Gathered Guests

Gathered Guests

A GUIDE TO WORSHIP IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

SECOND EDITION

Timothy H. Maschke

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To Robert and Ruth; Sharon; Jedidiah, Benjamin, and Nathanael.
You have taught me much! 2 Timothy 3:14

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Abbreviations

AC	Augsburg Confession
AE	Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. American Edition. General editors Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. 56 vols. St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and Fortress, 1955–86. Quotations used with permission.
AELC	Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches
ALC	American Lutheran Church
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
Concordia	*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*. Edited by Paul T. McCain et al. 2d edition. St. Louis: Concordia, 2006.
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
FC SD	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration
ILCW	Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship
LC	Large Catechism
LCA	Lutheran Church in America
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
SA	Smalcald Articles
WA	Luther, Martin. *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883–1999.
WELS	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Preface

to the Second Edition

The introduction in 2006 of *Lutheran Service Book* in the LCMS and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in the ELCA necessitated a revision of *Gathered Guests*. With these new books of worship for congregations, questions about proper practice arise, as well as the continued need for teaching the basic truths of Christian worship to the next generations. While *Gathered Guests* is particularly focused on *Lutheran Service Book*, Lutherans in synods other than the LCMS, as well as other Christians who desire an understanding of the basics of liturgical worship, will be able to adapt the information to their particular interests.

This revision of *Gathered Guests* has gone beyond merely updating the material in the chapters on the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament. Recent scholarly study and critical comments by book reviewers and kind readers have pointed out the necessity of significant changes in historical background material, as well as in correcting smaller inaccuracies or offering clarifications. Continuing diversity of practice and the novelty of convergent and emerging worship practices also required comments later in the book.

I wish to acknowledge my continuing appreciation for the editors at Concordia Publishing House, particularly Dawn Weinstock, for encouraging this revision. For their personal interest and comments I thank Dr. Armand Boehme (in the area of the Eucharistic Prayer) and Dr. Joseph Herl (in the area of growth of Lutheran music after the Reformation). Appreciation also is owed to the Rev. Jedidiah Maschke for preparing Appendix B and to the Rev. Steve Smith for helpful background research in the lectionaries of *Lutheran Service Book*. A debt of gratitude is also acknowledged for the careful reading of the semifinal draft by the Rev. Jon Vieker, who provided many insights and corrective perspectives on the historical and liturgical background of *Lutheran Service Book* and its associated resources. To the several readers who have kindly sent e-mails or letters pointing out areas that

needed clarification or correction, I express my deep thanks. And I owe gratitude to those reviewers who more critically evaluated the work in scholarly book reviews. Their encouragement and direction is very much appreciated.

Finally, once again, I thank my God, who continues to move me to greater and heavenly ortho-doxologies. Without that Word that became flesh and His comforting Spirit, little could be done that would have true value for the future. *Marana-tha!*

Timothy Maschke
Festival of St. Mary
August 15, 2007

Preface to First Edition

As readers will quickly recognize, *Gathered Guests* is a textbook. It is intended for informed laity and college-age students who want to know more about worship practices in the Lutheran Church. I have designed this book as a practical guide to worship—written by a Lutheran theologian, pastor, and teacher—to provide biblical and theological answers to the perennial question "What is worship?" and, particularly, to the question "What is *Lutheran* worship?"

How Lutherans worship has been determined by a long and distinguished tradition. The chapters of this book address topics under a variety of categories. After looking at various dimensions of worship from a Lutheran perspective, part 1 will introduce the Church Year and a hierarchy of traditions to use when evaluating one's personal worship life. In part 2 the origins and development of Christian liturgy as practiced by Lutherans are explained in light of the larger Christian tradition. Part 3 provides a glimpse into the integral place that music, art, and architecture have in the worship life of every congregation. Part 4 offers suggestions for various approaches to seasonal services—Advent, Epiphany, Lent, and Holy Week—and occasional services, such as Baptism, confirmation, wedding, funeral, and Morning and Evening Prayer. Guidelines for public prayer and public reading of Scripture are augmented in part 5 with discussions of various roles of leadership and service in the Church's worship life. Finally, part 6 provides practical suggestions for organizing a worship committee and planning for both small-group worship and variety in worship.

Some of the chapters are more practical; others are theoretical or historical. My goal in each chapter is to handle the subject matter in the way I believe best informs the interested reader about worship in the Lutheran Church. In almost all chapters, readers will benefit from exploring the parenthetical Scripture passages because they are the foundation and focus of

Lutheran worship life. While all the topics are related to the overall theme of worship, this book does not need to be read from cover to cover. Rather, it can serve as a reference work and resource for further study by God's gathered guests.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my appreciation and thanks to the many people who have contributed to this work, especially to those teachers I have had over the years and to those whom I have taught. *Gathered Guests* began more than a decade ago when I was asked to teach a course on worship for lay leaders. Dr. John Boubel encouraged me to expand the work he had developed for the course, which I gladly did. Since that time, I have taught the course on Lutheran worship at least annually at Concordia University Wisconsin. Therefore, I thank my many students for their insights and responses to various dimensions of the book as emphases developed over the years. Some of my classroom rhetoric has remained in the final edition. I want to thank especially the students who took REL 221 Lutheran Worship during the 2000 fall semester for their honest critical responses to a rough draft of this book. I should also mention my appreciation of Nathan Grepke, a graduate of Concordia University Wisconsin, who spent many hours preparing some of the illustrations found in this book.

