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Editorial office:  
 1333 S. Kirkwood Road,  
 St. Louis, MO 63122-7294,  
 314-996-1202



# THE IMPACT OF THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION ON WORSHIP

by Andrew Pfeiffer, PhD, Australian Lutheran College

The Lutheran Reformation refocused worship by using the words of Scripture so that we trust in justification in Christ alone.

## Introduction

**T**HE FIRST INVITATION I RECEIVED as a seminary lecturer to present at a district pastors' conference was an invitation to lead three sessions on worship. The second such invitation was to lead four sessions on the pastoral ministry. Those conferences remain etched in my memory as times of great challenge and great joy. Challenge because they touched on controverted issues causing conflict in the church. Joy because they stand at the core of Lutheran church life. Thank you for the invitation to present this paper—it also has offered me great challenge and great joy. After a few brief introductory comments we will turn in the main section to five Lutheran liturgical themes and reflect on the current liturgical practice in our churches.

## Justification in Liturgical Context

The article on justification in the Augsburg Confession is said to be the article on which the church stands or falls. The article does not stand in isolation, however. It is preceded by a Trinitarian confession and then the sin-Christ, law-gospel, bad news-good news articles. Then, having stressed that justification is by grace through faith, the confessions follow this with the confession that in order to obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, the ministry of the means of grace. They immediately define the church in liturgical terms as the assembly of those gathered to receive the faithful preaching of the gospel and the life giving sacraments. While justification by grace through faith stands at the heart of Lutheran teaching and ecumenical engagement, the

Lutheran understanding of church and ministry is a gift that Lutherans need to continue to give to one another, and then also offer to others in the ecumenical discussion.

Since the church is defined liturgically in Augsburg Confession VII, one of its tasks in each generation is to receive and pass on the Christian liturgical tradition. The liturgy is not Lutheran, it is ecumenical.<sup>1</sup> The liturgy is not German, it is universal. The liturgy did not have its roots in the sixteenth century Reformation; indeed we see the shape or order of Christian worship already in the word and meal pattern of Christ's revelation in Luke 24 and in the fourfold order in Acts 2:42.<sup>2</sup>

## Liturgical Renovators

The Lutheran Confessions follow Luther in seeing Lutherans as renovators, not innovators, when it comes to the liturgical life of the church.<sup>3</sup> That is, the task

<sup>1</sup> When this paper uses the word liturgy, it refers in the first place to the common Liturgy of Word and Sacrament, for example, *Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement*, 6, 58. When Matins or other prayer orders are meant, they will be noted specifically.

<sup>2</sup> See Arthur A. Just, *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 18, 81–83.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 53: 20–26 (hereafter cited as *LW*). The problem for Luther was seeing the liturgy turned into a work, but to use that objection to deconstruct the liturgy is not following Luther. Luther says, "It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use," (20). The basic order that he outlines on pages 27–30 is still obviously reflected for example in all the Lutheran Church of Australia orders of Holy Communion, *Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement*, 6, 58. Note also the essay by John Stephenson, "Luther's Reform of the Mass and its

of the church is to receive, test, and reform the liturgical tradition, not to try and invent it or introduce radical innovations. We see this perhaps most clearly in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. In fact, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are retained. (AC XXIV, 1)<sup>4</sup>

Confession has not been abolished in our churches. (AC XXV, 1)

We do not abolish the Mass but religiously retain and defend it. Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord's day and on other festivals, when the Sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, after they have been examined and absolved. We also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, vestments and other similar things. (Ap XXIV, 1)

Throughout the history of the Lutheran church it seems that liturgical reception on the one hand and liturgical renewal on the other have not sat well together and more than once the Lutheran church has had what we from within the so-called western Lutheran church sometimes call “worship wars.”<sup>5</sup> This

To be clear, the gap between heaven and earth is bridged by God, not us. Worship is not so much about our ascent to God as it is about his descent to us to serve us with gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Application to Liturgical Change Today,” in *Congress on the Lutheran Confessions: Worship 2000*, ed. John A. and Jennifer H. Maxfield (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 2010), 20–23.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the Book of Concord are from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Herl has demonstrated that liturgical conflicts were not confined to the 1970s western Lutheran liturgical tradition, but existed from the beginning of Lutheran liturgical life. Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism: Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). John Kleinig notes that the significant liturgical contribution of Theodor Kliefoth was forged in the context of finding himself superintendent of Schwerin and working for the spiritual renewal of the province at a time of theological and liturgical confusion in “The Liturgical Heritage of Theodor Kliefoth,” in *Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay*, ed. J. Bart Day (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 109–10. See also Naomichi Masaki, “The Confessional Liturgical Revival of Theodor Kliefoth and the Works of Liturgical Revision of the Preface in Nineteenth-century

is hardly surprising. If justification by grace through faith is at the core of Lutheran teaching and if that theological confession is enacted primarily in the liturgical assembly, then we can expect the liturgical life of the church to come under significant scrutiny, and, from time to time, to be a focus of conflict. At the same time, every generation has the joy of receiving, understanding, enriching, and passing on our liturgical inheritance.

