

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND ITS RELEVANCE TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

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PREAMBLE

Christian worship is an integral part of the Christian life which is related intimately to the Christian faith. It is an inevitable expression of the Christian faith; some equate it with this faith. Each cannot be separated from the other without mutilating or destroying the other. Both are creations of the Holy Ghost; without Him there can be neither Christian faith nor Christian worship. Both center in Christ and without Christ neither Christian faith nor Christian worship can exist. Both honor the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all". Romans 8, 22a. Both Christian faith and Christian worship are, therefore, Trinitarian and doxological in character and essence; both glorify the Holy Trinity and both edify man, rescue him from sin and damnation, and give to him the assurance of life everlasting through Jesus Christ.

Christian worship thus relates itself also to Christian theology. It relates itself to the whole of Christian theology and is an essential part of this theology. Like faith without works, a theology without worship is meaningless and dead in the sight of God. In fact, theology without worship as well as worship without theology are an abomination to the Lord.

The character of true Christian worship is determined by the Word of God as revealed in the Holy Bible and it is fitting for the Church to have also a Lehre vom Gottesdienst. Since this Lehre vom Gottesdienst relates itself to the whole of Christian theology, it relates itself also to each of the four areas of Christian theology, to exegetical, systematic, historical, and practical theology. A reciprocal relationship and influence is thus developed and nurtured by the theology and worship of the Holy Christian Church which asserts itself in the orders of worship of the Church and in the private worship practices of Christian people.

I. THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP TO EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

A. Bearing in mind that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only source and foundation of the Christian religion, these Holy Scriptures themselves, together with hermeneutically correct interpretations of the same, are basic and indispensable for a correct understanding and interpretation of Christian worship.

B. Sound exegetical theology, based on Holy Writ, enables the Church and her members to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4, 24) and makes it possible for the Church to formulate her Lehre vom Gottesdienst as well as her liturgies in a manner which is God - centered and God - pleasing.

C. Exegetical theology, based on Holy Writ, likewise provides the Christian worshipper with theological discernment and insights which equip and encourage him to

reject and repudiate religious error and falsehood and thus contribute substantially to the purity and the resultant power of Christian worship.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

A. Systematic theology extracts and assembles from Holy Writ the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion and redies them for use in Chrsitian worship that God be glorified and the worshipper sanctified and redeemed.

B. Systematic theology includes a study of the nature and work of the Holy Trinity as well as a study of the nature of man and of his proclivities to corruption and sin. Systematic theology sets forth the relationship which exists between God and man, between God who is worshipped and man the worshipper. Such knowledge is a pre-requisite for true Christian worship.

C. Systematic theology, derived from Holy Scripture, impresses upon Christian worshippers a knowledge of their total dependence upon God's own means of grace for a worship - life which is complete, valid, effectual, and soteriological in character and essence.

D. The Lutheran Symbols furnish the prolegomena of the Lehre vom Gottesdienst of the Lutheran Church and focus attention on the emphasis and distinctive character of our Church as a segment of the Holy Christian Church. They thus furnish Lutherans with safeguards and guidelines which help to determine the character of their services of ecclesiastical worship and which also balance and weigh the Church's orders of worship as well as the church - year and its observance.

E. Systematic theology provides Christian worship with much of its terminology and vocabulary; to this terminology and vocabulary it seeks to give sense and meaning which are catholic, true, and clear.

Christ to the woman of Samaria: "Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship." John 4, 22. - St. Paul to the Corinthians: "Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. - Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." 1. Corinthians 14, 11. 12. 19. 33.

F. The Christian Lehre vom Gottesdienst, as set forth in the Lutheran symbols, stresses that Christian worship evince also true unity in doctrine and faith, fervent love for the brethren, and recognition of the need for Christian edification.

Jesus: "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15, 9. St. Paul: "How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." 1. Corinthians 14, 24. - Article XXVIII: "It is proper that the churches should keep such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquility, so far that one do not offend the other, that all things be done in the churches in order, and without confusion, 1. Corinthians 14, 40; "Triglotta, p. 91. - Martin Luther: "(Then;) even if different people make use of different rites, let on one judge or despise the other; -- For external rites -- do not commend us to God, just as food does not commend us to God. But let faith and love commend us to God. Wherefore let this word of Paul govern here: The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Thus no rite is the Kingdom: of God, but faith within you, etc." Formula Missae, Philadelphia ed. of Luther's Works, Vol. VI, p. 92. Again St. Paul: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." 1. Corinthians 13, 1.

G. Exegetical and systematic theology soon decline and become mere academic knowledge and learning when divorced from Christian worship.

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." James 2, 19.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP TO HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

A. The history of the Church testifies to the truth that the portals of hell cannot prevail not only against the Church, but also against her worship.

God said to Elias: "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." Romans 11, 4.

B. The history of the Church and of Christian dogma furnishes proof that Christian worship has played an important part in strengthening those who both rallied to the defense of biblical truth and polemized against error and falsehood.

C. The great historical liturgies of the Church, assembled from the worship materials prepared by many generations of many ages, testify to the fact that the Holy Spirit has established and perpetuated true Christian worship among Christian people of all generations from the day of the first Pentecost of the New Testament era to the present.

These liturgies are therefore also valid historical documents which establish the fact that, throughout the New Testament era and despite sundry aberrations, the Holy Christian Church has always worshipped God in spirit and in truth.

D. The history of Christian art demonstrates that the Church and her members have sought to sublimate Christian worship through use of the arts for the purpose of glorifying God and edifying the children of God.