My friend and former colleague Dr. Joel Heck of Concordia University Texas first suggested the idea of publishing a book on worship. His experience in publishing and his honest reaction to several chapters provided encouragement and is most appreciated. In addition, Dr. Steve Mueller, Concordia University Irvine (California), made helpful suggestions on several chapters for which I am thankful. Other theologians, pastors, colleagues, and friends have influenced this work in ways I am often unaware. I have also benefited from the editorial support and encouragement of the staff at Concordia Publishing House, particularly Dawn Weinstock and her patience in the process. Any errors or mistakes in this book, however, are my own, and I take full responsibility for all that remain, if factual or theological, and I ask the reader's charity.

Besides thanking my teachers and those I have taught, several other people have provided special insights and perspectives that have proved helpful in my understanding of the Lutheran way of worshiping. My parents, the Rev. Robert and Ruth Maschke, were my first teachers as they modeled worship and music and life. I cannot express sufficient gratitude to my family for their support and training. My wife, Sharon, has quietly

spurred me on in this project, encouraging me to express in print issues we discussed across the kitchen table. My sons, Jedidiah, Benjamin, and Nathanael, have been my teachers, as well as my students, as they grew up before my eyes (and behind my back) over the past decades. Therefore, this book is dedicated to my family.

Finally, I thank God for gathering me as one of His guests through the miraculous waters of Baptism and for continuing to sustain me through the body and blood of my Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' death gives me life, and His Spirit continues to nurture my faith as that relationship with Christ grows and changes and matures. God has blessed me richly, and this book is one small way to express my gratitude for His grace.

S.D.G.
Timothy Maschke
Pentecost 2001

INTRODUCTION

Life, Liturgy, and Theology

I have always been interested in worship. Since my days attending a Lutheran high school, I have collected orders of service and been fascinated with what happens in worship. My theological training has made me increasingly aware of the intimate connection between theology and worship. This association is not something new nor is it revolutionary, yet this connection needs to be stated clearly at the beginning of this book. Woven throughout *Gathered Guests* is the concept that how we pray indicates what we believe. How did I come to this recognition, and, more important, why is it a valid concern for the worshiping life of God's gathered guests?

Probably no Latin theological phrase has been touted as flippantly in recent years as *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("law of praying, law of believing"). The historical origin and the various understandings and applications of this phrase help explain why the study of worship is important for the life of the Church and for an individual's spirituality. A decade ago, evangelical Christian author Robert Webber stated a concern for Americans and particularly U.S. church members that merits repeating:

> We Americans are a-historical. Most of us know very little about history and probably care even less. . . . Unfortunately, most churches in this country have the same mentality. This is especially true of conservative Protestant churches. . . . Unfortunately, when it comes to worship, there is a terrible price to pay for this attitude. When we cut ourselves off from the rich treasury of resources and from the collective spirituality of God's people throughout the ages, we diminish our vision of God. We isolate ourselves from what God would do in the world through us, his church.[1]

1 Webber, *Signs of Wonder*, 9–10.

It is always good to look at the historical roots of our understandings, and in this instance, I want to look particularly at the origin of the salient phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

In the early fifth century, a lay monk named Prosper of Aquitaine was a literary disciple and defender of Augustine. Facing a controversy over Baptism, Prosper penned the original adage: *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* ("the rule of believing establishes the rule of supplicating").[2] As part of his argument for salvation by grace alone, Prosper demonstrated that the reason the Church prays for all people is that faith is purely the result of God's grace. Thus the liturgy underscored the belief of the Church. Augustine had made similar proofs of doctrine from the liturgy.[3]

Although Prosper's concept is clear in its context, the simplified form of the phrase—*lex orandi, lex credenda*—has taken on a life of its own. Three distinct ways have developed for interpreting and applying the basic truth articulated by Prosper:

1. The Church's worship life creates and affects beliefs.
2. The Church's beliefs create and affect worship practices.
3. The Church's worship life and beliefs will have reciprocal effects on each other.

These three perspectives have historical precedents as well as contemporary manifestations.

Worship Life Creates and Affects Beliefs

Arius (AD 256–336), an early Christian teacher who began to lead people away from the true biblical faith, understood that the worship life of a Christian community had a powerful affect on its beliefs.[4] To introduce his aberrations about Christ's origin, Arius set his beliefs to music, using tunes from the marketplace to infect the people's thinking and theological consciousness.

