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The Liturgical Shape of the Old Testament Gospel

Alan Ludwig

The liturgy is a great treasure of the Christian church. The church has always held in highest esteem not only the Holy Scriptures but also her creeds, catechisms, and liturgical forms. The Evangelical Lutheran Church continues in this tradition. At Augsburg in 1530, the Lutheran princes confessed:

We are unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass. Without boasting, it is manifest that the Mass is observed among us with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents. . . . Meanwhile no conspicuous changes have been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung in addition to the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people. (CA XXIV 1, 9, 2 Ger)

Today, however, there are many who believe that if the Lutheran Church is to be a viable church in a populist-pluralist religious culture, she cannot continue to be a liturgical church. Liturgy, after all, is an *adiaphoron* – often interpreted as a commodity that we may take or leave – and, therefore, in Christian freedom, leave it we must. Traditionalists then scramble to defend the liturgy to doubting fellow-pastors and dubious parishioners. One way of doing this is to show how biblical the liturgy is. Some of us have seen worship folders and even hymnbooks that give scriptural references showing the sources of the liturgical rite.¹

Indeed, the liturgy is heavily loaded with the words of holy writ. But is it biblical only in that its texts are taken from Scripture? Why not then replace it with something totally different, something more relevant to modern culture that also draws its language from the Bible? In this essay, I shall argue that not only is the liturgy biblical, the Bible is liturgical. God's gracious work of deliverance from sin is the true liturgy. The very gospel, including the gospel of the Old Testament, has a liturgical shape.

¹ E.g., *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), in all five settings of the Divine Service, gives Bible references for nearly every part of the liturgy.

When I say “liturgical shape,” I mean something rather different from how this is commonly understood. In his highly influential book, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dom Gregory Dix attempted to identify common features that underlay the liturgies of the first few centuries. He determined a four-action *shape* of the Eucharist that, when properly performed, re-presents or actualizes the original event.² The merits and drawbacks of Dix’s “liturgical shape” are too complex to be explored here. Suffice it to say that I shall not attempt to reconstruct the precise liturgical patterns of the tabernacle or temple—a speculative task at best.³ Nor am I entirely comfortable with the views of Dix, Odo Cassell, and some Old Testament scholars such as Mowinckel, Pedersen, and von Rad that a dramatic recreation of an original saving event somehow mystically makes that event real for worshipers in the present, as though the reenactment is what does it.⁴ By *liturgical shape*, I mean rather that the gospel in the Old Testament has recognizable liturgical dimensions. The gospel—that is, God’s gracious self-manifestation in space and time to save sinners—in its height, length, and breadth is the archetypical divine service that was the source of Israel’s ritual and ultimately the fount of our own liturgy.

I. The Liturgy of Paradise

Let us begin at the beginning, with the first divine service. We all know the story: the LORD God created heaven and earth and saw that it was very good. He planted a garden, made a man in his own image and likeness to care for it, and gave him a woman as a helpmate. The one-flesh union of man and woman already has liturgical overtones as it typifies Christ and the church, specifically, Christ’s love for the church in giving himself for her and washing her in water with the word (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:22-33).

² Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: A. & C. Black, 1945; reprint New York: Seabury Press, 1982). For a helpful summary of Dix’s views see Timothy C. J. Quill, *The Impact of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism*, Drew Series in Liturgy 3 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 49-59.

³ For a survey of modern investigation of the origins Israelite worship, and the lack of scholarly consensus, see Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), 1-25.

⁴ See Alan Ludwig, “Remembrance and Re-presentation in Israel’s Worship,” S.T.M. Thesis (Concordia Seminary, 1991), for an examination of “re-presentation” in Old Testament scholarship and a critique of it based on Old Testament cultic institutions.

God gave the man and woman one commandment only: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you will surely die" (Gen 2:17). We know what happened next: the serpent beguiled the woman; she ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree; she gave her husband to eat; their eyes were opened; they knew they were naked; and they made themselves cloaks of fig leaves. Through one man's transgression death entered the world. God's exceedingly good creation became subject to futility. Now in paradise were found sinners.

The First Liturgy of Paradise after the Fall

Enter the divine liturgist. The LORD God himself came to seek the cowering Adam and his wife. As father confessor, he elicited from the pair an admission of guilt. As preacher, God not only proclaimed the law of sin and death, but the *Protoevangelium*—final defeat of the serpent by the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15).⁵ The LORD God himself preached the first sermon of law and gospel. God had said, "On the day you eat of it, you will surely die." Why then did Adam and Eve go on living? We cannot legitimately stretch the Hebrew *ביום אכלך ממנו*, "On the day of your eating from it," to the 930 years Adam walked the earth. Nor can we simply say that the slow process of death began on the day that Adam and Eve sinned, or that on this day they received a death-sentence to be carried out later.⁶ The guilty pair did die that day; they were driven from Eden and deprived of the tree of life—a walking death. But does this do full justice to the circumstance? Death as God threatened it, and as the man and the woman would have understood it, must also have brought an immediate end to walking, to breathing, however, end of story. "On that day," the divine liturgist had come not so much to execute the sentence of death as to preach the life-

⁵ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 2 vols. (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1942; reprint Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, n.d.), 1:163-170. Many modern interpreters reject outright a messianic interpretation, e.g., Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. Scullion S.J., Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 260-261. A middle view is taken by Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco: TX: Word, 1987), 80-81. Wenham believes that in light of subsequent revelation the verse may have a *sensus plenior* as *protoevangelium*, but this was not the narrator's own understanding. A question arises as to whether זרע, "seed," may be understood in the singular here. Modern commentators usually say no. But, as Galatians 3 makes clear, apostolic exegesis could view it both ways. Paul stresses the oneness of Abraham's seed and refers it to Christ, but later calls the plurality of the Galatian Christians "Abraham's seed" (Gal 3:16, 19, 29).

