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The Unity of the Church and Her Worship

WALTER E. BUSZIN

Luther Against Erasmus

JAMES I. PACKER

To Know and to Do: A Review Article on Training
Children in the Work of Worship

GEORGE W. HOYER

Homiletics

Theological Observer

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The Unity of the Church and Her Worship

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To possess a good understanding of the worship of the church one must possess as well an understanding of the doctrine of the church. Both, the church and her worship, are unique; each shares significant characteristics of the other. Both are creations of the Holy Spirit; both are spiritual in their very essence. The church can neither thrive nor exist without worship. Christian worship, on the other hand, is inconceivable without the church. The church is not only the locus operandi of all true Christian worship; it is also the agency of the Holy Spirit and as such prompts the local churches to propagate and promote Christian worship among people. This Christian worship, on the other hand, is the church's avenue of approach to God, its Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

It is important to note, therefore, that the *In nomine*, the Trinitarian Invocation which marks the beginning of the liturgy of the church, indicates not merely that Christian worship, like Christian theology, is basically Trinitarian in character and expression; but it also indicates that true Christian worship takes place not in our name, but in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The *In nomine* proclaims the fact that the triune God, and not man, is the creator and preserver of true Christian worship. Thus, in a sense, it warns all who worship to keep folly and error out of the services of worship, since folly and error cannot be

offered in the name of the triune God. All attempts to include folly and error are acts of arrogance and sacrilege, which provoke God to displeasure and anger. The contents and signs of true Christian worship are in an altogether different category.

Where the church is, God's own means of grace, the sacred Scriptures and the blessed sacraments, must be present and in use. These same means of grace bind all Christian worship into a united act. Their presence and use are indispensable both for the church and its worship. They are the insignia of the church and the vehicles of her worship.

Like the church, Christian worship is founded on Christ. Both are therefore evangelical in essence. Neither is based on compulsions of a legalistic character. In the church we hear the Gospel of redemption through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. This Gospel is the Magna Charta of the church. The character and content of this Gospel determine also the character and content of the church's worship.

The church is the channel of God's saving Gospel and holy sacraments and through the blessed work of the Holy Spirit the church becomes an inexhaustible point of origin for the worship of God. Because the Lord says concerning the holy Gospel: "It shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55:11), we have the assurance that the worship of the church is also efficacious and successful through Christ.

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When Christian services of worship are conducted, therefore, something of vital importance happens. Each Christian service of worship is a momentous occasion. In each something critical and decisive happens. In each men meet not only with men but with God. In each service men appeal to God, and God issues a verdict. Both appeal and verdict relate themselves to time as well as to eternity. That is why we say that in each service of Christian worship we face a crisis. The critical character of truly Christian worship does not permit us to take this worship lightly and to do in it what we please. "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." These well-known words of St. Paul (Gal. 6:7) apply also to the worship services of the churches, for in the preceding verse, in the opinion of some exegetes, Paul had spoken of communicating the Word of God to others. In Peter Brunner's *Leiturgia* essay, "Zur Lehre vom Gottesdienst der im Namen Jesu versammelten Gemeinde," he impresses upon his readers the utter seriousness of Christian worship.

The teaching about the sacred liturgy does not find its norm in what is happening in the present-day worship services of Christendom; that is, it is not empirically or descriptively oriented. Nor does the teaching concerning the worship service depend on what the congregation or individual members of the congregation have experienced in worship; it is in that sense neither psychologically nor anthropologically oriented. The teaching about the divine liturgy is likewise not the synthetic summation of what has been taught about divine worship in Christendom in the course of centuries. Although we must certainly listen to the voices of the

fathers and brothers on the doctrine of the divine worship, by the same token we dare not permit this teaching to be a historicized eclecticism. Just because we draw our doctrine of the worship service unqualifiedly from the historical revelation, it must be oriented in every respect to the living Word of God.¹