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2 For centuries the phrase had been attributed to Pope Celestine I (AD 422–432) in *Capitula Coelestini* (Patrologia latina 51:205–12); see also Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 175, where he quotes the expression as *lex orandi est lex credendi et agendi*. More correctly, Federer, *Liturgie und Glaube*, 13–16, attributes authorship to Prosper and cites M. Cappuyns, "L'origine des Capitula pseudo-célestiniens contre se semi-pélagianisme," *Revue bénédictine* 41 (1929): 156–70. See also Wainwright, *Doxology*, 225–26; and Church, "Law of Begging," 448–49, who cites P. de Letter, ed., *St. Prosper of Aquitaine: Defense of St. Augustine*, Ancient Christian Writers 32 (Westminster: Newman, 1963), 183: "Let the rule of prayer lay down the rule of faith." For the most recent scholarly treatment of this phrase and the nuances of its usage, see De Clerck, "'*Lex orandi, lex credendi*,'" 178–200.

3 Wainwright, *Doxology*, 227, cites more than two dozen such references in Augustine's writings.

4 Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 1:219–48.

One result of these popular jingles was that Arianism was difficult to eradicate in Asia Minor.[5] A century or so later when Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople (ca. AD 428), forbade his people from speaking of Mary as "God-bearer,"[6] only allowing them to call her "Christ-bearer," a theological battle erupted. His devotional directions were considered denials of the doctrine of the nature (actually the two natures) of Christ. As a result of this Nestorian heresy, the Chalcedonian Definition[7] quickly reaffirmed the phrase "God-bearer" in the liturgical confessions of the Church.[8]

A more recent and concrete illustration of this idea that worship forms faith is the 1950 doctrinal statement by Pope Pius XII that established the bodily assumption of Mary as an official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.[9] This doctrine states that Mary is physically in heaven. It flows out of the worship life of Catholics, who have prayed to Mary for centuries. Such devotion is verified and undergirded by the papal affirmation, but it was based on the practices of the Catholic Church over many centuries, not on any biblical evidence.[10] Eastern Orthodox Christians have had similar liturgical influences upon their doctrine.[11] Likewise, several Protestant Christian groups exhibit a comparable view as they seek to demonstrate the Spirit's presence through charismatic activities in their worship practices. Similarly, many modern Christian church bodies continue to seek Christian unity through

5 González, *History of Christian Thought*, 272–90.

6 Referring to Mary as "God-bearer" (in Greek, "Theotokos") had been done for at least a century. See Johnson, "*Sub Tuum Praesidium*," 52–75. Nestorius's prohibition was recognized as a liturgical change that had great potential to change the biblical doctrine of Christ's dual natures.

7 A church council, meeting in Chalcedon in AD 451, reaffirmed the Nicene Creed as being sufficiently clear. However, against the views of Nestorius and his opponent, Eutyches, the council further clarified the position that in the one person Jesus Christ two natures exist without confusing them, without changing them, without dividing them, and without separating them. See Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 1:542–57.

8 Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 1:451–72, 520–57. See also Wainwright, *Doxology*, 251. Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, deals with this most clearly.

9 Pius XII, apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, November 1, 1950, mentioned in Joseph Gallagher, trans., *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), 90.

10 Wainwright, *Doxology*, 238.

11 Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 271, quotes Georges Florovsky: "Christianity is a liturgical religion. The Church is first of all a worshiping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second." See also Wainwright, *Doxology*, 251; and Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*.

external worship practices, particularly a common worship resource, rather than through agreement on biblical teachings.[12]

Beliefs Create and Affect Worship Life

The second way to view the phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* takes an opposite perspective. As a result of many heretical worship practices in the early Church, ecclesiastical and doctrinal control was often rigidly exercised over the liturgy. The Reformation era brought about a recognition of the dogmatic value of liturgy.[13] John Calvin, particularly, made the Second Commandment foundational for all worship practices of those who followed his style of reform. Idolatry of any type was carefully avoided, including, as Calvin saw it, the idolatry of the liturgy.[14]

Robert Webber stated pointedly and correctly that a theology of worship affects the actions of worship.[15] Certainly the early revival preachers in the United States used an approach to evangelistic worship with a particular theological goal. Preparatory songs "warmed people up to worship," then the preachers gave extended and persuasive sermons that ended with an exhortation to "accept Christ." A physical act of coming forward and being "smitten in the Spirit" concluded the services. Recent evangelical worship styles continue this mechanical and manipulative approach to worship in the guise of American informality and liturgical minimalism, yet such practices clearly show that theology affects worship practices.[16]

David Luecke, though Lutheran, has adopted the paradigm derived from an American evangelical frontier tradition in his book *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*. After citing various styles of evangelistic worship, Luecke offers some strong theological reservations about particular styles. He concludes that Lutherans can only use one style, arguing that only "experiential 'contact' Pietism . . . has a rightful place in Lutheran theology and history."[17]

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12 Pfatteicher, "Still to Be Tried," 22, states that concept succinctly: "The point of having one book is to have one church."