⁶ Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 1:128; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 67-68; contra Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 224. Cf. 1 Kgs 2:37, 42, where the same construction unambiguously means that death will take place on the same day.

giving promise. This life-giving promise overcame the death that had already come to the sinners and that was to be the quick and sure penalty of their transgression. Adam understood this. He understood and believed. In the face of his own eventual return to the dust from which he was taken, he nevertheless named his wife חַוָּה, ζωή, "life," because she was to become the mother of all living, the mother of the Life-giver.⁷ Eve apparently made a similar confession of faith in the naming of her firstborn, when she said, קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה. According to the most natural rendering of the Hebrew text, she said something like, "I have got a man—Yahweh." Luther interpreted it as such in his translation of the Bible into German.⁸ Modern interpreters are inclined to doubt this sense on rational grounds, but grammatically it has much to commend it.⁹ God's proclamation that her seed would vanquish the serpent aroused in her the expectation of the soon coming of the divine-human savior. That Eve was mistaken in her identification does not nullify the genuineness of the faith created in her by the promise. Such was the power of the service of the word.

Then came the liturgy of the sacrament: "And the LORD God made tunics of skin for the man and his wife, and clothed them" (Gen 3:21). Even allowing for the terse style and sparse details of the Genesis narrative, we cannot say for certain that this was a full-blown sacrifice. Yet God took the skin from somewhere. There was a death, the first death ever, life given for life, substitution, the first shedding of blood, and a divine clothing that covered the naked sinners in place of their self-made garments of fig leaves. This sign sealed the promise and signified the means by which the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. If not a sacrifice in the fully developed sense, this was surely the prototype of later blood

⁷ "It was through the power of divine grace that Adam believed the promise with regard to the woman's seed, and manifested his faith in the name which he gave to his wife. חַוָּה (Eve), signifying life ... or life-spring, is a substantive ... from חָיָה = חַיָּה (xix. 32, 34) the life-receiving one." C. F. Keil, *The Five Books of Moses*, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983 reprint), 1:106.

⁸ Luther's 1545 version: "Ich habe den Mann, den HERRN." The 1912 revision has "Ich habe einen Mann gewonnen mit dem HERRN."

⁹ "So far as the grammar is concerned, the expression אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה might be rendered, as in apposition to אִישׁ, "a man, the Lord" (Luther) ..." Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1:108. Keil rejects this translation on the basis of sense, saying that the promise did not specify the divine nature of the seed. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 290, notes that the prep. אֶת, is never used in the sense given it here, "with the help of." Wenham is in doubt as to which is right; *Genesis 1-15*, 101.

sacrifice.¹⁰ We see this same divine ministry of the word and “sacrament” in Genesis 15, where Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness (15:6), and the promise was sealed with the shedding of blood as the LORD walked among the cut-up animal victims (15:8–20). In Genesis 22 we see the same divine provision of a substitutionary life, where the LORD gave a ram in place of Isaac as his father was about to slay him on the altar.

These Genesis passages highlight that blood sacrifice is above all a gift of God to man. It is a sealing of the messianic promise. Sacrifice points to and typifies the one true propitiatory sacrifice of Christ on the cross—a truth lost to all manmade religions, and, alas, too often forgotten by Israel. Put in Lutheran dogmatic terms, sacrifice was in first place sacramental. As the LORD said to Moses: “For the life of the flesh in the blood ... and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your lives” (Lev 17:11). Some of the sacrifices prescribed by the *torah* were also responsorial gifts of man to God. But all were primarily gifts of God to man. This can be most clearly seen in Genesis 3, where the transgressors had nothing good to offer for themselves. God came to them, slew the victim, and covered them with his death that they might live. For Adam and Eve, another suffered in their stead. A substitute died for them and hid their shame, as a token of the coming redemption of the promised seed.

The Ongoing Liturgy of Paradise as a Foundation for Worship

In important ways this liturgy in Eden became a foundation for Israel’s worship. The divine service in the garden was never repeated; the man and woman were driven out, and cherubim with whirling, flaming swords guarded its entrance to the east. Yet, in his mercy, God gave sinners a new entrance to paradise—from the east! From the east, worshippers entered the tabernacle and later the temple, whose cherubim, gold, precious stones, figures of palm trees, and pomegranates all recall the lost paradise described in Genesis 2–3, but whose entrance is no longer barred. Indeed, these sanctuaries were little Edens where, like Adam and Eve before the fall, the worshipers met with God and found acceptance through the blood of sacrifices. The Psalms sometimes extol the temple in the language of paradise. David sings:

How precious is your steadfast love, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the fat of your house, and you give them to drink from the river of your “edens” [עֲדֵנַי] (i.e.,

¹⁰ So Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1:106.

your delights). For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light. (Ps 36:7-9 [36:8-10 MT])

The liturgical foundations of Genesis 3 for Christian worship also should not escape us. Is not the cross our entrance to paradise?¹¹ Does the church not also with glad hearts sing psalms such as the one just quoted? Do we not confess that in the liturgy it is God who comes to us sinners, seeking us out, reviving us with his word and quickening us with the body and blood of the innocent victim? Do we not also confess that our divine service is not only a joining with the worship of heaven but also a partaking of paradise, a foretaste of the coming Lamb's feast, and a preview of the day in which we shall have a share in the tree of life?