The basic requirement . . . demanded of everything which is called divine worship runs as follows: God must be able to say "yes" to all that takes place; it must be acceptable to Him. Divine worship depends on God's good pleasure. What pleases God, however, must evidently be included in His Word and command. Not in vain did God make known to us what He expects from us. He who will serve Him while ignoring His own revelation can never please Him. Only that divine worship pleases God and deserves this name which in its totality is obedient to God's revelation, God's bestowal of signs, God's institution. . . . The gathering of Christians for divine worship can be true worship only when such worship is nothing else than that service commanded by God Himself.²

The importance and indispensability of Christian worship is impressed on us indelibly when we discover that Christian worship and the saving faith in Christ constitute an indivisible entity. In fact, great teachers of the church, from the days of the ancient fathers to the 20th century, did not hesitate to equate the terms "faith" and "worship" (*Glaube* and *Gottesdienst*). In the Athanasian Creed the church confesses: "This is the true Christian faith, that we worship one God in three persons

¹ *Leiturgia*, ed. Karl Ferdinand Müller and Walter Blankenburg, I (Kassel: Johannes Stauda Verlag, 1954), 114.

² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

and three persons in one God.”³ The Apology of the Augsburg Confession declares: “God wants us to believe Him and to accept blessings from Him; this He declares to be true worship.”⁴ Luther says: “For the true service of God consists in faith in Him whom the Father sent, namely, Jesus Christ.”⁵

Because Christian worship is a gift of God and centers in Christ and His redemptive work, it constitutes a unit which we can identify with only one faith, the Christian faith. Although the faith of some Christians is weaker than that of their fellow believers, the fullness of the worship of the church is not affected. Even the defection of some from both the church and the Christian faith and the false beliefs of others do not impair or destroy the integral unity of the church and her worship. To quote Oskar Bauhofer: “There certainly can be apostasy from the unity, but there cannot be a destruction of this unity.”⁶ The unity of Christian worship is not impaired because acts of worship vary among Christian people.

³ The Athanasian Creed, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c. 1959), p. 19; see *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p. 53.

⁴ Ap IV 228; Tappert, p. 139.

⁵ Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, trans. Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 23 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 22; see Martin Luther, “Des Sechsten Capituls Joannis: Die Dritte Predigt,” *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 33 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1907), 28.

⁶ Oskar Bauhofer, *Die heilige katholische Kirche: Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, in *Ich glaube. Eine Auslegung des apostolischen Glaubensbekenntnisses*, ed. Robert Grosche, 9 (Paderborn: Bonifacius Druckerei, 1936), 167.

Acts of worship are needed, just as we need food and raiment, but acts are external and do not constitute the essence of worship. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession asserts:

For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.⁷

We know, too, that uniformity in worship, though a symbol of the unity of the church, is of value largely because the church through her liturgical uniformity seeks to heed the warning expressed in 1 Cor. 14:33. Here we are told that “God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” Unrelated and chaotic services of worship perplex not only the unschooled and illiterate but also those who are enlightened and of good understanding. Unity of faith and salutary uniformity in worship practices may well be united with each other to indicate that we, as members of the church, strive sincerely to excel in building up the church. (1 Cor. 14:12)

The task of building up the church through her worship is the work of the Holy Trinity, although we appropriate it to the Holy Ghost. All the members of the church are the workmen, the laborers of the Holy Ghost, although special responsibilities are assigned to the clergy. All receive their instructions from the Holy Ghost, who assigns to each his task, coordinates their efforts, and uses His workers to build up one church, the church

⁷ AC VII 2—3; Tappert, p. 32.

of Jesus Christ. The edifice they erect is unique. It is composed of human beings. It is a kingdom, God's rule in action (Mark. 1:15). St. Paul calls it both "God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9) and "God's temple" (1 Cor. 3:16). This edifice has been in the process of erection much longer than any of the cathedrals of the world. The Holy Ghost and his countless laborers have been building it, and the work will not be completed until the parousia of our Lord on Judgment Day.