13 Fagerberg, *What Is Liturgical Theology?* 3–45, 112–13.

14 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.11.9–11; 2.8.11; 4.10.19; 4.10.24; 4.10.30.

15 Webber, *Signs of Wonder*, 32–33, 146.

16 Wright, *Community of Joy*, 55, recognizes that "worship styles, on the other hand, communicate the substance of faith." See Ward, *Selling Worship*, for several examples. James White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*, lays out a variety of worship styles that reflect various theological traditions, including what he identifies as "frontier worship," ch. 10, pp. 171–91. See also Senn, " 'Worship Alive,' " 194–224.

17 Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*, 92.

Thus he seems to fall into the category of Protestant worship leaders who think that theology is the only determinant of worship style.

Worship Life and Beliefs Affect Each Other

The third way to interpret Prosper's phrase is a middle position that acknowledges the validity of the two previous views yet shows that each is deficient in its neglect of the opposite. Lutherans have navigated this middle course between the proverbial and mythical Scylla and Charybdis. For centuries Lutherans have reflected the mutuality of both doctrine and devotional life. Theology and worship are significantly interrelated.

In 1523 and in 1526, Martin Luther wrote his *Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg* and his *German Mass* in which he demonstrated that changing certain parts of the liturgy was necessary for doctrinal purity, especially when he discovered that the proper biblical emphasis in the Lord's Supper was on God's gift to humanity rather than on the sacrificial responses of humans toward God.[18]

A mutual relationship always exists between liturgy and doctrine because liturgy communicates doctrine and affects the lives of those who worship. Vilmos Vajta demonstrates Luther's understanding of worship and summarizes it well:

> Rites and ceremonies indeed form a training school of faith. To this extent, the pedagogical view is true to Luther. While ceremonies cannot create the faith, they can point to it. They are the scaffolding needed for building the church, but must not be confused with the church itself. They can serve to bring the immature (the young and simple folk) in the orbit of the Word and Sacrament where faith is born. As long as man is "external," such outward orders will be needed for the sake of love, for love and order belong together.[19]

What occurs in worship affects doctrine, and the doctrine of the Church should be evident in its worship, according to Luther.

The Danish Lutheran theologian Regin Prenter has carried on Luther's approach of relating theology and liturgy. In a masterful article titled "Liturgy and Theology," Prenter exhibits this uniquely Lutheran approach: "The liturgy of the Church is theological. It speaks to God and man about God and man. . . . The theology of the Church is liturgical, a part of the liturgy in the

18 AE 53:11, 61.

19 Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, 175.

wider sense. . . . It serves God and neighbor."[20] The separation of the two has detrimental effects, warns Prenter:

> If liturgy is separated from theology, i.e., if it is no longer in its essence "theology" or true witness to the revelation of God, it then becomes an end in itself, a "good work," performed with the intention of pleasing God. . . . If, on the other hand, theology is separated from liturgy, i.e., if it is no longer seen as a part of the liturgy of the Church, part of the living sacrifice of our bodies in the service of God and our fellow men, it, too, becomes an end in itself, a human wisdom competing with and sometimes even rejecting the revelation of God. . . . These two dangers arising out of the neglect of the essential unity of liturgy and theology are, I think, imminent in our present situation in the Lutheran Church.[21]

Thus there is an intimate relation between what is done on a Sunday in a Lutheran congregation and what it means to be Lutheran.

Lutheran theologian Peter Brunner also underscores the mutuality of doctrine and worship. In introductory comments to his classic book *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, he states: "The church's doctrine on worship will determine which liturgical order it employs, which it leaves to freedom of choice, and which it rejects."[22] On the other hand, Brunner also states that "if the dogmatic statements do not simultaneously express what takes place in the concrete worship service in which we take part, this worship will find itself in a bad way. It would then cease to be the worship instituted by God and Christ."[23] To be a Lutheran means to retain the mutual tension between worship life and doctrine. It means I will evaluate what I do in worship in light of what the Bible teaches. It also means that I will evaluate my worship practices to be sure they reflect what I wish to teach.

The LCMS in its constitution has agreed to the following condition for membership: "4. Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school."[24] Such a statement demonstrates the synodical recognition of the mutual relationship between doctrine and worship,

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20 Prenter, "Liturgy and Theology," 151.

21 Prenter, "Liturgy and Theology," 141.

22 Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 24.

23 Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 27. Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, ix, cites an article by Brunner in which Brunner states: "Liturgy is dogma prayed and confessed." See Peter Brunner, "Die Ordnung des Gottesdienstes an Sonn- und Feiertagen," in *Der Gottesdienst an Sonn- und Feiertagen: Untersuchungen zur Kirchen agende*, I, 1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloh, 1949), 10.

24 Constitution, Article VI.4, in *Handbook of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.*

as well as the importance of education. The careful preparation, extensive study, and sensitive responses to feedback that went into the preparation of *Lutheran Service Book* certainly signal the ongoing recognition of how worship and doctrine go hand in hand. The benefits of such an approach will continue to have lasting effects upon the Church as a whole and upon the gathered guests assembled throughout the LCMS.