### Trinitarian Worship

The Lutheran confessions are Trinitarian confessions. When accused of being sectarian, the confessors repeatedly reference the ecumenical creeds—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.<sup>6</sup>

The first article of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, and the Smalcald Articles are confessions of the triune God. It is significant that the first confession in the Book of Concord is not the Augsburg Confession, but the Apostles’ Creed, followed by the two other ecumenical creeds, the Nicene and the Athanasian. Lutherans did not see themselves as theological innovators but as confessors of the faith of all ages.

This Trinitarian confessional starting point for Lutherans is also significant liturgically. Christian worship, and therefore Lutheran worship, is Trinitarian. On the one hand this is obvious. We gather in the triune name, with the help of the Spirit we confess our sins to our heavenly Father and ask for forgiveness for our sins for the sake of Christ and his death, we sing glory to the triune God, we hear the word of the triune God, we confess faith using the Trinitarian creeds, we pray numerous times in the liturgy and give thanks by the power of the Holy Spirit to the Father through the Son, we go out to our lives of Christian vocation with the Trinitarian blessing over us.

Why then are some of these things either missing in our liturgical life or enacted poorly? Perhaps we need reminding of the Trinitarian foundation of Christian

Sweden: The Vitality of the Lord's Supper as Confessed in 'He Alone is Worthy'" (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2005), 28.

<sup>6</sup> See AC III, Ap III, SA I, FC Ep III, FC SD, 37.

liturgy and of its meaning when enacting the liturgy. James B. Torrance explains the significance of being Trinitarian in worship in this way:

In worship we participate through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father. We participate in what the Son is continuing to do for us in the presence of the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world. There is only one true priest through whom and with whom we draw near to God our Father. There is only one mediator between God and humanity. Is not the bread we break our sharing in the body of Christ and the cup we bless our communion in the blood of Christ? And because we share in the Son we share in his communion with his Father, and we do so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is true. We are baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit into the community which confesses faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and which worships the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

A paper written by our own faculty builds on this thought and notes there are two aspects of this Trinitarian approach to worship:

Christian public worship takes place in the presence of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; we are present in the heavenly sanctuary of the Triune God. The Heavenly Father offers the riches of his grace in Jesus Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Spirit we approach the Father through and with the Son. The Spirit leads and empowers us in our response to God's presence and activity.<sup>8</sup>

To be clear, the gap between heaven and earth is bridged by God, not us. Worship is not so much about

our ascent to God as it is about his descent to us to serve us with gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Peace of conscience and joy of heart have their foundation in the divine service, not in the human response, even though such a response is Spirit led, faith based, and rightly oriented to giving glory to the triune God.

Another way of speaking about this distinction is to speak about the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of worship. Commenting on Kliefoth's contribution to Lutheran liturgical distinctions, Kleinig first draws attention to Melancthon's description of this way of thinking in the Apology XXIV, 69–77, and then explains:

In the sacramental side of the divine service the Triune God acted on the congregation and gave out his gifts to those assembled in his presence; in the sacrificial side of the divine service the congregation responded to God's giving of himself and his gifts by presenting its offerings to him. It brought its Spirit-produced, God pleasing sacrifices to God the Father in prayer and praise, confession and thanksgiving, the giving of gifts and the self-giving love for the people of God. The sides belong together. They co-exist in the liturgy. Yet the sacrificial reaction depends on the sacramental action and is empowered by it.<sup>9</sup>

The Augsburg Confession links the reception of the Holy Spirit to the word of God in Articles V and XVIII. It is through the word and the sacraments that the Holy Spirit is given.

This sacramental/sacrificial understanding is helpful for Lutherans as they assess their liturgical life today and look to the future. This paper now uses that framework to reflect on particular contributions Lutherans have made but also the particular challenges Lutherans face in worship today, beginning with the sacramental, and then the sacrificial. A brief section on catechesis connects the two.