This edifice is unique because its foundation cannot be replaced or duplicated, nor can the foundation be used as a basis for other edifices. No other edifice can serve the purpose assigned to this building, no other edifice can replace it. St. Paul tells us expressly: "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid." (1 Cor. 3:11)

This edifice is unique also because Christ Himself is the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). St. Peter informs us that the builders of Jesus' day rejected this stone (1 Peter 2:7). In their madness they sought to stone Him (John 10:31), and they finally succeeded in killing Him on the accursed tree of the cross. Yet this stone was the living stone (1 Peter 2:4), which became the Head of the corner (1 Peter 2:7). Though this stone is to many "a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall" (1 Peter 2:8), yet Isaiah already reported: "Therefore thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: "He who believes will not be in haste"' (Is. 28:16). After quoting in part from what Isaiah had reported, St. Peter added: "And He who believes in Him

will not be put to shame" (1 Peter. 2:6). Peter could also have put it thus: "He who worships Him will not be put to shame."

The Foundation and Chief Cornerstone is Jesus Christ. On Him is built not only the church but also all Christian faith and worship. As living stones in this building, Christians possess this faith through Holy Baptism. Christians believe in one church "because all believers are one spiritual body, whose only Head is Christ."⁸ In a similar vein, because all Christian worship has Christ and Him alone as its foundation, because only through Christ can we worship the triune God, the worship of the church also has unity. Despite all synodical, denominational, and organizational divisions among church bodies, despite liturgical divergencies and cultic variants, the essence of true Christian worship remains perfect and unalloyed through the one Christ, whom all true worshipers put on as their protecting garment of righteousness at the time of their baptism (Gal. 3:27). Like the precious Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world and enables men to worship God through the shedding of His blood, worship is to be glorious, holy, and without blemish, and like the church, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). True Christian worship is the worship by the regenerate and redeemed, whose faith is built on Jesus Christ, their Savior, through whom alone they can approach God's exalted throne of grace to receive salvation. For good reason Peter Brunner concludes that "Der Gottesdienst schliesst

⁸ [Heinrich Christian Schwan], *A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c. 1912), p. 99, No. 187; see Eph. 2:20.

unbeschadet der Einmaligkeit des Taufgeschehens einen ständigen Rückgang zur Taufe ein. Er ist ständig Busze, ständig neuer Empfang der Vergebung der Sünden."⁹ We recall the passage of Holy Writ to which the authors of the Augsburg Confession referred at the close of Article VII, where they quoted from St. Paul's majestic *hymnus unitatis* of the *Corpus Christi mysticum* (Eph. 4:4-6): "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." The worship of the church shares with the church this *unverlierbares Wesensmerkmal*; this mark of identification which expresses an ever-existing reality and not merely an ideal, since it is based on Jesus Christ and the *pro vobis* of His most precious Word.

The corporate worship of the church has of necessity a societal character. This societal character is *sui generis*. It involves a fellowship, but this fellowship differs from that of other associations. Because it is so different, some theologians prefer to use the word *koinonia*, a Greek word that can be translated as "fellowship" or "participation." Unfortunately, however, this word is tossed about quite recklessly by some who impose a sentimental, a pietistic, or a purely social meaning upon it.

To Christian theologians *koinonia* is a fellowship in Christ, a fellowship which is enjoyed because it is fostered *in nomine Jesu* and *ad maiorem gloriam Dei*, a fellowship not only among brethren in faith but chiefly with Christ, our Brother. Since

in the blessed Sacrament of the altar we partake of the body and blood of our Lord and there enjoy the closest and most intimate communion with Him who died for us on the cross of Calvary, the fellowship which is ours in the service of Holy Communion is a particularly rich *koinonia* because it is manysided. In fact, both the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Prayer are the exclusive property of those who have been baptized into Christ and who have thus entered into the *koinonia* and royal priesthood of the holy Christian church. In this *koinonia* the Christian worshiper may learn to know his Savior so fully that he counts everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord. (Phil. 3:8)

Together with the other members of the *koinonia* he chants joyfully: "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple" (Ps. 27:4). In this temple of the Lord he finds himself in the best company ever assembled, not only with worshipers of his own day and immediate surroundings but also with the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the holy church throughout all the world. With them all he sings a mighty *Te Deum laudamus*. With them and with David of Old Testament times he exults with fervor: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" (Ps. 133:1). Together with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven the Christian worshiper, in *koinonia* with fellow believers who assemble with him at the Lord's Table, lauds and magnifies God