This book is written from the perspective that God's gathered guests come together because God calls us by His Gospel. We are gathered in His name to receive His Word and Meal. We respond in praise and prayers and works of service. This gathering time provides us with the power for living and believing. The worship service ends, but our service continues throughout the week as we live out our faith in Christ in our daily lives.

PART 1

Dimensions of Worship

CHAPTER 1

What Is Worship?

"It's time for church!" From infancy I have attended church regularly. As a child, going to church was a time to learn more about Jesus, to sing hymns, sometimes to sit beside the organ while my mother played, or sometimes to sit in a pew with a friend while my father preached. I saw babies and adults baptized. I watched my parents during Communion, particularly as they returned from the altar. Church also evokes sounds for me, particularly hymns played on an old pump organ and on a pipe organ. I remember the pianist in a mission church and a harp concert one memorable Sunday. Going to church always meant a sermon, a main feature of the service. It was why we went to church: to hear about God's love for us in Jesus. Now I hear people talking about "worship" in the same way we used to speak of "going to church."

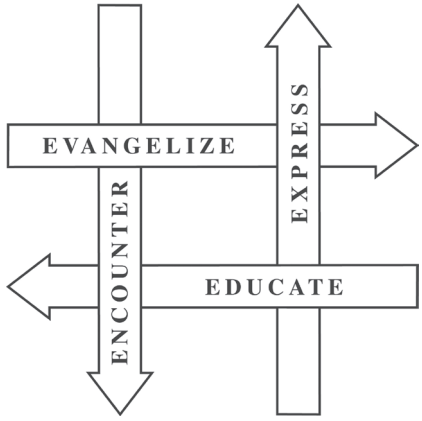
What do Lutherans mean by *worship*? Most often it refers to Sunday church services, and worship is indeed what happens on Sundays. Yet the concept of worship goes beyond an hour's activity on Sunday (or any other day of the week, for that matter). Lutherans understand worship as something more than what occurs on one day of the week. It is a matter of God's gracious gift of faith and the resulting activities that flow from that gift. Such faith-based activity is most evident in Sunday services as we gather as God's guests to receive from Him and to express our thanks and praise to Him. For that reason the focus of this book will concentrate on Sunday worship, though a variety of worship ideas and practices will be presented.

This chapter will look at the concept of worship in a manner that should provide more to think about the next time you attend church. In addition, you will have an opportunity to read in both the Old and New Testaments what God thought about worship. Finally, this chapter will look briefly at how contemporary Lutherans understand worship, the elements

necessary to make a worship service "Lutheran," and why worship remains an important activity for all Christians.

The Four Dimensions of Lutheran Worship

The concept of worship for Lutherans is multidimensional. There is no one way to express the fullness of the concept of worship in a single word or equivalent concept, though many have tried. This is true when we study the biblical ideas and our historical heritage, as well as when we reflect on present Lutheran worship practices. The concept of worship has two clear directions and four distinct dimensions (see diagram).[1] Worship is God's service to us as His gathered guests and our faith-full response to Him in Christ. Worship is also an opportunity to grow and develop as a community and for the community to be empowered to go out into the world. Therefore, Lutheran worship can be described as being downward, upward, inward, and outward—or to put it in the words of this chapter, Lutheran worship is *encounter*, *expression*, *education*, and *evangelism*.



Encounter

The first dimension of Lutheran worship is *encounter*.[2] Walter Buszin, a formative worship leader and Lutheran seminary instructor of a previous generation, writes:

> In her services of corporate worship the Christian Church presents the eternal verities of God's holy and infallible Word, exhorts to high regard for Christian doctrine and to the application of Biblical

1 I thank Robert Christian and Walter Schoedel for portraying this multidimensional idea, which I had verbalized for many years but was unable to visualize until I saw their diagram in *Worship Is* (p. 19). Witvliet, *Worship Sourcebook*, 25, calls this "the dialogic nature of worship—the sense in which worship is a conversation between God and the gathered community." With arrows, he then illustrates each element of Reformed worship according to three directions—up, down, and out.

2 Van Loon, *Encountering God*, emphasizes the significance of encounter as the dynamic dimension of Lutheran worship. Similarly, Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality*, concludes with the emphasis that liturgical worship is an encounter with God that changes worshipers, causing them to grow and develop a deeper relationship with and faithfulness to the God of glory and grace.

> teaching, receives the benefits of the blessed Sacraments, and enjoys the fellowship which has its roots in the very Gospel of Christ Jesus.[3]

Lutherans understand worship as a profound encounter with God and His manifold gifts to His people. God comes to His gathered guests with numerous blessings from on high.