<sup>9</sup> Kleinig, "Theodor Kliefoth," 116–17. For an exploration of the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacramental/sacrificial understanding of worship, see John W. Kleinig, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Divine Service," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 44, no. 1 (2010): 20. He notes in that article biblical insights of the sacramental/sacrificial understanding from a study of Heb 12:22–25, the confessional background to the discussion in Ap XXIV, 71–75, and the work of Torrance referenced above, especially pages 1–57. He also adds the helpful pastoral note that "while these two sides can be formally distinguished, they cannot be separated or reduced to a chronological sequence of a divine action followed by a human response. They can at times coincide and combine, as Melancthon notes, in a single enactment with 'a twofold effect' (Ap XXIV, 75)," 20.

<sup>7</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 8–9.

<sup>8</sup> Faculty at Luther Campus, "Worship at Luther Campus: A Declaration and Appeal," 1995, accessed June 7, 2016, <https://lca.box.net/shared/static/kpdgboj6mnc97132md.pdf>.

## Lutheran Liturgical Themes for Reflection

### *Worship—Divine Service as the Enactment of Theology*

For Lutherans, worship is the enactment of theology. For example, we confess the catechetical understanding of baptism in Luther's catechisms, but the call to sacramental faithfulness is not finished with that clear confession. People are actually prepared for baptism, baptised, and taught to live daily in their baptism. Likewise, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of absolution grounded in John 20:21–23 and taught in the Confessions (AC XXV, 1), but it is equally necessary to teach people the difference between real guilt and human anxiety, how to respond to a guilty conscience with confession of sin, and, from the pastor's point of view, how to actually absolve the penitent. The liturgical response to the penitent is not the Australian mantra, "She'll be right mate," but, "I forgive you all your sins."

Luther taught people the reality of enacted theology by distinguishing between forgiveness won and forgiveness given:

So that our readers may the better perceive our teaching I shall clearly and broadly describe it. We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world.<sup>10</sup>

Again, our own faculty highlight the necessity of seeing worship primarily as divine service:

The heart of worship is God's own service to God's people. Worship is always divine service, because in worship God serves us. Divine service is God at work, giving to us as he forgives, renews, sanctifies, blesses, empowers, and equips us for service. What God requires of us before all else is a listening ear, receiving hands, and a believing heart. In worship we hungry beggars come to be filled.<sup>11</sup>

Arthur A. Just reminds us that "the liturgy is the

context in which God acts to save his people and in which God's people respond."<sup>12</sup> Paul Grime notes the connection between right worship and true faith when he writes, "The Divine Service is first and foremost about God. He is the author of our salvation: hence, any worship that does not begin and end with God runs the risk of being false."<sup>13</sup> We might ask then, what else could the divine service be about?

Joseph Herl has noted that the influence of rationalism in the eighteenth century led to calls for new liturgies or even total abandonment of the inherited liturgy. It is revealing to read what some of the objections were. Herl says that Johann Rau, for example, noted the most important abuses as

The too frequent use of the Lord's Prayer, the making of the sign of the cross, the Aaronic benediction, chanting by the pastor, the use of candles on the altar, private confession, the use of the appointed lectionary texts for sermons.<sup>14</sup>

He also notes that Peter Burdorf, writing in 1795, argued this way:

repetition in the liturgy weakened the attention of the listener ... the sermon ... would be more tolerable if hymn verses were interspersed during it ... return to the communion observance as Jesus celebrated it, without ceremony, consecration, or singing of the Words of Institution ... some liturgy was necessary for public services to be held, but it should be as simple as possible in order to meet the needs of contemporary Christians.<sup>15</sup>

Is it any wonder that the liturgies that emerged were said to reflect sentimentality and moralism?<sup>16</sup>

Different theological and cultural emphases do influence churches and their leaders and there is sometimes pressure for the sacrificial aspect of worship to take

<sup>12</sup> Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Paul J. Grime, "The Theology and Structure of the Divine Service," in *Christ's Gifts in Liturgy: The Theology and Music of the Divine Service*, ed. Daniel Zager (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2002), 12–13.

<sup>14</sup> Herl, *Worship Wars*, 128.

<sup>15</sup> Herl, *Worship Wars*, 128.

