

Mission Moments – July 27, 2007
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“Where’s the Beef?” – Part 2
What’s in the Beef?
by Mike Zehnder

An earlier Mission Moments article I wrote (at www.centerforusmissions.com > Newsletters > May 18, 2007) was titled “Where’s the Beef?” – a question I’ve been tempted to ask as I visit various spiritual food establishments (churches) of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Too many churches frequently serve a diet of worship songs full of passion but light on theology-- “beef.” The article’s title echoed the question asked in Wendy’s commercials some time ago by the little old lady (played by Clara Peller) who, at competitor restaurants, would sniff at the paltry amount of meat on her hamburger bun and demand, “Where’s the beef?!”

My email inbox was filled with responses from folks who resonated with the article.

- I am looking at this [problem of thin texts] on a daily basis. There is so much good music out there!! However, one has to beware of picking songs that are shallow. There are a lot of great tunes and hooks but many lack words of depth.
- I wholeheartedly agree. We definitely need discernment in choosing music for worship.
- I think people are hungry for good solid leadership in worship/music issues.
- Fluff and ‘mindless repetition’ cannot cut it when it comes to ‘worshipping God in spirit and in truth.’
- I’ve been trying to find such a resource of songs with pith AND which are heartfelt. I hope you can reconcile this whole issue for our synod so we can attend to other things.
- How can a pastor oversee the selection of songs responsibly yet sensitively, without alienating his worship leader/minister of music? This is a great problem that many pastors don’t know how to face.

In this I want to address the issue of tainted meat; beef that is poisoned with the toxin of false doctrine. More serious than “Where IS the beef?” is the need to ascertain “What ELSE is in this beef?” Is this beef mixed with something deadly? The evil queen didn’t jealously ask Snow White to drink a vial of deadly cyanide. No, she offered something appealing. The food “looked good to the eyes.” What could be wrong with a ripe, juicy apple? But “healthy food” can be a vehicle for unhealthy additives; that’s why parents carefully check Halloween candy, and cat owners return cans of tainted pet food.

When it comes to worship songs, we need to ask “What ELSE is in this beef?” Some examples:

“Come, Now is the Time to Worship” has a problematic line: “Still the greatest treasure remains for those who gladly *choose* you now.”

In 2000, I compiled and edited the song book *The Best of the Best in Contemporary Praise & Worship*, printed by Fellowship Ministries, distributed by Maranatha and Word, Inc. I very much wanted to include this tuneful, popular song of invitation to worship. So I requested permission of both the copyright administrator and the author to substitute “serve” or “love” for the word “choose.” The request was denied so I didn’t include it in the songbook because of its synergism, a four-letter word for theologians.

Some defend this song on the basis of Joshua 24:15, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” They rightly point out that redeemed Christians make daily choices to serve or not serve the Lord, depending on whether we’re “keeping in step with” the Spirit or in step with our flesh (Romans 8). They assert we shouldn’t be so squeamish about the word “choose” and that it can be justifiably used of the redeemed as they are moved by the Holy Spirit to follow Christ.

True. But in the song, “those who choose you now” is contrasted with those who never believed and who, according to Philippians 2, will finally acknowledge the truth before they are cast into the abyss. The song says: “One day every tongue will confess you are God. One day every knee will bow. Still the greatest treasure remains for those who gladly choose You now.” The context negates the argument and exposes this to be a choosing of justification – a theological impossibility for a dead man.

The same problem exists in “Refiner’s Fire,” another song I wanted to include in the songbook. It’s a good song theologically and melodically, except for this problematic line: “I choose to be holy.”

I asked permission of the copyright holders to edit it to “I want to be holy,” a tiny verbal alteration with a huge theological difference, so that those who are “dead in trespasses and sins” aren’t credited with the ability to restore their own life apart from God who alone can raise the dead! Their answer: no. I chose not to put it in the book. That was definitely a choice I could make!

As a pastor and as a musician, I draw a line in the sand against using texts like these because of the synergism. Grace mixed with law is no longer grace. It’s either “grace alone” or it’s some kind of work righteousness. Considering the wealth of songs available, it’s neither necessary nor loving to include songs that have the potential to say something other than what we believe, teach and confess.