⁹ Brunner, p. 159.

in an eternal, never-ending *Sanctus* which reverberates through earth and heaven, through time and space to testify to the great fact that heaven and earth are indeed full of God's glory. Here on earth, too, may he sing the majestic *Dignus est Agnus* of Rev. 5:12, thus already now joining his voice to that of the myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands round about the throne, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" As a member of this distinguished fellowship the Christian confesses also privately with St. Paul that the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord, impels him to want to know Christ "and the power of His resurrection," and to share {*koinonia*} "His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death." (Phil. 3:10)

In these words we find expressed the true spirit of the *koinonia* of God's chosen generation and of all true Christian worship. This spirit relates itself most intimately to the *pro vobis* of our Redeemer, to His suffering and death, to His resurrection and ascension. This spirit of the *koinonia* heeds the *Verbum Dei*, it leads to the altar and its blessed sacrament, it encourages prayer and incites to heartfelt song in loud exalted strains. We need not wonder why St. Peter tells all who share this glorious fellowship: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We recall, too, a verse which precedes the one just read, where St. Peter says to all members of the *koinonia*: "Like living stones be yourselves

built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5)

In view of the fact that we are dealing with spiritual concepts when we speak of the church, of Christian worship, the means of grace, and the *koinonia* of God's chosen people, we dare not lose sight of the fact that the church is a militant church, waging unceasing war against all types of sin and corruption. Unfortunately, this Church Militant is also a divided church. Falsehood and error characterize the development of these divisions, and the resultant ecclesiastical denominationalism of the church has always affected also its worship.

In our worship life today we are confronted by problems of denominationalism of a serious and perplexing nature. Fortunately, however, much denominational worship is of necessity catholic in character. For this reason we regret that the word "catholic" has undeservedly been discredited among Christian people, largely because it has been usurped by a denomination which grew out of the Council of Trent and which only in recent years has begun to reexamine many Tridentine statements. Not only by using this word as part of her name and thus giving the word a pronounced denominational slant but also by referring to herself as "*the* Catholic Church," the Roman Catholic Church has prejudiced many Christians against one of the finest and most expressive words in the church's vocabulary. The word implies far more than universality. It indicates what all Christians of all generations have in common in Christ through the effectual work of the Holy Ghost. It includes what is basic and sound and thus

relates itself particularly to the great heritage in worship of the body of Christ and its *koινωνia*. In itself the word "catholic" reveals no denominational distortion or bias; on the contrary, this word calls attention to the ecumenical character of the holy Christian church and discourages a divisive sectarian approach. We therefore rejoice to find it used not only in the ecumenical creeds of Christendom, but also in the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church. In his *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, Edmund Schlink stresses that the terms "unity" and "catholicity" complement each other. He says:

The church is the *one* and, at the same time, the *catholic* church which embraces all believers of all times and in all places. Both characteristics, unity and catholicity, are indeed always in contrast when viewed from the standpoint of church history, since, wherever the church gives expression to her unity in the fellowship of the same order and even the same creeds, not all believers are united . . . the unity and the catholicity of the church are identical not in our observation but in faith. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church is to be believed and is confessed in the same faith which confesses the triune God (Apost., Nic., Art. 3).¹⁰

The Creed "says 'the church catholic,' lest we take it to mean an outward government of certain nations. It is, rather, made up of men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments" (Ap. VII, 10).¹¹

[N. B.: Schlink then defends the authors

of the Lutheran Confessions for using, as a rule, the word "Christian" instead of "catholic."]