<sup>16</sup> Herl, *Worship Wars*, 128, noting the opinion of Luther Reed. It is also possible to try and reorient the focus of the liturgy around the collective emotional state of the people gathered. This is not just a case of the sacrificial element of worship overtaking the sacramental. It divorces the sacrificial from the sacramental because the sacrificial aspect is no longer a response to the sacramental, but possibly even a contrived response.

<sup>10</sup> "Against the Heavenly Prophets," *LW* 40: 213–14.

<sup>11</sup> Faculty at Luther Campus, "Worship at Luther Campus."

precedence in the liturgy. The place we in Australia most experience this in practice is probably at a funeral, where there seems to be little time constraint on the obituary and other tributes to the departed, and yet the Bible readings may be reduced and the preacher is under considerable pressure to keep the sermon short. Yet the divine action comes primarily in that liturgy through the reminder of baptism, the readings, the sermon, and the word-based prayers.

The use of the church year goes a long way to ensuring that the liturgy is the context for God's action. The lectionary insists on focusing on Christ and his death for the sin of the world, and then on the life of Christ in the church. The world's issues find their place in cries for mercy, focused law-gospel sermons, prayers, and offerings.

Some pastors, especially in the United States and Australia, are under cultural, and sometimes even ecclesial, pressure to be entertainers. The daily news service, late night talk shows, and the contemporary arts tend in the direction of entertainment rather than serious engagement with content. Good liturgical leadership grows as pastors and pastoral candidates grow in confidence in what God wants to do in worship and how he wants to do it. Such leadership doesn't need to lack emotional heart or bore people to sleep, but it will start with a conviction that the prime leadership task is to ensure the service is first and foremost divine service.

#### *Table Discussion*

God's action and the response of the faithful both need attention in our liturgical practice. Think of your own church's liturgical practice. How would you evaluate in these areas: following the church year, preaching lectionary readings, singing Psalms, praying the Kyrie, responding to the cultural pressure to entertain?

#### *The Empowering Word*

One of Luther's main concerns in the early days of the Reformation was to re-invigorate evangelical preaching. When he names the problems that have crept into the liturgy, he says the worst is that God's word has been silenced. The second problem follows closely—other topics or “un-Christian fables” becomes the focus of sermons.<sup>17</sup> The Lutheran Confessions contrast the pastoral approach of Lutheran preachers with what is being preached from other pulpits:

Among the opponents there are many regions where no sermons are delivered during the entire year except during Lent. And yet the chief worship of God is to preach the Gospel. And when the opponents do preach, they talk about human traditions, about devotion to the saints and similar trifles ... On the contrary, in our churches all the sermons deal with topics like these: repentance, fear of God, faith in Christ, the righteousness of faith, consolation of consciences through faith, the exercise of faith, prayer ... the cross, respect for the magistrates and civil order, the distinction between the kingdom of Christ and political affairs, marriage, the education and instruction of children, chastity and all the works of love. (Ap XV, 42–44)

There already we Lutherans hear a challenge for today. Can we be as confident today about what people will hear from the pulpit as Melancthon was in 1531? The Lutheran Confessions teach that “the true adornment of the church is godly, useful and clear doctrine, the devout use of the sacraments, ardent prayer, and the like . . . the centre of worship [is] the proclamation of the gospel, faith, and its struggles” (Ap XXIV, 51). The gospel, faith, and its struggles—note the pastoral concern. The gospel is to be preached in such a way that it addresses people's struggles as they seek to live as children of God in their daily lives.

It is just at this point that we face at least two challenges in contemporary preaching. The first is to teach preachers to choose a text from the lectionary, invest time to find out what it means, and then under the Spirit's guidance, meditate on the way in which that text speaks into the faith and life issues of the people gathered. Preaching begins with the word and not the world, but evangelical preachers always have the world in mind, because the world is both the location of much temptation and trial, and also the daily exercise of faith.

The second challenge is that sermons sometimes go astray precisely when it comes to preaching both law and gospel. Sermons that try and diminish the preaching of the law, or preach it so softly it is hardly heard, do not serve people well because they do not help people see their need for salvation and Christ. The law is a mirror held up to the society, to the church, to individuals, in order to reveal reality. Left to our own devices of spiritual understanding and love and faith, we are lost. There is no need for a gospel of salvation if no one is lost.

<sup>17</sup> “Concerning the Order of Public Worship,” LW 53: 11.