Perhaps some will think that I have gone too far in casting Genesis 3 as a divine liturgy of word and sacrament. Indeed, I have deliberately superimposed some basic liturgical terminology upon the text. This is to make the point that it can plausibly be done. Would it be equally possible to describe, say, your typical contemporary worship event in liturgical terms? I think not. The contrasts are just too great. Nor would it be easy to find much in common between Genesis 3, where God came to save sinners, and some of today's contemporary worship, where people strive to raise themselves up to God. Can you imagine spinning a tale of the events in Eden as so-called entertainment evangelism? I cannot – unless it be the serpent's cunning persuasion of the woman as he appealed to her senses against the word of God. No, God's rescue of fallen humanity in the garden is liturgy not at all in the contemporary-cultural sense. It is liturgy in the traditional sense, if only in this, that a gracious God came to rescue sinners, and did so through means. Since then, the surroundings have changed, and the liturgical texts have developed. Yet, in the liturgy of Eden as happens in true liturgy of all times and places, God proclaimed and sealed to sinners the life-giving promise in the face of sin and death. This is the essence of the gospel; this is the essence of the liturgy.

II. The Liturgy of Deliverance

Without question the central event in the Old Testament is the exodus from Egypt. What the cross is to the New Testament, the exodus is to the Old. Through the exodus, the promises to the fathers began to be realized. By means of the exodus, Israel became God's people, and God dwelt in

¹¹ "Who on the tree of the cross didst give salvation unto mankind that, whence death arose, thence Life might rise again; and that he who by a tree once overcame might likewise by a tree be overcome" (the traditional Proper Preface for Lent).

their midst. Psalmists and prophets hymned the exodus. Subsequent and even eschatological events find prophetic expression in terms of a new exodus. In its historical and typological import, the exodus can hardly be overestimated. It marks a new milestone in God's dealings with humanity.

In Genesis God had made himself known to the fathers by his name El Shaddai, perhaps best rendered as "God Almighty."¹² He provided for them, blessed them, protected and defended them. Now in Exodus God reveals his name, יהוה. The etymological meaning of this name is much debated, but Yahweh himself told Moses exactly what his self-revelation by this name meant. He had heard the groaning of his people. He would deliver and redeem them from Egypt. He would fulfill for them the promises made to their fathers. He would be their God and they would be his people (Exod 6:4-8).¹³ This is the true meaning of the name Yahweh, whatever its correct etymological explanation may be. Here, for the first time, in connection with this name, the rich Old Testament vocabulary of salvation makes its appearance. Words such as נָצַל (deliver), גָּאֵל (redeem), and יָשַׁע (save), apply to God's activity in bringing up his people from Egypt.¹⁴ To put the matter in catechetical terms: God's revelation of his name El Shaddai consisted largely of those works comprehended in the first article of the creed. Any patriarch could say of El Shaddai, "He has given me my body and soul ... he richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life ... he defends me against all danger, guards and protects me from all evil." God's revelation of his name Yahweh largely comprises the second article of the creed. Any Israelite standing on the other side of the Red Sea could confess: "He has redeemed me ... purchased and won me ... that I may be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him." Redemption is the hallmark of the exodus from Egypt.

¹² The precise meaning of יהוה is very much an open question in modern scholarship. The LXX translates יהוה as παντοκράτωρ 14 times. This usage is reflected in the Book of Revelation. In Genesis this name is generally found in contexts of God's creating and preserving activity.

¹³ In Exodus 6:4-8 Yahweh lists 7 self-revelatory acts, 3 in the past and 4 in the future, which are marked at the beginning and end with the *inclusio* "I am Yahweh."

¹⁴ E.g., In Exodus 6:6 we encounter נָצַל Hiph., "to snatch away, deliver," and גָּאֵל, "to redeem with a price, to act as kinsman-redeemer." In 14:30 יָשַׁע, "to save," is used of God's rescuing Israel from Egypt through the sea, as well as its cognate noun יְשׁוּעָה, "salvation," in 14:13 and 15:2.

The First Liturgy of the Exodus Event

Yahweh's deliverance of his people from Egyptian bondage has a markedly liturgical shape. If Genesis 3 suggests the liturgy, then the Book of Exodus defines it. God accomplished the salvation of his people by means of both word and "sacrament," if you will. This time Yahweh worked through his servant Moses. God was no less involved than he was in Eden, when there was no one else who could preach but himself. At the burning bush, Yahweh said to Moses, "I have seen the affliction of my people ... and I have come down to deliver them from Egypt" (Exod 3:7-8). Yet he said to Moses, "Go, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people up from Egypt" (Exod 3:10). Everything Yahweh did to rescue his people, he did through Moses and Aaron. If you study the text of Exodus carefully, you will see that Moses and Yahweh are inseparably intertwined in the work of redemption. The rod of Moses is the rod of God (Exod 4:20);¹⁵ the hand of God and the hand of Moses are as one (e.g., Exod 4:21; 14:16, 31). In this matter, the text of Exodus takes us to the very edge of orthodoxy. To Moses' continued objections about being sent, Yahweh responded:

Is there not Aaron your brother? ... You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. And he will speak for you to the people. And it will come about that he will be your mouth, and you will be his God. (Exod 4:14-16)¹⁶

Later Yahweh also says to Moses, "You will be God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet" (Exod 7:1). Moses of course is not actually God in his person, but in Exodus he and Yahweh are so closely identified in the ministry of deliverance that he functions in God's stead. One can scarcely avoid thinking of the incarnation. This is good and right, for Moses is indeed a type of Christ, the greater deliverer, the greater עֶבֶר יְהוָה ("servant of Yahweh"). Moses is also the prototype of how God

¹⁵ There is no warrant in the text for distinguishing the rod of Moses from the rod of God, as though they were two different rods; contra William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, Anchor Bible 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 227-228.