The unity and catholicity of the church are identical in the *unity* of the Son of God to whom *all* men are subject, and therewith also the *unity* of the Holy Spirit who creates *every faith* in Jesus Christ and without whom there is no saint on earth.¹²

The members of the Evangelical Confraternity of St. Michael, who wrote "Credo Ecclesiam — von der Kirche heute," have this to say:

The abandonment of the catholicity of perspective always means at the same time the loss of evangelical freedom. Catholicity excludes the sovereignty of the individual and of every ecclesiastical fellowship just as surely as it excludes the exclusiveness of a specific system of doctrine. "Catholicism hinders the catholicity of the church."¹³

Among the many who advocate church union today we often hear it said that the churches should ignore their differences of belief and unite on the basis of what is accepted by all. We know that the problems involved are not as simple as some would have us believe. We know, too, that whatever conclusion is reached must of necessity be related to the worship of the church. Church union without unity in the faith soon becomes a mockery and involves deception of self and of others. In the worship life of the church, catholicity in the faith must go hand in hand with unity in the faith and with a faithful and salu-

¹⁰ Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c. 1961), pp. 204 f.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 208

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹³ "Ältester und Rat der Evangelischen Michaelsbruderschaft," *Credo Ecclesiam: Von der Kirche heute* (Kassel: Johannes Stauda Verlag, 1955), p. 28.

tary type of Biblical confessionalism. The teachings or doctrines of the Lutheran church, as set forth in its confessional writings, are not abstract in substance or of historical interest only. In the worship of the church they are put to practical and concrete use. Denial and disregard of Christian doctrine, too, are live and animate and soon assert themselves when present in services of divine worship. Let us illustrate what has been said and point to resulting developments.

Many American Protestants appear to be almost exclusively interested only in a this-world religion. Protestantism's stress on a *Diesseitsreligion* by the second decade of the present century had given rise to a social gospel. Preaching often was hardly more than moralizing. Many Protestants stressed a type of brotherhood which was thoroughly unionistic and which ignored the basic concepts of the *koinonia* which we described before. In our opinion, a liturgical approach to worship cannot easily be related to developments of this kind. Liturgical worship was subjected to much ridicule, and standards of worship were adopted which would have horrified John Calvin, Huldreich Zwingli, John Knox, and other fathers of the Reformed churches.

Naturally, these developments affected also the music of the Protestant churches. While this music had already previously become romantic, it now became effervescent, pretty, and cute. Protestant composers tended to ignore texts which mentioned the subject of death. Publishers of sacred choral music asked composers and editors to avoid texts which mentioned death and which related themselves to the final Judgment and to eternity. Choirs

sang music which focused attention on melody, sentimental harmony, and rhythm and not on glorious texts of the Bible, the liturgies, and the hymnody of the church. Music dealers sold almost countless copies of "Brighten the Corner Where You Are" and "One Sweetly Solemn Thought." In many churches professional quartets replaced choirs; each member of these quartets was a soloist in his own right and usually sang accordingly. Solo singing abounded and virtually everywhere one heard "The Holy City" and "The Lost Chord." In funeral services one heard "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere," and, in the order of nuptials, "Hold Thou My Hand." In Christmas services the great theme of the Feast of the Nativity, ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, was ignored and congregations heard instead works like Pietro Yon's *Gesu Bambino*, accompanied by organ with chimes and the *vox humana*. On Easter the majestic *Et resurrexit* theme of the day was ignored, and one heard either pompous anthems in which the organ accompaniment drowned out the choir, or charming ditties on the appearance of leaves, buds, and flowers in the springtime; the Easter service was thus related to worship services of the Era of Rationalism.

The situation became so bad that a reaction was bound to set in. It began notably after World War II, when greater stress was put on better and more appropriate church music, on a return to the music of the master composers of the church, on a revival of the classical hymns of the church, on higher standards of worship practice, and on a deeper, more esthetically-oriented regard for liturgical worship. The influence of the renaissance in Christian worship coursed its way even into

denominations whose standards of worship had been rather low. Probably there are not many church bodies today who resist the liturgical renaissance consistently, unless this be true of some groups who may be classed as the ecclesiastical descendants of the Anabaptists of old.