In many ways Lutherans are not unique in this understanding of worship. The Roman Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx wrote a twentieth-century classic on sacramental theology with the telling title *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*.[4] More recently, Anscar J. Chupungco defined the liturgy as an "encounter between the faithful and God. . . . The liturgy is personal encounter in the sense that human persons meet the three divine persons."[5] James White, an authority on Protestant worship, distinguishes between two classical approaches to worship—one that places an emphasis on human feelings and one that emphasizes the people's work.[6] He says of the first category of worshipers that people seek to "get something" from a service, usually an emotional reaction. Feelings judge the worship experience. Such an evaluative measure and approach to worship is relatively recent, growing out of Pietism (seventeenth century), Methodism (eighteenth century), Revivalism (nineteenth century), and Evangelicalism (twentieth century) with their emphasis on humanity and human experience (decision). The second approach, one evident in the larger catholic tradition, views worship as work to be done in God's service. People plan to give their time, talents, and treasures as part of the community's natural response, in obedience to God, and from grateful hearts (as offering). Neither of these approaches is clearly or distinctly Lutheran, however. A third perspective views worship as an opportunity to receive the blessings, comfort, and gifts from God and then to respond in gratitude. Lutheran worshipers are gathered guests whose worship involves feelings and work but, most important, the opportunity to receive tremendous benefits from a great and gracious God.[7] Worship as encounter calls to mind the Lutheran emphasis on the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments. Lutheran worship is boldly and unashamedly

3 Buszin, "Genius of Lutheran Corporate Worship," 260.

4 See bibliography for publication information.

5 Chupungco, "Definition of Liturgy," 6–7.

6 James White, *Protestant Worship and Church Architecture*, 3–15.

7 Former LCMS president A. L. Barry stated, "The purpose of [Lutheran] worship, therefore, is to be gathered by God around His gifts" ("Lutheran Worship: 2000 and Beyond"). See also Brauer, *Worship, Gottesdienst, Cultus Dei*, 41–48.

sacramental worship, but it is important to understand that such an encounter is somewhat peculiar, even among many Protestants.[8]

Encounter is actually the first half of what Lutheran liturgical theologian Peter Brunner considers the two dimensions of worship, which can be described as revelation and response. Following earlier Lutherans, Brunner uses the German word *Gottesdienst* to describe worship. This word has a unique double sense because it is made up of two words—*Gottes* ("divine" or "God's") and *dienst* ("service"). The term "Divine Service" thus can refer to both God's service to us as well as our service to God.[9] Martin Luther insightfully commented on this dimension of worship when he wrote: "On this day of rest (since we can get no other chance), we have the freedom and time to attend divine service. We come together to hear and use God's Word, and then to praise God, to sing and to pray [Colossians 3:16]."[10] Rightly, the introduction to *Lutheran Service Book* begins, "Our Lord is the Lord who serves." The second paragraph specifically notes that "our Lord serves us today through His holy Word and Sacraments."[11]

Worship is also an encounter with the blessings God has given His gathered guests as expressed in particular symbols, people, actions,

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8 Almost twenty years ago, the liberal mainline Protestant magazine *Christian Century* carried an article by Paul Westermeyer that advocated the inclusion of preaching and the Lord's Supper at every weekly service (see "The Practical Life of the Church Musician," *Christian Century* [September 13–20, 1989]: 813). In a letter to the editor, John Chamberlain of Goucher College, Townson, Maryland, claimed to have "no complaint" with "sacramentalists." However, he was "offended" by those who placed the Lord's Supper at the center of Christian worship. He explained that if "I receive communion more than three or four times a year I find it monotonous and cheapened." According to Chamberlain, his "spirit is left out of balance by a service in which Scripture and sermon are preparatory to a Eucharist." While claiming not to condemn sacramentalism, Chamberlain states that it is "not characteristic of the Protestant heritage or central to Protestant spirituality" ("Eucharist Nonessential," 941–42). How different this is for Lutheranism, which is unapologetically sacramental!

9 Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, emphasizes these dimensions of "sacrament" and "sacrifice," particularly in part 2.

10 LC I 84 (*Concordia*, 368).

11 *Lutheran Service Book*, p. viii. See also Vieker, " 'Something Old, Something New,' " 25, which notes: "Months later, when it came time to develop the introduction to *LSB*, the center word 'service' in *Lutheran Service Book* became the central theological theme woven through the first three paragraphs: in the first, our Lord's service to us through His incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection, and ascension; in the second, our Lord's service to us today through His life-giving means of grace; and in the third, our service to the Lord and to one another. Thus, the German word in our Confessions for 'worship'—*Gottesdienst*, 'God's service,' or 'service of God'—has finally been incorporated into the title of an LCMS hymnal, and then articulated in its introduction. Now *that* is definitely 'something burgundy'!"

