

## CHAPTER 1

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# *Liturgical Worship*

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One does not choose to join a liturgical<sup>1</sup> church, and a church does not become or remain a liturgical church because of personal preference or taste. The Liturgy includes aesthetic elements such as music, art, architecture, vestments, and ceremony, but elements of style always come second. Worship forms are based on doctrine. Worship practice reflects and communicates the beliefs of the church. Liturgy articulates doctrine.

It is true that churches *make decisions* about *how* they will worship. This is an on-going process observed in the variety of forms among the great liturgical families of Christendom. There are differences between the Eastern and Western liturgies. In the West, one can observe differences between Roman Catholic liturgies before and after the Council of Trent (ended 1563)

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<sup>1</sup> The adjective *liturgical* describes churches that retain the historic Liturgy. The word *liturgy* has several usages. It may be used in reference to all of the public orders of service whether on Sunday (Divine Service of Word and Sacrament), in other non-Communion daily office services (Matins, Vespers, etc.) and other occasional rites (baptism, marriage, burial, ordination, etc.). It may also refer to specific historic liturgies such as “The Liturgy of St. Basil,” “The Roman Mass,” “The Anglican Liturgy,” or “The Lutheran Liturgy.” Since this chapter deals primarily with the historic Liturgy of Word and Sacrament, I have chosen to capitalize the word *Liturgy* where it refers to the Chief Divine Service (*Haupt Gottesdients*). The word *Liturgy* comes from the Greek *leitourgia* for “public service.” In recent years it has been popular to define the word *liturgy* -according to its etymology as “the work of the people.” While it is true that public worship includes the sacrificial response of the people, this popular definition is misleading if not inaccurate. The etymology and basic meaning of the word *leitourgia* (service) is formed from *leitos* (public, i.e., concerning the people or national community) and the root *-ergon* (work). The problem is not with the words *people* and *work*, but with the preference to insert the little genitive “of” rather than the dative “to” or “for.” In the nonbiblical Greek usage, it referred to a wealthy citizen (or liturgist, *leiturgos*) who was obligated to offer his “service for the people” through taxes that paid for civic improvements (roads, buildings) or military support. In the NT, priests performed the Liturgy on behalf of the people in the temple (Heb 9:21; 10:11), and the ascended Lord Jesus Christ offers His more excellent eternal liturgy (*leitourgias*) on behalf of His people. In 2 Corinthians 9:12, Paul also calls the gifts collected for charitable relief for the poor in Jerusalem as their liturgy (*leitourgias*). In a sense, it is the liturgy after the Liturgy. See Herman Strathmann, *leitourgeo*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 215-31.

and again after the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s. The Lutheran liturgy exists in a variety of forms: (1) Luther's *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe*; (2) the many regional liturgies in Germany developed in the sixteenth-century; (3) the evangelical reforms of the mass that took place outside of Germany in Eastern Europe, the Baltics, Russia, and Scandinavia; and (4) the post-sixteenth-century Lutheran liturgies outside Europe in America, South America, Africa, Australia, and Asia. Finally, there are the various Reformed liturgies from Switzerland, France, England, and so forth.

The forms of the historic Liturgy have varied yet share a two-part common structure. The Service of the Word focuses on *hearing* Holy Scripture and preaching. The Service of Holy Communion focuses on *eating* the Lord's Supper. The Lord is present in Word and sacrament, and in them He gives out His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Where His Word is, there is His Spirit, creating and sustaining faith and moving faith to respond in prayer and thanksgiving. Thus prayer, praise, and thanksgiving constantly express themselves throughout both parts of the Divine Service.

The variety of forms making up the historic Liturgy share a common biblical and theological understanding of how man acts in God's presence and, more importantly, *how* God has chosen to *be present* and *how* God *acts* toward those gathered in His name. God acts through His Word and sacrament. The historic Liturgy also retains this understanding, approach, and attitude (fostered through reverent ceremony) concerning *how* God has chosen to *be present* among His worshiping people, distributing the forgiveness of sins through the Word and Holy Sacraments.

Churches make decisions. In one sense, the Liturgy is an *adiaphora*.<sup>2</sup> Holy Scripture does not command or prescribe the exact form and details (texts, music, and ceremonies). It does not follow, however, that liturgical matters are unimportant or arbitrary. The well-known maxim attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine (d. 463) can be helpful here: *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of prayer/worship, the law of belief). The way you worship effects and determines what you believe. Islamic worship makes Muslims. Buddhist worship makes Buddhists. Roman Catholic worship makes Roman Catholics. Pentecostal worship makes Pentecostals. American neo-evangelical contemporary worship makes generic, Arminian, Protestant Christians. Lutheran liturgy makes Lutherans and keeps them Lutheran. But the opposite is also true in a different sense. One can reverse Prosper of Aquitaine's maxim to read, *lex credendi, lex orandi*: what you believe effects, determines, and shapes the way you worship. "Nothing can be liturgically correct that is not dogmatically correct."<sup>3</sup>

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the movements of Pietism and Rationalism popularized the false notion that the early church was nonliturgical and preferred simple, informal, spontaneous styles of worship. Twentieth-century scholarship has demonstrated that this is simply false and historically inaccurate.<sup>4</sup> The real reasons for the rejection of the historic liturgy were theological. Pietists minimized the external means of grace and replaced them with

<sup>2</sup> *Adiaphora* is Greek for "indifferent things." The Lutheran Confessions employ the term for "church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God." See "*The Formula of Concord*," Article X, *The Book of Concord*.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Sasse, "The Liturgical Movement: Reformation or Revolution? A Letter from Hermann Sasse," *Una Sancta* 17 (1960): 21.