Despite the fact that the liturgical renaissance in the Christian church is already a century old and that this renaissance found its way to America more than three decades ago, it still has not found widespread acceptance in America. Though it may never achieve widespread acclaim and popularity, this renaissance has nevertheless done the church much good. That is conceded even by enemies of the movement. While the progress of the liturgical renaissance has been retarded largely by extremists within the movement, many have begun to realize that, to be successful in the best sense of the term, a liturgical renaissance must primarily be spiritual and theological. A spiritual and theological approach will help to curb license and caprice and discountenance extremes and folly in ceremonies and rituals.

Since American Lutherans have much contact with American Protestantism, some non-Lutheran thinking has found its way into our circles, a type of thinking which conflicts with sound principles and practices of Lutheran worship. Education in the genius of the Lutheran liturgy is needed. Do we often discuss with our people the nature of Lutheran worship? We receive people into communicant membership without alerting them to the intimate relationship which exists between our chief order of worship, the Order of Holy Communion, and Holy Communion itself.

Despite various unfortunate excrescences, we should begin to realize that, as indicated before, the liturgical renaissance has matured considerably in recent years and that it need no longer resort to experiments which create a chaotic condition and perhaps even give offense. Offense is sometimes taken at perfectly proper liturgical practices because people have not been informed or instructed as they should have been. Pastors, teachers, and parents may inculcate into those entrusted to their care strong prejudices and hatreds which bind consciences and subject the minds and hearts of people to attitudes and predispositions which weaken the faith, deprive people of Christian liberty which Holy Writ accords, and endanger the unity of the church.

Our Lutheran liturgy reflects the mind of the church. It is for us as teachers, preachers, and theologians of the church to imbue the members of the church with the mind of the church, lest we create the same condition which developed in the Reformed community and among the many American Protestants of other traditions. Those who harbor a strong aversion to the liturgical worship practices of the church are reacting against sobriety, against what is well balanced and normal. While, therefore, we by no means endorse every liturgical practice in the Lutheran Church, there are several fundamental attitudes among us which have served as valuable liturgical fences. Our profound regard for the Bible as the inspired Word of God, as well as our ready acceptance of the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, have kept us and our liturgies in tow; our hymns have also helped us to retain an eschatological outlook. This outlook in

turn leads us to insist that our services of worship be Christocentric. Anthropocentrism in liturgy is dangerous.

The work of the church is so closely related to the work done in her schools that it often becomes difficult to separate the one from the other, for in our schools we prepare the future adults, the future pastors, teachers, and lay people of the church. That is why it is important, too, that in our schools we stress the study of the worship of the church and that we impress upon the youth of the church that all true Christian worship centers in the Holy Trinity.

Our youth, too, must learn that our worship is of necessity also eschatological. We do not want our people ever to put out of mind the hope of the parousia of their Lord Jesus. On the contrary, they must learn to say: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20)

Our Lutheran pastors stress the doctrine of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith as the cardinal doctrine of the Christian religion, and they also regard acceptance of this doctrine as the prime requisite for the unity and worship life of the church. In their pastoral work as well as in their sermons they faithfully link up this doctrine with the doctrine of the last things; they remind us constantly that man is mortal and must face his Savior as Judge on Judgment Day. All of life, so they remind us, is an opportunity to worship God and to prepare for a departure to the everlasting mansions through the redemptive work of Christ. In our chorales the subjects of death and resurrection are treated so consistently, especially in their closing stanza(s), that this is regarded as

a reliable mark of recognition of Lutheran hymnody. We agree with Werner Elert:

In the early church, dogma tended to be confession; it actually contains the confession of the early church in its formal structure, and confession means divine worship. One can invert this and say: every divine worship is confession. In the New Testament there are many formulae, prayers, blessings, acclamations, doxologies, which evidently were in liturgical use already in early days. They indicate that confessing or proclaiming is life's highest consummation even apart from its missionary task, and they constitute, in any event, the beginning of all later confessional constructions. According to Paul, this kerygmatic character is to characterize also the celebration of the Lord's Supper.¹⁴

In actuality, not only the historical manifestations of early Christian orthodoxy but also the dogma as theological expression has its *Sitz-im-leben*. In the early church only that is dogma which possesses liturgical dignity.¹⁵

In the liturgy we find eschatological emphases which both sober and inspire us. The liturgy certainly is doctrinal and Christ-centered and thus helps bring us closer to Scriptural truth and to our Savior. The church year stresses the cardinal doctrine of justification and yet gives due stress also to the other fundamental doctrines of the church. It is eschatological chiefly on the last Sundays of the Trinity Season and on the Sundays in Advent.