The vagaries of implied synergism in these above two songs, however, are almost innocuous compared to songs like the next one which contains patently false theology:

You Paid It All

Gary Sadler / John Hartley

There laid a price upon our heads/The cost of life required a death
Our enemy demanded blood/The sentence hanging over us
Was nailed with You upon the cross/Your remedy was Your love

And You, You paid it all/And You, You paid it all...

And why would You do this for us/To seek us out when we were lost
To love a world despising You/Lord You paid it all
You brought us home from distant lands/You called a feast and booked the band
Your arms embraced the prodigal/Lord You paid it all

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Did you spot the heresy? If not, read it again. You might think it's a great song describing grace. I would agree, except for the second line: "Our enemy demanded blood." This is incorrect theology and contains a common misconception which gives Satan power and glory that are not his. Though Satan is the "Accuser of Mankind," it is the righteousness and holiness of God that demands death for sin, not some decree of Satan. "On that day you will surely die," God said in the Garden of Eden. God Himself has set the price for sin ("the wages of sin is death") and in His mercy He has also supplied a substitute sacrifice: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

If instead of "our enemy" the song said "Your holiness," the song would move from red to green.

These are but three examples of how easily error in our songs can teach untruths. As you select songs, I encourage you to ask "Where's the beef?" and "What's in the beef?"

Starting this fall, I plan to list contemporary songs of substance and truth in topical form on the Center for U.S. Missions website to help you locate the best of the best. Down the road, I'll also provide weekly contemporary song suggestions that fit the themes of the three year lectionary to make your worship planning easier. But on your own and until such planning tools arrive, keep asking Clara's question of your contemporary worship songs. And don't settle for anything less than the finest, *untainted* beef of Law and Gospel!

News from the Center

- 1. Church Planter Assessment Center**
DATE CHANGED TO Sept. 24-27, 2007
LOCATION CHANGED to Chicago, Illinois

The Church Planter Assessment Center (CPAC), a 4-day experience to help potential church planters verify if God has given them the necessary gifts and character to be a lead church planter, has been rescheduled from August to September 24-27. The location has been changed from Ohio to Chicago, Illinois.

Endorsed and encouraged by LCMS World Mission, CPAC uses a variety of tools, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, to prayerfully evaluate candidates. CPAC is a key strategy for supporting the Church Planting movement (2000 new congregations in the USA by 2017), which is part of the *Ablaze!* initiative.

The registration fee for candidates sponsored by LCMS districts or parent churches is \$250 for

the candidate and \$250 for the candidate's spouse, if applicable. LCMS World Mission provides an additional \$1500 per person scholarship to round out the full cost of assessment. Candidates not sponsored by a LCMS agency pay \$1800. The registration fee covers pre-assessment tools, all on-site assessments and activities, lunches, supper and snacks Monday through Thursday, and concluding reports for the candidate and sponsoring agency. All applications, references and assessment tools must be completed and submitted by September 3, 2007. For more information, and to register, visit www.centerforusmissions.com and click on this event in the “Currently-scheduled Seminars” listing.

2. New Mission Executive Training, August 21-22, 2007, St. Louis

For more information, contact the Center.

3. Daughter Church Planting Seminar, September 14-15, 2007, Woodbury, MN

Church consultants tell us that the best way to reach the unchurched is by planting new churches. Congregations of all sizes will benefit from this refreshing and hope-filled seminar that approaches churches planting churches from a Biblical and practical point of view. Explore planting strategies, the advantage of planting, when to plant, the process of daughtering, mother-daughter relationships and more! Pastors, congregation leaders, mission executives and district presidents who have taken this seminar have developed a contagious spirit and become advocates for churches planting churches. For more information, and to register, visit www.centerforusmissions.com and click on this event in the “Currently-scheduled Seminars” listing.

Mission Moments, a biweekly electronic newsletter from the Center for U.S. Missions, brings information and encouragement to all who desire to share the God’s great love in Jesus Christ with others. The Center for U.S. Missions provides research and training for mission work among unevangelized people in the United States. A partnership of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod World Missions, Concordia University in Irvine, California, and the North America Mission Executives of the LCMS, the Center serves all Christian denominations.

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