¹⁶ So Luther's Bible: "er soll dein Mund sein, und du sollst sein Gott sein." The RSV translation of Exod 4:16, "and you shall be to him as God," is too weak. וְאַתָּה תְּהִי־לִי לְאֵלִים is the same construction as in 6.7, וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לְאֵלִים, translated "and I will be their God." Moreover, the previous phrase in Exod 4:16, translated by the RSV "and he shall be a mouth for you," has exactly the same syntax as this one. The RSV adds the same buffer-word "as" in Exod 7:1.

works through his called servants of all times—then priests and prophets, and now, ministers of the gospel.

The liturgy of redemption in Exodus 4 commences with the service of the word. Yahweh sent Moses to proclaim Israel's deliverance. Because he was not "a man of words," but was "heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue" (Exod 4:10), Aaron became his mouth. Moses, of course, did signs, yet Exodus 4-11 centers on preaching; the signs served to confirm the word. This was a word of deliverance to God's people, but a word of judgment to those who resisted the word and will of Yahweh. The prominence of the signs should not obscure the fact that the word itself was living and active. The word was a two-edged sword, both working faith and strengthening the hardness of unbelief in its hearers. Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart only after Pharaoh repeatedly hardened his own heart against the proclamation.¹⁷ When the children of Israel heard the same word Pharaoh would hear and saw the same signs Pharaoh would see, they believed (Exod 4:31). Faith comes by hearing. Indeed, like that of saints of all times, Israel's faith vacillated when things got worse. They held to a theology of glory, not a theology of the cross. Yahweh had seen their afflictions and promised to deliver them, yet their immediate experience ran counter to that word as Pharaoh afflicted them even more. Weak and wavering though the children of Israel's faith was, it was a true faith wrought by the preaching of the gospel.

In Exodus 12 comes a dramatic shift. Public preaching had ended. Now began the liturgy of the faithful. Now Yahweh would save, deliver, and sustain his people through the Passover, the Red Sea crossing, manna from heaven, water from the rock—types of the eucharist and baptism (1 Cor 10:1-13). The rich theology and typology of these things cannot be explored here. What is important for us to note is that the God of Israel served his people through means: not only through the word and its confirming wonders, but now through the elements of his created order. He sent his people out of Egypt by means of the Passover. He freed Israel

¹⁷ In Exodus 4-14 various expressions for hardening the heart are almost equally divided between Pharaoh's hardening his own heart and Yahweh's hardening it. The verbs used are הִזַּק ("to be strong," Pi. "to make strong"); כָּבֵד ("to be heavy," Hiph. "to make heavy"); and once קָשָׁה (Hiph. "to harden"). For the first 5 plagues, it is Pharaoh whose heart is "strong/heavy" or who "hardens/strengthens his own heart" (Exod 7:13 22; 8:15; 9:35 [הִזַּק]; 7:14; 8:11; 28; 9-7 34 [כָּבֵד]). It is only at the 6th plague that Yahweh begins to intervene (9:12 [הִזַּק Pi.]; cf. also 4:21[הִזַּק Pi.]; 7:3 [קָשָׁה Hiph.]; 10:1 [כָּבֵד Hiph.], 10:20, 27 [both הִזַּק Pi.]; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17 [all הִזַּק Pi.]).

and destroyed their enemies through the waters of the sea. The spiritual food and drink he gave kept them alive in the wilderness.

There is something quite new in this liturgy of deliverance, yet something that is familiar to us all from our own liturgy:

And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him. And Moses and Aaron went and gathered all the elders of the children of Israel: and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had seen their affliction, then they bowed down and worshiped. (Exod 4:28-31)

The preaching of the word worked faith in the hearers, and the faithful then responded to God's grace in the way that faith responds. This same faith and worship-response of the faithful is found again in the service of the sacrament. When Moses had finished giving instructions for the Passover, the people again "bowed down and worshiped" (Exod 12:27). Yet again, on the other side of the sea just after the crossing:

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And Israel saw the great hand¹⁸ which the LORD did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD; and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses. (Exod 14:30-31)

In this last instance the emphasis is not on hearing, as it was in the liturgy of the word, but on seeing: sacraments are for the eyes.¹⁹ Moses had urged the people to stand still and see the salvation of Yahweh (Exod 14:13); Israel saw and believed. What is the very next thing they did? They sang. They sang to Yahweh, confessed his name, rehearsed his mighty

¹⁸ A literal translation of the Hebrew *יְמִינֵהוּ*. This is likely a reference to Moses' hand that he stretched out over the sea (Exod 14:16, 21, 26, 27). The Song of the Sea also speaks of Yahweh's "right hand" (*יְמִינֵהוּ*) shattering the enemy (Exod 15:6). Yet this hand never manifested itself apart from Moses' hand.

¹⁹ "When we are baptized, when we eat the Lord's body, when we are absolved, our hearts should firmly believe that God really forgives us for Christ's sake. Through the Word and the rite God simultaneously moves the heart to believe and take hold of faith, as Paul says (Rom 10:17), 'Faith comes from what is heard.' As the Word enters through the ears to strike the heart, so the rite itself enters through the eyes to move the heart" (Ap XIII 4-5).

deed of deliverance through water, and confessed their future hope. The Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 is not some simple-minded little praise ditty, the kind of thing some might expect in that impoverished setting. No, this is a full-blown liturgical composition, complete with strophes, refrains, and antiphonal singing. How did they do it on the spot? Perhaps Moses and Aaron composed it and sang it themselves, or taught it to a few while the others crossed over. The women sang the refrain (Exod 15:21). The Song of the Sea is a great work of art, one of the marvelous hymns of the Bible, and a tremendous testimony to the power of proper divine service to create faith in the participants and elicit a response of thankful praise.