On the other hand some sermons diagnose sin sickness well but then fail to preach the gospel of grace. One reason we sometimes resonate with a whole variety of preachers from different denominational backgrounds is because they too have diagnosed sin-sickness quite accurately. But then comes the question, “What now?” When the reality of how we stand before God as sinners has been diagnosed and named, now what? Too often the response is one or another form of “obedience” preaching. Try harder in the faith, pray more fervently, give more generously, follow Christ more perfectly. Who is doing the work here?

Faithful living, love and generosity are fruits of the work of God, so God needs to go to work in the sermon. And God goes to work through the clear proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. What the guilty need to hear is not “pull your spiritual socks up,” but God forgives, God restores, God welcomes, God hears prayer, God blesses the poor in spirit, God gives gifts to the spiritually needy, God is true to the promises he makes in his word to the baptised and those who look to him in faith. The challenge is to find that promise and action of God in each text, and if it is not there in the specific reading, then it is there in the context.

The sermon is not the only place the word of God is used in Lutheran worship, however. In the basic common order of the Lutheran Church of Australia, the whole liturgy is basically the word of God enacted. For example, the confession of sins uses Hebrews 10:22, Psalm 124:8, and Psalm 32:5 to give penitents the words they need. Various Scriptural passages are recognisable in our liturgical Glorias (LUKE 2:14; 1 TIM 1:17; ROM 11:33–36; 16:27; REV 5:12–13). The Kyrie echoes common biblical cries for mercy (MATT 9:27; 17:15; 20:30–31; MARK 10:47–48). The preface and thanksgiving prayers are prayed Scripture (for example PS 25:1; 86:1–14; ISA 6:1–9; REV 4:8). The Sanctus (REV 4:8), the Agnus Dei (REV 5:11), and the Blessing (NUM 6:24–26) are examples of Scripture used liturgically to enact theology.<sup>18</sup>

This is a significant issue in times when people have a genuine concern to see the Holy Spirit at work in the

life of the church. The Augsburg Confession links the reception of the Holy Spirit to the word of God in Articles V and XVIII. It is through the word and the sacraments that the Holy Spirit is given. Kleinig draws the liturgical conclusion:

How then can we be sure that the Spirit is at work in our worship? We can be certain of the Spirit's inspiration and operation when God's word is faithfully used as the means of the Spirit. This may be why all the classical ecumenical orders of service consist almost entirely of scriptural material. We absolve and bless with the word; we preach and meditate with the word; we baptise and perform the Eucharist with the word; we pray and praise with the word; we offer ourselves and our gifts with the word. Through the right enactment of God's word we participate in the descending and ascending operation of the triune God in the assembly, the work by which the Spirit not only brings God the Father to us through his Son but also brings us to God the Father together with his Son. Whatever is done with the word and by faith in the word is done with the Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

Through the use and reception of the word of God in the liturgy, we can have confidence in the reception and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The centrality of the word in a Lutheran view of worship is not only a formal theological pillar, it has an inherently pastoral goal. Through the word and the presence of the Holy Spirit, people are forgiven, healed, restored, and empowered for the service that lies ahead of them.

Lutheran churches are sometimes called to respond to Pentecostal challenges that members need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When the word of God is at work in the liturgy, in the readings, in the sermon, as the basis for prayer, and as actual texts for canticles and blessings, then the whole service is designed so that people weekly receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit through the word of God. The first main focus in the liturgy is to bring forgiveness and peace and healing in order to give people good and cleansed consciences. Another emphasis is to enact the teaching that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the church through the means of grace, the means of the Holy Spirit. These are theological and pastoral reasons for the extravagant use of the word of God in the divine service.

<sup>18</sup> See also Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 238–40. Just concludes that “the ordinaries of the liturgy—the Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Hymn of the Day, Creed, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei—are biblical and reflect a community shaped and formed by Christ through Scripture.” Günther Stiller also praises the liturgical functioning of the Bach cantatas because of their grounding in Scripture in *Johann Sebastian Bach and the Liturgical Life in Leipzig* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 157.

<sup>19</sup> Kleinig, “Holy Spirit,” 24.

The challenge for us today is twofold. How are we using the word liturgically? Is our preaching a clear proclamation of law and gospel with God as the chief actor for salvation and life?

#### *The Lord's Supper—For You*

It is striking to return to the Augsburg Confession and see how short the article on the Lord's Supper is. What is more striking is to see how short the article is in the Apology. After noting that the Roman Confutation approved the Tenth Article, there are just two paragraphs which mainly focus on how the Lutheran understanding is affirmed by the Roman church and also the Greek church (Ap X). The opening to the Smalcald Articles on the Lord's Supper is almost the same as the Augsburg Confession. Luther does address communion in both kinds and what he calls the sophistry of transubstantiation, but the article is still modest in length. Luther shows us his own approach in the catechisms that bear his name. He says, "We must speak about the second sacrament . . . under three headings, stating what it is, what its benefits are, and who is to receive it" (LC V, 1).

