appear in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*:

Liturgical use of the psalms

The proposal seeks further to honor the use of the psalms in worship by including the entire Psalter. However, the proposal seeks to respond to the desire, expressed by many over the past generation, to pray the psalms in the language of prayer, that is, addressed to God, and in language that avoids the preponderance of masculine language and images within the current liturgical version.

Based on the current version in LBW, the proposed version represents a conservative revision, which retains the names and images for God in the psalms (including “The LORD”), but which more often (as is common in Hebrew poetry) shifts from “third person” descriptive language to direct forms of addressing God, and which limits the use of gender-specific pronouns. This version has been prepared with the extensive help of Lutheran Old Testament scholars, and seeks to achieve the goal of psalm versions that are useful throughout this church for singing and prayer. Other versions of the psalms will continue to be available in various Bible translations and in electronic forms.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship will include descriptive and explanatory notes making clear the source of the various liturgical texts and the principles underlying the use of biblical language and imagery in the liturgy.