And so we see that Yahweh's work of freeing his people from Egyptian tyranny gained the liturgical rhythm with which we are all familiar. God spoke and acted; as a result the people believed and gave right praise: "Yahweh is a man of war; Yahweh is his name" (Exod 15:3).

The Ongoing Liturgy of Deliverance after the Exodus

The Tabernacle. The liturgical structure and liturgical rhythms of the exodus event are impressive enough. Yet an even more striking feature of the Book of Exodus is how closely the historical exodus from Egypt is tied up with the ongoing liturgical life of Israel. In fact, salvation in space and time and the ritual of Israel are inseparable in the Book of Exodus. Sometimes they are virtually indistinguishable. This is evident in a number of ways. One of the most obvious ways is the prominence of the tabernacle. Thirteen chapters—roughly one-third of the book—concern the tabernacle, its furnishings, and its personnel. This is a lot when you consider that the central event, the Red Sea crossing, gets only two chapters, and one of these is a poetic retelling. The giving of the *Torah* rates only six chapters. Furthermore, the building and dedication of the tabernacle serve as the climax of the book, the culmination of everything that has come before, as the Glory of Yahweh fills the structure (Exod 40:34–38). Yahweh delivered his people not just to say that he had done so. Nor was his main goal to rout the gods of Egypt, which he marvelously did. Yahweh's purpose was other. He said:

There [in the tent of meeting] I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests. And I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God. (Exod 29:43–46)

Yahweh's goal was to restore the communion with mankind that had been broken by Adam and Eve in Eden. Because the sons of Israel were

still the sons of Adam, who could not behold his face and live, he mediated his presence among them by tabernacle, priesthood, and altar. Without these liturgical furnishings and personnel, without the sacrifices and accompanying rituals, there would have been no communion with God. Without this communion there would have been no true knowledge that he was Yahweh their God who had brought them out of Egypt.²⁰ Thus the act of redemption and the ongoing liturgy of redemption are cut from one cloth.

The Song of the Sea. We have already considered how the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 was Israel's faith-response after the Red Sea crossing. Thematically the song serves as a hinge, summing up what has preceded and anticipating what follows. It unites exodus and cult. Most simply this song can be divided into two parts. Verses 1-12 retell Yahweh's mighty victory over the Egyptians in the sea. Verses 13-18 look toward the future, when Yahweh will bring his people to his sanctuary on his holy mountain.²¹ This is fulfilled in measure with Mount Sinai and the building of the tabernacle. Yet, the Song of the Sea looks well beyond this:

You will bring them in and you will plant them on the mountain of your inheritance; The place which you have made for your dwelling, O Yahweh, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. (Exod 15:17)

The liturgical dimension of the exodus reaches not only to the worship of the tabernacle in the wilderness, but into the Promised Land and the establishment of the temple on Mount Zion.²²

Sinai. Another way in which the exodus from Egypt and Israel's worship intersects is Mount Sinai. After the tabernacle, events at Mount Sinai receive the most play in Exodus (chapters 19-24). Without question, the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai was a divine service. When Yahweh first met Moses at the burning bush, he said, "I will be with you; and this will be the sign for you that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship {עבד} God upon this mountain" (Exod

²⁰ The Hebrew verb ידע, "to know," more often than not denotes experiential knowing.

²¹ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia:Westminster 1974), 251-252.

²² Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 176, views this as a literary device designed to "actualize the victory in the form of a liturgical celebration." This seems not to take seriously the text's claims as to the historical origins of the song.

3:12).²³ The verb עָבַד can mean either "serve" or "worship." Here it has shades of both senses, but in its context is connected with offering sacrifice. Israel was serving Egypt as slaves. When freed from that slavery, they would serve Yahweh not by making bricks but by the liturgy.²⁴ This is exactly what happened after the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai.

The worship at Sinai has the liturgical features with which we have now become familiar. In chapter 19 we have the preparation. The presence of Yahweh covered the mountain, and there were boundaries of holiness set that foreshadowed the grades of holiness of the tabernacle. Then began the liturgy of the word. Yahweh himself thundered out the Decalogue. Because the people were afraid to hear his audible voice, Moses read the rest of the statutes and laws to them. We should note that this was not all "law" in the doctrinal sense; there were gospel words as well, most notably, "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves" (Exod 20:1). Sometimes we Lutherans, in our zeal to maintain the proper distinction between law and gospel, deny that the establishing of the covenant at Sinai was a grace event. The gracious promise to Abraham was now being fulfilled. Apart from any merit or worthiness in the children of Israel, Yahweh had borne them on eagles' wings and taken them to himself (Exod 19:6). But Sinai was not only about divine grace. As St. Paul says, "The law ... was added because of transgressions" (Gal 3:19). Although the law did not annul the promise, yet because of its requirements that the sinful flesh was powerless to keep, the giving of the law became a ministry of condemnation and death. Three times, as Moses spoke the words of Yahweh in the ears of the people, they were moved to answer with one accord: "All that Yahweh has spoken, we will do" (Exod 19:8; 24:3, 7). The fear and faith elicited in them by the presence of Yahweh on the mountain and the hearing of his words led

²³ Childs, *Exodus*, 56-60, gives a detailed discussion of the problem of this sign, as does Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 203-204. Elsewhere in the Bible the sign precedes the event. This leads scholars to propose various alternate solutions here. Childs opts for the burning bush as being the sign that participates in the reality of the worship at Mount Sinai (60). Most interpreters still assume that the future worship at Mount Sinai is the sign; this is the most natural meaning. In either case, the two, the theophany in the burning bush and the theophany in the cloud atop the mountain, are of one piece: in both Yahweh is present; the ground is holy; God speaks. Propp leaves the question open, although suggesting that perhaps the sign is the giving of the "rod of God."