Why do I note this? One of the main impacts of our sacramental theology on our liturgical life is that since we are convinced

- that our confession with respect to the Lord's Supper is biblical,
- that we administer the Lord's Supper faithfully, and
- that God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation are freely given.

We need to do all we humanly can to ensure that people receive those gifts for their blessing.

Joseph Herl's studies of various sources come to the conclusion that one of the main issues in Luther's day with respect to the Lord's Supper was limited participation on the part of the laity. Many of the faithful only communed at Easter or four times a year at high festivals. This wasn't necessarily because they lacked faith, but because "the priest offered the mass on behalf of the church, therefore communion by all present was not necessary."<sup>20</sup> The lack of regular attendance had a theological cause.

Likewise, increased regular attendance at the Lord's table also has a theological cause—recognition of our own need and trust in the divine gifts offered. Lutheran teaching on the Lord's Supper is essentially pastoral. The main focus is that troubled consciences are forgiven and

healed. Luther's emphasis when considering who the sacrament is for starts with simple trust in the word of God and the promises of God. "The best preparation is . . . a soul troubled by sins, death, and temptation and hungering and thirsting for healing and strength."<sup>21</sup> Or, as we know it from the Small Catechism, "a person who has faith in these words, 'given for you' and 'shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,' is really worthy and well prepared" (SC VI, 9–10). And, we can conclude, such a person is to come and regularly receive the gifts God offers.

Recognition of spiritual need comes through trial, temptation, and listening to the word, and so the liturgy of the Lord's Supper does not stand on its own but follows the liturgy of the word.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes it is not a lack of intellectual understanding about the sacrament that prevents people from attending regularly, but a lack of understanding about their own spiritual need. It is a first commandment issue.

We learn at least two things from Luther at this point. As far as the liturgy is concerned he proposes walking between imposing universal laws and customs on the one hand, and ordaining and establishing nothing on the other hand, which can result in as many factions as there are opinions.<sup>23</sup> In Luther's opinion, the word and the Supper had suffered in the hands of the Enthusiasts and the Romanists.<sup>24</sup> A conservatively renovated evangelical liturgy, which bore a strong resemblance to the one he had received, ensured the word and sacrament were faithfully given to the faithful, and were not at the whim of any one priest or pastor who for one reason or another did not understand the deep connection between theology and pastoral practice.

The second thing we learn is the need for patient catechesis. The starting point for Luther when he observed the poor spiritual state of the church was not liturgical imposition, but biblical, theological, and liturgical catechesis (SC Preface, 7–24). This happened among other things by ensuring as much as possible that the liturgy enacted the gospel and so served to catechise people every time they attended. This was accompanied by teaching people a deeper understanding of the liturgy and the sacrament, which led to a deeper hunger for more regular participation.

<sup>21</sup> "Order of Mass and Communion," *LW* 53: 34.

<sup>22</sup> Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 211.

<sup>23</sup> "A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians Concerning Public Worship and Concord," *LW* 53: 46.

<sup>24</sup> "A Christian Exhortation," *LW* 53: 19–20.

<sup>20</sup> Herl, *Worship Wars*, 26.

It should not surprise us though that Luther's patience did have its limits. While he suggests careful instruction in moving people from communion in one kind to reception of both kinds, he says at one point that two years is enough. If after two years they are not eager to receive in both kinds, they probably never will be. There is pastoral common sense here for us. Be careful of radical innovation even when it is a return to a better liturgical or pastoral practice. Teach, teach, teach. But at some point the liturgical change may need to be made for the sake of the best delivery and reception of God's gifts for hungry souls.

#### *Catechesis*

I have a firm conviction that Luther's Small Catechism is an excellent resource to teach the Christian faith into any cross-cultural context.<sup>25</sup> The Small Catechism is primarily Scripture and scriptural teaching ordered in such a way that

- we are faced with our own need for salvation (Ten Commandments),
- we hear who God is and what God has done for us (Creed),
- we learn how to ask God for all kinds of gifts (Lord's Prayer),
- we see how God gives us the Holy Spirit and all manner of good gifts (Holy Baptism, Absolution, Lord's Supper), and
- we discover what daily Christian living looks like (daily prayers and the walks of life where we practice faith in love).