While throughout the world the sermon plays an important part in Lutheran ser-

¹⁴ Werner Elert, *Abendmahl und Kirchengemeinschaft in der alten Kirche hauptsäch-lich des Ostens* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954), p. 93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

vices of worship, we realize at the same time that not the sermon only, but all parts of our liturgical services of worship are important. If anything is not important, it does not belong in the liturgy; it is excess baggage which burdens our worship and ignores our Lutheran insistence on liturgical economy. Taking our cue from the liturgy, we Lutherans insist that only if we stress the *Gloria in excelsis Deo* can we live out in our worship life the *et in terra pax hominibus*. Unlike other denominations, we train a large percentage of our church musicians in our own schools and thus impress upon them their duties and attitudes as servants of the church. We are in the very forefront among denominations in the renaissance of organ building, and we realize that this renaissance is indicative not merely of cultural interest and advancement among our people but also of a desire for healthier standards of worship within the church.

We are indeed aware of the truth expressed by Ernest B. Koenker in *Worship in Word and Sacrament*:

The worship of the church, like its theologies, ethics, creeds, and confessions, begins with an action of God. Worship has its source in God, in certain redeeming, historical acts in which God brought about His purposes. . . . We must remember that in its primary sense worship is God's action in Christ; only secondarily is it man's action.¹⁶

Although a long chapter on the use of the arts in worship could be appended at this point, we shall content ourselves with a few words. Koenker says:

¹⁶ Ernest B. Koenker, *Worship in Word and Sacrament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 11.

Both Bible and liturgy are . . . a proclamation of man's sin and God's grace. They are a report on the most significant events in history. Christian art as well is not merely an artist's concoction, his manipulation of an idea or sentiment; it is "news of reality," whether this be in the very ground plan of the structure, in the symbolism of stained-glass windows, or in a Gregorian chant. . . . The arts utilized in worship, whether cantatas or responses, magnificent structures or Eucharistic vessels, triptychs, or bronzework, find their source in, and contribute to, the promulgation of the mystery of Christ's redemptive work. Each of these forms has its distinctive mode of addressing those to whom the mysteries are revealed as well as those who are without.¹⁷

To insure the unity of the church and to safeguard her worship, God has given us His Word, the symbols of the church, the great liturgies of Christendom, the music and the other arts of the church. The very fact that God has given us all these gifts should indicate to us how profoundly concerned God is about the unity of His church and her people. On the other hand, since God has given us these gifts in great abundance, ought we not be deeply concerned about using them faithfully and joyously and for the foremost purpose for which they are intended? Is it perhaps necessary that we rethink matters, that we cross-examine ourselves, and subject our attitudes not to one but to many and various acid tests? If we do this, we may discover, much to our discomfort, that our approach to the problems of church unity and ecclesiastical worship has been too academic and esoteric, that, at least at times, it has been the very type of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 74 f.

thing against which St. Paul warned Timothy, namely a "disputing about words, which does no good" (2 Tim. 2:14). Such disputing bruises the worship of Christian parishes, especially when it finds its way into pulpits and classrooms and is coupled with pugnacity and rancor.

In order to help prevent this, God has given us not only the blessed means of grace, but also hymns, music, and art. These latter gifts relax us as they refine our spirit. They help to drive away evil

thoughts, and they reduce the strain of our tensions. These gifts should, as Luther said repeatedly, be regarded not as mere creations of men but rather as gifts of God. Luther also said repeatedly that music vitalizes and animates the texts and words used in our worship. Our church music and our hymns are indeed *vivae voces evangelii* and the church's unity in Christ is the great *cantus firmus* of all true Christian worship.

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