locations, relationships, and, ultimately, faith. Visualize what you see in a worship setting—a cross or crucifix, an altar, a pulpit, candles, a Bible, special cloth hangings (paraments), and, perhaps, works of art in the form of banners or stained-glass windows. We encounter many symbols in a worship setting. We also encounter people—the pastor, other worshipers, guests and visitors, ushers and greeters, musicians and choir members, young children and older adults, those with much and those who have little. Some of these people have special roles in the service that encourage a variety of additional encounters. The actions we encounter in worship become evident once the service begins—standing, singing, sitting, and speaking are common. Some worshipers cross themselves, kneel for prayers, raise their hands in praise, and respond verbally to the preacher. Worship activities are normally conducted in a building that is specifically designed for the gathering of God's people. Some congregations, however, meet in public buildings or in private houses or even in funeral homes. Whatever the specific location, each is designed or rearranged to enable people to encounter God's blessings. Finally, the relationships we encounter in worship are numerous—friends, family members, strangers, leaders, followers, contributors, and participants. We may be in all of these relationships and more when we participate in various worship services and encounter those who gather in God's name to pray, praise, and give thanks.

Most important, we encounter our triune God—our faith relationship with Him is what worship is all about. Encountering God and His gifts draws believers together, so that true Christian worship has been described as "centripetal worship."

> Christian worship is a centripetal force, pulling us into the center. . . . At the center of Christian worship we encounter the Trinity and, even more, Christ crucified and risen again for us. This merciful God stands at the center of our worship. And our liturgy, with its prayers and proclamation, its sacraments and song, cannot point to itself, much less force us to find that center somewhere else in life, but instead witnesses and draws the worshipping assembly to that very center.[12]

Vilmos Vajta's description of Luther's understanding of worship applies equally to us: "Revelation and worship constitute one and the same reality: fellowship between God and man on the earthly level."[13] Worship is an encounter with the grace-revealing God who is known most clearly in His

12 Wengert, *Centripetal Worship*, 11–12.

13 Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, 15.

Son, Jesus, who sends us His faith-strengthening Spirit. This encounter is central to all worship and is the vital element of whatever else occurs in the Divine Service.

Expression

Lutheran Service Book continues in its introduction: "The Lord's service calls forth our service—in sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to Him and in loving service to one another."[14] Worship is also an *expression* of our faith or a response to what God has done for us in Christ. Psalm 96 (particularly vv. 7–9) captures the essence of this dimension of worship in a most engaging manner. The psalmist writes:

> Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
> ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!
>
> Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name;
> bring an offering, and come into His courts!
>
> Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness;
> tremble before Him, all the earth!

Psalms are written in a Hebrew poetic style characterized by parallelism—a second line repeats or parallels a thought from the first line. The parallelism in these particular verses from Psalm 96 draws the thoughts together and develops an idea that focuses on the key theme. The psalmist directs us to an understanding of true worship. The first line of the first verse is not a clear or complete thought because it does not tell the "families of the peoples" what should be ascribed. The second line of the verse completes the thought: God deserves our ascription of praise because of His awesome glory and omnipotent strength. The next verse becomes more focused. We are not to ascribe just any glory to God; instead, we are to ascribe the unique glory reflected in His name. Included in that ascription of praise are physical activities that express the worshipers' self-recognition as creatures of the great Creator. Offerings, whether monetary or material, are integral to authentic biblical worship. Finally, the idea of worship is expressed, but not any worship; rather, it is worship that reflects God's holiness, His uniqueness, His utter "otherness." Notice that as the psalmist expands and expounds on ascribing to God His worthiness, he culminates with an expression of awe and reverence before the gracious Almighty One. This is the essence of worship as response.

The modern English word *worship* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *weorthscipe*. *Weorthscipe* referred to the worthiness of someone or

14 *Lutheran Service Book*, p. viii.

something—quite literally *weorth* ("worth") plus *scipe* ("ship"), indicating worth-ship or worthiness. As is true of all Christians, we express our worship by ascribing to God the fact that He is truly worthy of our praise. Once we have encountered God's blessings and grace as His gathered guests, we want to express our gratitude to Him in worship.

Two Hebrew words are often translated as *worship* in the Old Testament. One has to do with bowing down, falling down with faces to the ground, or prostrating oneself (2 Chronicles 7:3). The other has to do with adoration and service (Exodus 23:24–25). Both are responses to God and His benevolence. In the New Testament the word translated as *worship* is used to describe one's whole life (Romans 12:1) and is centered in the Christian's response to the living Word (Christ) and God's Word (Scripture). Worship is our grateful and thankful response to God for coming to us in His Word and Sacraments. Therefore, the second dimension of Lutheran worship is one of joyous and grateful response along with the saints and angels (Hebrews 12:1; Revelation 4, 5, 7, and 9).

There are inward expressions as well as outward expressions in corporate worship. We experience worship through our senses and respond through these same senses, especially as we communicate with others. Sounds of praise are heard and felt. Our eyes see visual expressions of the faith—lights and furnishings—that set the mood for worship and direct our attention to God's presence and promises. We may smell the fragrances of flowers or evergreens or sacramental wine and taste the elements of Holy Communion. Some Lutheran congregations use incense to visualize the prayers of the people and to connect the sense of smell to the worship experience.