The Small Catechism is also an excellent resource to teach the liturgy. Just as the link between Scripture and the catechism is integral in teaching the faith, so it is possible to integrate a teaching of the liturgy in any teaching of the catechism. Even a cursory look at the list above reveals the opportunities that arise to teach the invocation, confession and absolution, the liturgy of the word, offerings and prayers, the liturgy of the Lord's Supper, and blessings for daily living.<sup>26</sup>

As Luther demonstrated, it is impossible to talk about the basic content of the faith without drawing out the liturgical implication that

People no longer want to receive the sacrament and they treat it with contempt. This too needs to be stressed, while keeping in mind that we should not compel anyone to believe or to receive the sacrament ... instead we should preach in such a way that the people make themselves come without our law and just plain compel us pastors to administer the sacrament to them ... those who do not hold the sacrament in high esteem indicate that they have no sin, no flesh, no devil, no world, no death, no dangers, no hell. That is, they believe they have none of these things although they are up to their neck in them ... On the other hand, they indicate that they need no grace, no life, no paradise, no heaven, no Christ, no God, nor any good thing ... Emphasize clearly the benefit and the harm, the need and the blessing, the danger and the salvation in this sacrament. Then they will doubtless come on their own without any compulsion. (SC Preface, 350–51)

Lutherans face two challenges here as we look to the future. The first is to keep or regain confidence in the word of God to do the work of God. The second is to introduce people to the Christian faith in such a way that theology and its enactment in the liturgy are seamlessly integrated.

We now turn to the impact of Lutheranism on two of the sacrificial aspects of the liturgy—prayer and congregational song.

#### *Prayer, Christ, and the Word of God*

Lutheran teaching impacted congregational prayer for much the same reason that it impacted a range of liturgical practices in the church. Attendance at mass, participating in private confession, and remembering saints' days were not taught so much as works of the faithful, but as gifts of God, each in their own way, nurturing and encouraging faith and faithful living. Likewise with prayer.

The first Lutherans took great pains to distinguish prayer as a God-pleasing work of a justified person from prayer as a good work that earned God's approval. They emphasized three things. First, Christian prayer depends on God's commands and promises rather than the performance of the person, for by his Word God gives access to His grace. The power of prayer therefore comes from God's Spirit-filled Word. Second, prayer is an act of faith

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Pfeiffer, "Faith into Context," (lecture, Luther 500 Conference, Melbourne, Vic, June 2016).

<sup>26</sup> See also John T. Pless, "Ceremonies for Seekers: Catechesis as a Fundamental Criterion for Worship in the Lutheran Confessions," in *Congress on the Lutheran Confessions: Worship 2000*, ed. John A. and Jennifer H. Maxfield (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 2010), 29–43.

by which a believer receives a good conscience before God and all His promised gifts. Third, Christ encourages and helps His disciples to pray by giving them the Lord's Prayer.<sup>27</sup>

When the invocation of saints is discussed in the Apology, the key themes are the merits of Christ as the basis on which Christians come to their heavenly Father, and the commands and promises of the word of God (Ap XXI, 17). The word of God reveals a merciful God in Christ, and that this same Jesus Christ leads us in our prayers and even gives the church the words to speak as he gives his own prayer (JOHN 16:23; 17:20–26; LUKE 11:1–4). The word commands the church to pray but also to be confident in prayer, knowing that prayers are heard on account of Christ and answered by a gracious God (MATT 11:28; LUKE 11:5–13).<sup>28</sup>

The Reformation's renewed confidence in the all sufficiency of the word of God meant that prayer too was to arise from the word of God. This was especially significant for Luther's understanding of the Lord's Prayer, and prayer in general, as Wengert notes:

The God who commanded Luther to pray, promised to answer, and gave him the words to pray, is the very God who redeemed him with his holy and precious blood ... The only weapon the Christian has to wield against Satan is "prayer alone", a sola worth adding to Reformation stain glass windows—but understood now not as mere howling or magic but as arising out of God's Word and human need and thus in line with the "little word" (Wortlein) of "A Mighty Fortress."<sup>29</sup>

In the Large Catechism, Luther teaches that God does not respond to prayer because of the merits or status of the person praying, but because people take God at his word and trust in his promises (LC III, 16). This is not innovative. Jesus' teaching about the Pharisee and the tax collector makes the same point (LUKE 18:9–14). The tax collector's prayer grows out of spiritual reality. I am a sinner

and God is a God of mercy, so the prayer prayed in accord with that reality is, "God have mercy on me, a sinner."

