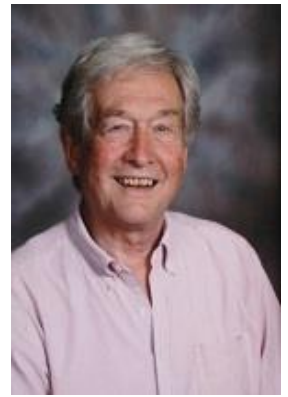


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KOINE WORSHIP: PART TWO

31 As promised in my previous posting, *Koine* Worship Part One, here's a partial list of the kind of every-Sunday song embellishment I'm thinking of. I continue with the numbering system of Part One, to illustrate that this is essentially all one Essay.

32 There's a long tradition in Europe of allowing the people in the pew the pleasure of singing the Hymn of the Day (HOD) embellished with one of the techniques I note below. The HOD presumably extends or elaborates on the themes in the Day's sermon or scripture. Alone among the songs and hymns sung every Sunday – In my parish we regularly sing eight hymns! Every week! – the HOD deserves, every Sunday, some splendid glory provided by the people themselves – aided by some special attention from music leaders.

33 ALTERNATION: This is the simplest and least messy of the possibilities for enriching the people's part in *koine* worship. Treble voices in the entire assembly are invited to sign one stanza. Lower voices in the assembly are invited to sing another. A simple print announcement in the parish bulletin may be sufficient for this to work tolerably well. A song leader may not even be necessary for alternation.

34 It will surprise you, if you've never tried alternation, how the meaning of the text can change when you hear disparate voices singing specific stanzas. If you study a given congregational hymn text, you'll often discover individual stanzas that cry out for men's voices, or women's.

35 Alternation could also work between choir and people. Or between one side of the hall and another side. Alternation even works *within* a given hymn. Try this on *ELW 424 Laast uns erfreuen*. One set of voices sings the opening phrase: “Ye watchers and ye holy ones...” A second set sings “bright seraphs, cherubim and thrones...” The first; “Alleluia!” The second: “Alleluia!” The final grand “Alleluia!” in each stanza is *tutti*, all together! Marvelous!

36 Or try this with *ELW 365 Easter Hymn*. One set of voices sings the text for each verse. A second set of voices sings the “Alleluias”. Again, hair-raising!

37 If a parish musician and choir were to spend all their time devoted to this kind of attention to the hymns for the Day, their time would be well spent. Even without preparing an anthem.

38 SINGING IN PARTS: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass (SATB). This type of hymn embellishment might require a song leader or leaders. See 27 above. Separate parts might need a little on-the-spot rehearsing.

39 A CAPELLA singing is a splendid *koine* embellishment to worship. Accompanying keyboard simply cuts out after the first or second stanza. Let the people hear their own unaccompanied voices, on occasion! If they go a little flat or sharp after a couple of stanzas, the sky won't fall!

40 However, not all hymns are meant to be sung in parts. *ELW* is praiseworthy in providing melody line only on some hymns. They're meant to be sung in unison.

41 There is also a lobby – Shall we call it that? – among Christians these days that maintains *all* congregational singing should be in unison – no SATB. That lobby is chiefly European, and chiefly German. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was among those who argued for unvarying unison singing in worship. The unity of voices was to be a sign of unity in spirit. And in Spirit.

42 That constriction of musical possibilities seems to me unnecessary and counter-productive to worship's richness. Victorian hymns cry out for SATB singing, as I hear them. African call-and-response hymns ditto. And North American congregations these days are full of people with at least a little musical education who have no problems with SATB singing.

43 CANONS: Some hymns lend themselves to singing in canon. That's kind of like a round. Voices enter not simultaneously but one after another, singing the identical text and tune, but separated by some measures. There can be two part canons and three part canons and even four part canons, each group singing the identical hymn, text and tune, but part four bringing up the rear, so to speak. *Tallis' canon, ELW 565, All praise to thee my God this night*, is a familiar example. It's great fun to sing, and couldn't be easier.

44 DRONES: No, not the kind that fly. A musical drone is like that low insistent note underneath a bagpipe's squall. And it works perfectly in congregational worship with people who claim they can't sing. Who say they're monotones. That's exactly what a drone is: a monotone, usually a low and constant single bass note that could even be hummed. Try it with *Nettleton*, the tune for *ELW 807, Come thou Fount of ev'ry blessing*.

45 Again, you will probably need the help of your extrovert song leader to set a solid drone among the lower voices in the assembly. With 807, I'd establish the drone as the D in "Fount". Get the men and others with low voices to hum that D. The women and those with higher voices sing the melody and words. The men – and others with the drone – simply hum that D throughout, underneath the voices that carry the words and tune. It sounds terrific!

46 Almost any one of the hymns in the "white spiritual" tradition can profit from a solid drone, underneath the text and tune sung by other voices. Look for hymns with tunes from the middle of the 1800's, like *ELW 796 Foundation*, or 843 – *Nettleton* again! – or 785 *Ville du Havre*, or 755 *Pilot*, or even 890 *Battle Hymn*.

47 *PARALLEL ORGANUM*: You'll need a song leader for this one too. Probably two of them. *Parallel organum* is a fancy name for the practice of asking one set of voices to sing the melody in the hymnal, and having a second set of voices sing the same text and tune, along with it, but a fifth lower. As such it represents the very beginnings of harmony in Western music. Each set of voices will probably need its own leader.

48 *Parallel organum* is almost inseparable from plainsong; Any plainsong hymn in *ELW* – like 257 *Veni Emmanuel: O come, O come Emmanuel* – sounds great in *parallel organum*. Once again, the lower voices sing the same words and tune as the treble voices, but the lower voices sing that tune five steps below. It will take a little practice before the two melodies “lock”. But when they do, it's hair-raising. I'd never sing *Veni Emmanuel* without *parallel organum*, if I had my way!

49 Finally, here's a challenge for you. There must be a small aggregation of hymns in *ELW* – in any hymnal! – that can actually be sung on top of another hymn, so to speak. I'm thinking of the kind of song Irving Berlin provides in his *Won't you play a simple melody?* *Google* it!

50 In that Broadway song, a second singer starts to sing on top of the first: *Musical dreamin', set your honey a-schemin'*! The two songs are entirely different, but they sound great sung together, simultaneously!

51 So here's the challenge: Find two hymns in *ELW* that you can sing simultaneously, one on top of the other! There must be some!

52 And let me know when you've found 'em!

53 Bottom line: The *people* in a *koine* assembly should have some fun singing on Sunday morning too. Not just the choir!

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