<sup>4</sup> It is true that subsequent to the legalization of Christianity as a public religion, the church did incorporate additional ceremonial, artistic, architectural elements to accommodate the large numbers of new converts and the need to conduct orderly, reverent worship in large public buildings (basilicas).

a direct experience of God through the heart. Rationalists placed the mind or reason above Holy Scriptures. Their rejection of the supernatural also led to a penchant for simplicity and intolerance of traditional forms in the Liturgy. When one rejects the doctrine of original sin, the deity of Christ, and the resurrection, there is no need to retain a liturgy shaped by a belief that the risen Lord's body and blood are present in the bread and wine, forgiving the sins of those who eat and drink with faith and condemning those who eat and drink without repentance and faith.

*Lex credendi, lex orandi.* What one believes establishes (or at least should establish) the way one worships. Church bodies that believe that the direct indwelling and experience of the Holy Spirit is to be sought independent of the Word and Holy Sacraments will be inclined to reject liturgical texts, music, and ceremony in favor of more ecstatic and emotional worship forms. The purpose of this chapter is to present some of the reasons why the Liturgy is important. Down through the centuries, the Liturgy has had its ups and downs. It has seen periods of neglect, deterioration, abuse, and misuse. It has also seen periods of restoration, reformation, and enrichment. It has been said that the Queen in rags is still the Queen. What is it about the Liturgy that is treasured and loved, that has sustained the church and reached the lost for the past two thousand years? The purpose of this chapter is to help one gain an appreciation of the reason why the Liturgy has endured and will continue to endure. In short, this chapter will articulate some of the reasons why the traditional Liturgy (that is, liturgical worship) is important.<sup>1</sup>

## *The Liturgy Is Important for the Sake of the Gospel*

To answer the question "Why is the Liturgy important?" it is necessary to begin with doctrinal questions. What does a church believe, teach, and confess about the Holy Trinity, original sin, Jesus Christ, justification, the nature of faith and grace, the Holy Ministry, good works, the nature of God's Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, Holy Absolution, and such questions as "What must I do to be saved?" "How can I be certain I am saved?" "What has God done for my salvation?" and "Where and how is God present for me with His saving gifts today?" All of these questions are summarized in the important question "*What is the gospel?*" "Wherever the pure gospel comes, there the great liturgy of the true church revives. And wherever men seek genuine liturgy they cannot avoid facing the question, 'What is the gospel?'"<sup>5</sup> The Liturgy is important because the gospel is important.

I was extremely blessed as a child. Every Sunday my parents brought me to the Lord's house for the Holy Liturgy. As an infant I heard the pastor chant the Liturgy and the congregation respond in chant and song. This shaped my belief and piety, as did my catechism instruction. Liturgy is catechesis in action. However, by the time I got to college, if someone had asked me, "Why is the Liturgy important?" I doubt I could have given a thoughtful response. Like most people, I simply never gave it much thought.

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However, the claim that early Christian "house church" worship was nonliturgical or antiliturgical lacks veracity.

1 J. Ligon Duncan et al., *Perspectives on Christian Worship : 5 Views : Ligon Duncan, Dan Kimball, Michael Lawrence & Mark Dever, Timothy Quill, Dan Wilt* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 18–21.

<sup>5</sup> Herman Sasse, as quoted in John Pless, "Hermann Sasse and the Liturgical Movement," *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 7 (1998): 48.

Why not throw out the old Liturgy and import new songs and worship forms from the Baptists, Pentecostals, and other “evangelical,” nondenominational, revivalist groups? Why not sing their lively songs and listen to their heartfelt, emotional sermons? Why not throw out the fixed prayers and litanies in favor of informal, extemporaneous prayers? Why not give the Holy Spirit free course to fire us up with some “real praise”?

This is exactly what took place in many liturgical churches in America during the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1971 I left college with my guitar in hand to serve as youth director at a Lutheran Church. Along with the pastor, I was encouraged to create a new form of worship each week. New prayers, “dialogs,” creeds, and praise songs replaced the ancient and biblical Kyrie, Gloria, Creed, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, traditional hymnody, and so forth. Drums, electric guitars, and hand-clapping were all designed to produce a real “celebration.”