E. The history of Christian education conveys to us the conviction that members of the Body of Christ of all ages have maintained schools in which the youth of the Church might learn the better "to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Psalm 29, 2.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP OF WORSHIP TO PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

A. Christian worship is a practice, an act, in many cases a habit. It is not a speculative philosophy, a flight of fantasy, or idle dreaming. It is rather a service, an act of faith; it is an act of service rendered to God (*latreia*; *Gottesdienst*). It is a job, a work (*leiturgia*; work of the people). It is, therefore, not an act of self-service, it is not an end in itself. It is not an act which is performed in order to please or obey men. It is rather an act or practice which is performed to please, honor, and obey God who has commanded: "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Matthew 4, 10.

B. From the Christian point of view, all of the Christian life and all acts and practices of the Christian life are Gottesdienste. However, worship per se differs from other practices of the Christian life in that it may be performed by the heart only, without the aid of the human body and its other individual parts. While empathic worship is of great value, especially when it enables us to worship together with fellow-Christians, worship itself may be no more than an outflow of the Christian faith from the heart to its God. Such worship is no less valid than a type of worship which employs the entire human body or any of its members. This explains why some equate Christian worship with the Christian faith.

C. Liturgical worship is a well-organized type of Christian worship which is practiced in obedience to the mandate of Holy Scriptures which says: "Let all things be done decently and in order." 1. Corinthians 14, 40. It is therefore a disciplined, controlled, balanced, and regulated worship - practice which seeks to avoid intemperance, caprice, and vulgarity. Its character and modes of expression are determined in large part by the fact that it is intended for corporate services of worship of people who strive to have their services of worship reflect the fact that they are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar (purchased) people" who seek to show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. 1. Peter 2, 9.

D. Christian worship employs the arts in the service of the Gospel and with the aid of these arts glorifies God and edifies man. The symbolical character of much

Christian art is signally mnemonic and has a great deal in common with the empathic gestures of Christian worship. The Christian Church and her members employ music to vitalize, intensify, and beautify their worship; such music enables worshippers to express that words themselves can often express only inadequately. However, to be truly effective from a Christian point of view, true worship music, like the sermon, must be wortgebunden, it must be bound to the Word.

E. Christian worship employs the pastoral care of souls and also Christian teaching and preaching in order to establish people in their Christian faith, to encourage them to apply their faith in Christian worship habits, and to win others for membership in the Church of Jesus Christ in order that they, too, may learn to worship God in spirit and in truth.

On the other hand, pastoral duties as well as the work of teaching and preaching can and should enable the Holy Spirit the better to establish Christian pastors and teachers in their Christian faith and hence also meliorate and enrich, again in spirit and in truth, their worship of God, their ambassadorship of Christ, and the service they render to others as implements of the Holy Ghost. The very nature of their work should impress upon them the fuller meaning and the greater implications of the well-known theological maxim: Deum colere est Deum habere.

F. When a church-body indulges in error and falsehood, it becomes necessary to remedy not only its false doctrine but also its worship, since both will involve a perversion of God's Word. The Church's Lehre vom Gottesdienst is therefore a practical discipline and the entire area of practical theology is governed by this Lehre which, like the other fundamental doctrines of the Church, insists upon purity and verity also in its practical application. This problem confronted Martin Luther who remarked in part in his Formula Missae et Communionis:

" - - audendum est aliquid in nomine Christi. - - ac sic agemus, ut non amplius solum verbo doctrinae corda regamus, sed manum quoque apponamus et publica administratione in opus perducamus, - - . - - ut communi opera rem communem iuvenus." Erlangen ed., vol. vii, p. 3.

Conclusion

We close with a few remarks by Peter Brunner who stresses that the Christian must arrive at the conclusion:

dasz der Vollzug des Gottesdienstes ein eigentümlich kritisches Geschehen, "eine tatsächliche Krisis einschliesst. Nicht Gottes Wort, nicht Christi Sakrament kommt im Gottesdienst in eine Krisis hinein, aber der Mensch, der hier mit Gottes Wort und Christi Sakrament zusammentrifft. - - Das Wichtigste in allen Bemühungen um den Gottesdienst bleibt doch der rechte geistliche Vollzug durch die versammelte Gemeinde und ihre Diener. Gewiss steht dieses Wichtigste nicht in unserer Macht. Aber ohne rechte Lehre über den Gottesdienst wird es in unserer gegenwärtigen, in vieler. Hinsicht

verwirrten Lage nicht zu einem rechten usus kommen. -- Die Grundordnung, die an alles was Gottesdienst heisst, gestellt werden muss, lautet: Gott muss zu dem, was da geschieht, ja sagen können; es muss für ihn akzeptabel sein. Gottesdienst hängt an Gottes Wohlgefallen. Was Gott wohlgefällt, muss aber in sein Wort und Gebot eingefasst sein. Nur der Gottesdienst gefällt Gott wohl und verdient daher diesen Namen, der in seinem Vollzug gehorsam ist gegenüber Gottes Kundmachung, Gottes Zeichengebung. -- Dogmatisch wird unsere Aufgabe dadurch, dass die Beantwortung der aufgeworfenen Frage bedingungslos an die geschehene Offenbarung Gottes ausgeliefert wird. Nur in dieser Bindung an das Wort der Offenbarung -- ist Lehre vom Gottesdienst möglich. So gewiss wir auch bei der Entfaltung der Lehre vom Gottesdienst auf die Stimme der Väter und der Brüder zu hören haben, so gewiss darf diese Lehre nicht ein historisierender Eklektizismus sein. Indem wir die Lehre vom Gottesdienst an die geschehene Offenbarung bedingungslos ausliefern, wird sie auf der ganzen Linie an dem lebendigen Worte Gottes selbst orientiert sein müssen. "LEITURGIA - Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes. Kassel, 1954, I, pp. 113-114.