²⁴ Seven times in Exodus (4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3) Moses demanded of Pharaoh that he let Yahweh's people go that they might serve him in the wilderness. In context, this service was cultic, for it consisted of offering sacrifice (3:18; 5:3; etc.).

them to this unanimous declaration. Israel's sincerity is not in question. The subsequent sad history, however, showed that they did not—yea, could not—do what they had promised.

The service of the sacrament begins in chapter 24. After Moses read the words of the covenant, he sprinkled the altar and the people with the sacrificial blood and said, "Behold, the blood of the covenant which Yahweh has made with you on the basis of all these words" (Exod 24:8). On the basis of which words was the covenant made? The words of the Book of the Covenant that Moses had just read? The words of the people, who promised to do what is written? Or both? In any case, there is a conditionality to this covenant. In this way, Moses' words stand in stark contrast to the similar words that were spoken some 1400 years later, when Christ said, "This is my blood of the new testament, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." With Christ's testament no law is added because of transgression, because the law was added only until the seed should come to whom he was promised (Gal 3:19).

The liturgy of the sacrament did not end with the sprinkling of blood. Now came the covenant meal. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Joshua, and seventy elders went up the mountain, where they ate and drank in the very presence of the God of Israel. They saw him and lived. What did these men eat and drink? No one can say for sure, but a strong possibility is that the food included the meat of the *שְׁלֵמִים*, the peace-offerings or communion-offerings that had just been sacrificed (Exod 24:5). According to the later *Torah*, this was the one sacrifice that was to be eaten by all worshipers and not just the priests and their families. The eating of this sacrifice meant communion with a gracious God and unity with one another. This would explain how the men could see the God of Israel, yet he did not lay a hand against them. Whatever food they may have eaten on the mountain, their eating in the presence of God is a beautiful type of the new-covenant meal.

At Sinai, then, we see the same liturgical shape that we encountered in the exodus event itself: the liturgy of word, followed by the liturgy of "sacrament." Israel's redemption from Egypt was carried over into the ongoing ritual. There is contrast as well: the deliverance was unconditional; the covenant of that deliverance was conditional. This contrast, however, should not blind us to the grace of God even in the

giving of the *Torah*,²⁵ nor to the liturgical pattern of word and sacrament that underlies both.

The Passover. Nowhere is the connection between the original saving event and its ongoing liturgical commemoration more wonderful than in Exodus 12, where Yahweh instituted the Passover. The first Passover on the eve of Israel's departure from Egypt is interwoven with Yahweh's instructions for future generations. The historical event on the one hand retains its uniqueness. On the other hand, it cannot be separated or divorced from subsequent Passover celebrations, because the institution of the first Passover applies to all. It is wrongheaded of critical scholars to try to identify various sources and strata, as though these strands can be rent asunder or were put together piecemeal by some late redactor.²⁶ Such analysis misses the point.

If the first Passover and subsequent observances are so intertwined, is there a distinction? Exodus 12:1-11 gives detailed instructions for the preparation and eating of the Passover. Then Yahweh says: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am Yahweh" (Exod 12:12). There is no indication in the chapter that he will strike the land of Egypt once a year throughout all generations as the Passover is kept. Does this mean then that later Passover meals are mere reenactments designed to remind people of what happened then? Indeed, the text says that the day of Passover throughout all generations is a "reminder" (זִכָּרוֹן). The context, though, strongly suggests that this זִכָּרוֹן is a reminder to Yahweh as well as to Israel. When God remembers, he acts. This is no empty memorial, no symbolic commemoration.²⁷

This is confirmed by other evidence. After detailed instructions for the preparation of the animal, it says, "It is Yahweh's Passover."²⁸ This is a

²⁵ The *Torah* not only made demands upon Israel, but also provided the means of forgiveness for failure to meet these demands. In the doctrinal terminology of Lutheran theology, the *Torah* contains gospel as well as law. This is clear, e.g., in Ps 119:93: "I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me."

²⁶ See further Ludwig, "Remembrance and Re-presentation in Israel's Worship," 68-69, especially n. 41.

²⁷ Ludwig, "Remembrance and Re-presentation in Israel's Worship," 72.

²⁸ Hebrew *זֶה חַגְּיָהוָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל*, which could be translated "It is a Passover to/for Yahweh" as well as reading the *ל* as possessive. I have opted for the possessive because it can include both aspects of the passover: it was a gift from God to man, as well as the right worship rendered to Yahweh by Israel when it was observed as he instituted it. If the *ל* is taken as dative, it means "It is a passover in the eyes of Yahweh," that is, to him

liturgical-legal formula found throughout the first chapters of Leviticus. It means that, when the sacrifice is prepared per instructions, Yahweh declares it to be the real thing: "It is a whole burnt offering." "It is a thank offering." Then all that goes with it applies: it is a restful aroma to Yahweh, it carries his promise of atonement and forgiveness, and so forth.²⁹ In the case of the Passover, the specific promise attached is that, when Yahweh sees the blood on the lintel and doorpost, he will spare the firstborn of Israel (Exod 12:12). A few verses later in the chapter, Yahweh repeats the promise. Then he prescribes the liturgical words for all future Passovers:

You shall observe this thing as a statute for you and for your sons for ever. And when you come to the land that Yahweh will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your sons say to you, "What is this service to you?" you shall say, "It is the sacrifice of Yahweh's Passover [כִּבְדֵיפֶסַח הַיְהוָה לְיְהוּדָה], who passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses." (Exod 12:24-27)

In each succeeding generation the father speaks the liturgical-legal formula to his son, nearly identical to the formula spoken of the first Passover (cf. Exod 12:11): "It is the sacrifice of Yahweh's Passover." It is the actual thing. It is no empty symbol, but has an act of divine grace attached. Here, though, the father refers not to a future but to a past event: "he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt." Yet this is not merely a past history of some dead ancestors. A hundred, five hundred, a thousand years after the exodus, the father will say to his son, "He spared *our* houses." It is as if to say: "Their houses are our houses. Their history is ours. My son, through the Passover sacrifice we share in the deliverance from Egypt." It is not so much that the Passover actualized past events in the present,³⁰ or that worshipers were transported through time into the past, but that the participants were incorporated into the once-for-all deliverance from Egypt. Through eating the Passover they were united with the first generation of those who came out of Egypt. These, too, became God's people and he their God.

This is not so unlike baptism, by which we were buried into Christ's death, or the Eucharist, by which we receive the same body and blood with

it is legitimate and acceptable because it is carried out in accordance with his institution. The $\bar{\iota}$ of advantage seems excluded by the context. In Exod 12:13 we see how the passover works to Israel's advantage.

²⁹ E.g., Exod 29:22; Lev 1:13, 17; 2:6, 15.

³⁰ Contra Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 176.

the same forgiveness of sins as the Eleven received on the night Christ was betrayed. Yet nowhere in Scripture is the liturgical rite more intimately connected with its original event than it is in the case of the Passover.

In summation, the exodus gospel is linked to the ongoing exodus liturgy. God's deliverance was liturgical in itself, and by the divine will it spawned all sorts of liturgical commemorations. These commemorations, however, were not bare symbols but applied the original salvation from generation to generation.

III. The Liturgy of Return

The next great gospel event in Israel's history was the return of the exiles. Not so much can be said about this in the present discussion. Israel's worship had long been institutionalized, and the goal was thus to rebuild the temple and reestablish the cult, through which Yahweh had blessed and sustained his people, and through which he wished to do so again. Yet, a few pertinent points can be made about the liturgical nature of the return to the land. For one thing, several of the prophets portray the return from exile as a new and even a greater exodus.³¹ What pertains to the first exodus pertains in large measure to the return from Babylonian captivity. As Yahweh had brought Israel out of Egyptian captivity into the land of promise, so he would bring their descendants out of Babylon and the surrounding nations to dwell once again in the land from which he had driven them because of their disobedience.

By what means did Israel's God deliver from captivity this second time? Again, by the prophetic word. What is unique is that the living, active word of release from captivity began to be spoken long before the fact. The second half of Isaiah is a preaching of comfort to the captives. Nearly 200 years before the return, Isaiah proclaimed:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God. (Isa 61:1-2a)

Christ, of course, applied these words to himself; in Christ they have their great fulfillment. Yet, in their context, they pertain first of all to Isaiah's ministry of comfort and release to the Babylonian captives, spoken even before those captives were born. Like Christ after him, Isaiah freed

³¹ E.g., Isa 11:10-12; 43:2, 16-19, 48:20-21; Jer 23: 7-8; Ezek 20:33-38; Hos 2:14-23, 11:10; Mic 7:15-17.

the captives by preaching the comfort of the gospel. Like Moses before him, Isaiah spoke Yahweh's word to the king. Yet unlike Pharaoh, king Cyrus believed and heeded the word of Yahweh to let his people go. Unlike Pharaoh, who refused to let Israel worship his God, Cyrus decreed that the house of God be built in Jerusalem.³²

We see especially clearly the life-giving power of God's word to the exiles in the prophecies of Ezekiel. The prophet saw a valley of dry bones in a vision. He prophesied as Yahweh directed him, and his word put flesh upon the bones and life and Spirit into them. These were the exiles who, even before the fact, received life and release by the creative word of God spoken by the prophet.

God's ministry of delivering the captives, however, did not end with the prophetic word. When the exiles reentered the land, the "liturgy of the sacrament" began. Of all the prophets, Ezekiel gives a particularly detailed parallel between exodus and return from exile:

As I live, says the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out; and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. (Ezek 20:33-35)

The prophet goes on to describe in some detail the purging out of the rebels in the wilderness. Then, like Moses before him, he shows forth the liturgical goal of the new "exodus":

For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares Lord Yahweh, there all the house of Israel, all of them, will serve/worship me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy offerings. By means of a restful aroma [בְּרִיחַ נְיִיחַ] I will accept you³³ when I bring

³² Isa 44:28; 45:1; 2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-8.

³³ Contrast the common translation "as a soothing aroma I will accept you." This is highly unlikely in the context of the previous verse, which speaks of real sacrifices and Yahweh's acceptance of the people on his holy mountain in their worship. The translation given here takes the *בְּרִיחַ נְיִיחַ* as a *beth instrumentalis* rather than as a *beth essentiae*, and is favored by a number of significant commentators, notably, G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Ezekiel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 223; also Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, Anchor Bible 22, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City,

you out from the peoples and gather you from the nations where you have been scattered. And I will show myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. (Ezek 20:40-41)

What is most striking here is not the emphasis on worship when the exiles return to the land. From the time of the conquest this had been the case. What is striking is the explicit statement that God would accomplish his saving purpose by means of the sweet savor of sacrifices. Without the liturgical cult there would be no acceptance and no blessing of the freed captives. Gospel and liturgy, therefore, cannot be severed.