Evelyn Underhill, an influential author on contemporary spiritual life and worship, described worship in almost mystical terms when she said that it is predominantly what people do before God. She spoke of "the response of the creature to the Eternal" and an acknowledgment of God as transcendent.[15] She meant that once we encounter God, there is a natural tendency to respond to Him. Even pagans respond in various ways to their understandings of God. Yet Lutheran Christians understand God as revealed most clearly in Jesus Christ, so our response is different from that of non-Christians. Our response is always *coram Deo* ("before God"), as Luther said, because we always stand before a God who is gracious to us in Jesus.

The word *celebration* has become popular in recent years to describe large worship gatherings or events. While a wonderful word when connected

15 Underhill, *Worship*, 3, 10, and especially chapter 1, "The Nature of Worship."

to our Christian response, James White expresses some caution about using *celebration* as a synonym for Christian worship:

> [*Celebration*] is frequently used in secular contexts and seems to have developed a vagueness that makes it rather meaningless unless used with a specific object so that one knows what is being celebrated. Since the 1920s the word has been linked to such indefinite notions as celebration of life, joy, a new day, or other equally vacuous objects. It seems better to use it to describe Christian worship only when the object is clear so as to have a definite content and form. If one speaks of celebration of the eucharist or celebration of Christmas, the content may be clear. Christian worship is subject to pastoral, theological, and historical norms; many kinds of celebration easily elude all of these.[16]

As an expression of faith, worship can be a celebration of God's gifts to His gathered guests. We celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior. We celebrate "the communion of saints and forgiveness of sins." We celebrate the joy of a renewed life in Christ and the hope of eternity. We celebrate the opportunity to be edified by God's Spirit.

Education

Worship is also *education* or *edification*. Early Christians, for example, used the account of Jesus' Last Supper both for liturgical and educational purposes.[17] Luther recognized this dimension of worship early in the Reformation. He exhorted the Livonians to "consider the edification of the lay folk" as he helped them reform their worship practices.[18] A year later, in his German Mass, Luther explained the purpose of carefully conducted liturgical worship practices: "They are essential especially for the immature and the young who must be *trained and educated* in the Scripture and God's Word daily so that they may become familiar with the Bible, grounded, well versed, and skilled in it, ready to defend their faith and in due time to teach others

16 James White, *Protestant Worship and Church Architecture*, 36.

17 Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 15, suggests that "the narrative functioned as a catechetical rather than a liturgical text as such, until at least the middle of the fourth century." Sartore, "Catechesis and Liturgy," 97–109, shows that the Roman Catholic Church is still struggling with the relationship between liturgy and education. However, it does recognize the vital relationship between the two, reporting that "in various nations notable efforts have been made in the search for a more enlightened and constructive relation between these two aspects of the life of the Church in the perspective of a more unitary and organic pastoral practice" (97).

18 "Christian Exhortation to the Livonians," AE 53:47.

and to increase the kingdom of Christ."[19] Luther saw the abuse of worship practices in his day, yet he also recognized the profound ability of good liturgical worship to maintain the faith in the face of false "prophets" who proclaimed rigid adherence to a mechanical form of worship or who advocated total freedom from any constraints in the area of liturgy.[20]

As education, worship teaches the faith and nurtures the faithful because it is Word-oriented. Ralph Smith writes, "Worship is a safe learning environment because the Word of God has primary place in this gathering."[21] The fellowship of believers, gathered in the name of Jesus, fosters the work of the Spirit. Lutheran worship is Word-centered worship. Sermons based on the readings of the day and the use of liturgical texts are rooted in the divine biblical revelation.[22] The Sacrament of the Altar is administered according to Christ's intent and institution. In such a context God becomes the teacher of His gathered guests.

Kent Burreson has underscored this educational dimension by delineating three tasks necessary for enabling a person to understand or "read" the liturgy properly:

> Liturgical formation of valid Lutheran, liturgical "readers" entails three responsibilities for the pastors and leaders of individual congregations. First, since the liturgy of any particular community is its primary theology in action, the teaching of the congregation ought to spring from and be completely dependent upon the community's liturgy. Instruction of adult catechumens ought to be conducted within a liturgical context and ought to lead toward the life of the Christian in the liturgy, as did the 4th-century catechumenate. . . . Second, such a liturgical grounding requires that the pastor and the community's catechists be familiar both with the history and the theology of liturgy. . . . Third, the formation of valid liturgical interpreters is an ongoing task since the interpreter's world can continue to be a hindrance to understanding.[23]

Often neglected in the worship life of a congregation and the Church as a whole, children learn easily to pray, to confess their sins and their faith, and to respond to God with song and financial gifts in a worship setting. In fact,

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19 "German Mass and Order of Service (1526)," AE 53:62 (*emphasis added*).

20 See background information from Brecht, *Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, 119–35, 157–72.

21 Smith, "Worship as Transformation," 346.

22 Note the biblical references in *Lutheran Service Book*.

23 Burreson, "Forming a Lutheran Liturgical Reader," 392–93.