Why did I, like many others of the so-called baby boom generation, return to the Liturgy? Reflecting back, I realize that, through it all, I always sensed that something was not quite right—that there was a theological disconnect between Lutheran theology and doxology. Our new “experimental” forms of worship did not reflect what I was teaching in catechesis. After each Sunday’s performance, nagging questions remained. What did we *accomplish*? Did the people really, truly grow *closer* to Jesus? How does one answer such questions? I could only attempt to measure the results on the basis of the level of enthusiasm we could generate. Did we generate a deeper passion and love for Jesus?

As I attempted to do these measurements in my mind, I always came up empty. I was on very wobbly ground. I knew something was not right, but I could not quite put my finger on it. “What did we *accomplish*?” This is a law question. The proper distinction between the law and gospel is essential for Lutheran theology, catechesis, preaching, and worship. The law is that doctrine in the Bible in which God tells us how we are to be (holy)<sup>6</sup> and what we are to do and not to do. The gospel is that doctrine in the Bible in which God tells us the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. It proclaims what God has done and still does for our salvation. If worship is primarily something *we do*, then we can never be certain we did enough. The law always accuses and condemns (*lex semper accusit*). It leads to a “mathematical,” *measure-oriented* way of evaluating how worship is done. Law questions ask, did people grow *closer* to Jesus? *Stronger* in their faith? This leads to additional questions. How close is close enough? How strong is strong enough?

There is also the assumption with this way of thinking that Jesus is to be found somewhere in the heart, and that the way to find Him is to feel His presence. Worship experiences based on feeling God’s presence and being moved to commit one’s entire heart and life to His will and law always come up short and easily lead to despair or to arrogance and hypocrisy. This is law worship.

Gospel worship works the other way. The liturgy is first of all what God is doing. In law worship, we bring our obedience and praise to God. In gospel worship, we bring our sin and sinfulness, and God brings His gifts to us. When one hears the word *gospel*, the mind should hear the word *gift*. One does not give a gift to oneself. Gifts cannot be earned, deserved, or paid for. If so, they would not be gifts but wages. It is in the nature of a gift simply to be received. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8–9, ESV). The “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” in its discussion of the doctrine of justification, beautifully explains this understanding of gospel worship:

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<sup>6</sup> “You shall be holy for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2 ESV).

Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God, while the worship of the law is to offer and present our goods to God. We cannot offer anything to God unless we have first been reconciled and reborn. The greatest possible comfort comes from this doctrine that the *highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace and righteousness.*<sup>7</sup>

It is in the very nature of the Divine Liturgy to be a liturgy of the gospel—gifts given and received in faith. Liturgical worship is not simply religious words and talk about God, salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Rather, God is truly present in His Word and body and blood, forgiving sins, saving, sustaining, sanctifying, and strengthening our faith in Christ. One does not need to ask, “Am I close to Jesus?” Rather, faith knows for certain that Jesus is not just *somehow* close to us. His own words enter our ears and hearts, and the very body and blood of the Son of God are brought to our lips and mouths. There is no need to get closer than this. Often this greatly stirs our emotions. Sometimes it does not. The important thing is that our Lord’s gifts are always certain, true, and given out to us. When we have wonderful, moving, emotional experiences, it is something for which to give God thanks. We can enjoy them and give thanks for them, but we do not put our faith in them. We put our faith in Christ and His Word, His promises, and His gifts.

Another way of saying the word *gospel* is to say Jesus Christ. The Liturgy is important because the Liturgy is the bearer of Christ into our midst, and He comes with grace to forgive His repentant children. The Liturgy is His Word, and where His Word is, there is He. The Liturgy consists of His true body and blood, miraculously present in the holy meal to forgive our sins, nourish our faith, comfort us, and sustain us until life everlasting.

The Liturgy is important, for it is here that the Holy Spirit is present, sustaining our faith. Where the Spirit slips away from the Word, confidence in the efficacious Word is replaced with internal, emotional experiences of the heart (enthusiasm)<sup>8</sup> or with the bare mind (rationalism). The Augsburg Confession offers a precise explanation of the concrete connection between the justification of the sinner through faith and the Holy Spirit who works through the gospel and the sacraments. “To obtain such faith [i.e., that man is justified by grace alone through faith] God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the *Gospel and the sacraments*. Through these, as through means, he *gives the Holy Spirit*, who works faith, when and where he pleases in those who hear the Gospel.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Book of Concord: The Confessional Writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 155. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, “Justification.” See also Apology, Article IV, 49: “Faith is that worship which receives God’s offered blessings; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers.”

<sup>8</sup> The word *enthusiasm* (from Greek *entheos*, possessed by a god < *en-*, in + *theos*, god; Gr. *Schwärmerei*) is used here in its theological sense to refer to the belief that people receive special revelations directly from the Holy Spirit. Enthusiasts expect God to draw, enlighten, justify, and save them without means of grace (i.e. Word and sacraments).

<sup>9</sup> *Book of Concord*, 31. The Augsburg Confession, Article V, “The Office of the Holy Ministry” (German text).

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2 J. Ligon Duncan et al., *Perspectives on Christian Worship : 5 Views* : Ligon Duncan, Dan Kimball, Michael Lawrence & Mark Dever, Timothy Quill, Dan Wilt (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 21-24.