This is why the one book of the Bible that gives us some historical details about the actual return from exile is so preoccupied with the cult. The Book of Ezra focuses more on the return of the temple vessels, the rebuilding of the altar, the reestablishment of the burnt offerings, and above all the rebuilding of the temple than it does on the return of the exiles themselves! Besides Leviticus and parts of Chronicles, the Book of Ezra is arguably the most cultic-minded book in the Bible, for it was through temple, priesthood, and sacrifice that God would deal graciously with his people in the land. It should be stressed also that the new temple did not institute a new style of worship that better reflected the new cultural situation. The second temple remained firmly within the Mosaic and Davidic liturgical traditions described in the Pentateuch and the books of Chronicles.³⁴

To the prophetic way of viewing things, the return from exile marks the beginning of the messianic age. It may be more precise to say that the return to the land blends into it. Ezekiel seems to speak immediately of the exiles when he says that Yahweh will sprinkle them with clean water, cleanse them, and put his Spirit within them (Ezek 36:25-27), but this cultic language is truly fulfilled not in the second temple but after the coming of Christ, in baptism (John 3:5). When the prophet foretells that the people will be under one Davidic shepherd, and that he will put his sanctuary among them forever (Ezek 34:23-24; 37:25-28), he seems to be speaking of events immediately after the return. Yet as we know now, Christ did not come immediately after the exile. The people waited for another 500+ years for these things to come about. Finally, in chapters 40-48 of his book,

NY: Doubleday, 1983), 375; contra GKC 379 §119 i; and Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 653.

³⁴ Hence modern critical opinion that the worship described in Chronicles is anachronistic, that it is post-exilic worship retrojected upon the first temple by the Chronicler.

Ezekiel sees the messianic age in profoundly Old Testament liturgical images: temple, altar, priesthood, and sacrifice. The prophet Zechariah also portrays the coming age in cultic terms (Zech 14:16–21). In short, the Old Testament sometimes typifies even the Christian church in its own peculiar liturgical language.

IV. The Liturgy of the New Testament Gospel

This leads me to a few brief remarks about the New Testament. While this is not within the designated scope of the topic, it has to be addressed because the objection always lurks that the Old Testament is irrelevant and obsolete, that Christ has fulfilled all rituals, and so now we neither need nor desire liturgical forms of worship.

Can we find the same liturgical shape to the New Testament Gospel? The answer is an unwavering yes. The four Gospels, whatever their differences, all share to a degree the liturgical shape of the first fifteen chapters of the Book of Exodus. In all of them, Jesus—like Moses—begins his ministry with preaching and teaching. As were Moses' signs, Christ's miracles are the signs that confirm his proclamation that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When the liturgy of the word ends; the liturgy of the sacrament begins. The Lord kept the Passover with his disciples, feeding them a food and drink far more life-giving than the Passover lamb they had just eaten. Finally, Jesus accomplished a greater exodus than that of Moses, defeating the foes by the wood of the cross. His flesh given for the life of the world was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. He is the great sacrament, the fount and source of all sacraments, as the water and blood flow forth from his pierced side (John 19:34).

If there is any doubt about all this, we have only to consider the Epistle to the Hebrews. Christ our great High Priest entered the Holy Place with an offering better than the blood of bulls and goats. In this epistle, Jesus Christ is priest, sacrifice, and temple; his cross is the altar; his liturgy of salvation is a *λειτουργία* more excellent than the Aaronic liturgy (Heb 8:6).

Besides this, one could mention in passing the scenes of heavenly worship in the Book of Revelation. There we find tabernacle, altar, incense, chanting, antiphonal singing, bowing, even prostrating oneself before the throne of God and the Lamb—all those ritualistic trappings that some people think are outmoded, done away with in Christ, or that make them uncomfortable. There we also see the liturgical rhythm of God's acting and the saints' response of hymnic praise. Most profoundly, the heavenly liturgy serves to accomplish God's purposes on earth: destruction of the ungodly and deliverance of the faithful.

More could be said. All of this is to make the point that the New Testament parallels the Old in its conception of salvation as liturgy. We cannot, therefore, easily dismiss the Old Testament witness on the grounds that it has been superseded.

V. Conclusion

All of this has been to demonstrate that the Old Testament gospel has a liturgical shape. The Old Testament liturgy reflects and perpetuates this pattern of God's coming to sinners to save them through word and sacrament. Likewise, the traditional liturgical forms that the church has inherited preserve the shape of the gospel of grace among us. Rooted in tabernacle, temple, and synagogue, the venerable Christian liturgies preserve this integral connection between saving event and worship. Our liturgical roots, thus, go far deeper than that the words of our liturgies are scriptural, true as this is. The roots run deeper than that our liturgies are faithful to biblical doctrine, necessary though this be. The traditional forms of liturgy with which we are familiar perpetuate gospel history, God's way of coming into the world to seek and to save sinners. They find their rhythm in the rhythms of the Lord's deliverance and the saints' faith-response to this deliverance. They pulse with the lifeblood of the ancient and saving biblical narratives. Most importantly, traditional liturgy provides the framework in which God's mighty deeds of salvation, culminating in his one great saving act in Christ, grasp us anew and bind us to themselves, so that once again they become ours and we part of them. This same thing cannot be said for contemporary substitutes for the liturgy, which invariably breathe a strange air that the patriarchs and prophets did not breathe and follow patterns foreign to the biblical gospel.