The cry for mercy in the liturgy, the Kyrie, as we call it, which echoes the cry of blind Bartimaeus (MARK 10:46–52), is a significant aspect of the sacrificial part of the liturgy. Luther retains the Kyrie in his revised liturgy.<sup>30</sup> It is the church's call to God for mercy upon itself, and also upon the world. The church stands with Christ before the heavenly Father and prays for the troubled world. If anything, in our troubled times, the Kyrie ought to be expanded in contemporary liturgies, not omitted as it sometimes is. The Kyrie enacts the theology of the cross in prayer, as we stand before a merciful God living by faith alone and not by sight.

The Collects are obvious examples of prayer being shaped by the word of God for the day, and the structure of the collect can also serve as a basis for personal spirituality:

- address to God
- biblical basis of the prayer
- actual request
- future intention
- Trinitarian conclusion

What is less obvious is the way in which most general prayers are constructed. The General Prayer in the Lutheran Church of Australia common order is an example of praying the Scriptures and scriptural echoes abound.<sup>31</sup> The church prays for the mission of the church and for mercy on those who oppose it (MATT 24:9–14; 28:18–20; LUKE 10:2; LUKE 8:5–8; 2 TIM 4:2), for justice and wisdom for political leaders (1 TIM 2:1–2; MATT 22:21), for protection, blessing and comfort (MATT 11:28–30; HEB 13:20–21; 2 COR 1:3–4), for those who gather at the Lord's table (1 COR 10:16–17), and for true faith and a godly life as we prepare for the world to come (LUKE 17:5; 18:8; 23:43; EPH 2:10). While this is not a specifically Lutheran impact on worship, because of the centrality of Christ and his word in Lutheran theology, the Lutheran church needs to ensure its liturgical life is a good example of this depth and breadth in congregational prayer, especially at a time when it is tempting to become limited in vision and even self-obsessed in prayer.

We need to make brief mention of Luther's pastoral advice to his barber, Master Peter, who asked Luther to

<sup>27</sup> John W. Kleinig, *Lutheran Spirituality: Life as God's Child* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 71.

<sup>28</sup> Here again, we see the close connection between the word and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Kleinig concludes, "As the church hears God's word and receives Christ's body and blood, it prays for the Spirit and receives the Spirit, just as Christ promised in Luke 11:13." Kleinig, "Holy Spirit," 20.

<sup>29</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 197.

<sup>30</sup> "Order of Mass and Communion," *LW* 53: 23.

<sup>31</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1989), 13–14.

teach him how to pray.<sup>32</sup> Nearly a third of the catechism is direct quotation of Scripture, and where it is explanation of teaching, as in the section on Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the question is always asked, what word of God is the *sedes doctrinae*, the source of the teaching. Master Peter is directed to meditation on the word with the help of the Holy Spirit. When you pray, Luther says, first take one commandment and ask what it teaches. Only then does he move to actual prayer—for what can I give thanks, what do I need to confess, and what request will I make of God.<sup>33</sup> This so-called “four garland” pastoral advice not only remains an excellent illustration of, and model for, Lutheran spirituality, but it also explains why Luther can say he can never exhaust the catechism.

#### *Congregational Song*

It is no accident that this paper has not addressed the issue of music in depth. It is a topic that demands a paper all of its own.<sup>34</sup> Robin Leaver draws attention to a draft outline Luther developed as the basis for a future treatise on the subject of music. For now it is enough to note Luther's main points:

- Music is a gift of God
- Music creates joyful hearts
- Music drives away the devil
- Music creates innocent delight
- Music reigns in times of peace

Leaver offers a helpful commentary on each one.<sup>35</sup> Luther's pastoral advice in his letters of spiritual counsel sometimes direct people to music for spiritual consolation in times of depression and anxiety.<sup>36</sup>

Luther's liturgical concern in the early days of the Reformation was to involve the people of God more in singing liturgy and hymnody. According to Herl, the issue for Luther was giving song back to the congregation because the choir had taken the primary responsibility for singing in the liturgy.<sup>37</sup> Leaver highlights how Luther used

music as part of his catechetical pedagogy.<sup>38</sup> Even though the Italian renaissance style of more individualistic performance made its way to Germany, Stiller's judgement is that German Lutheranism did not know of the distinction between church style and theatrical style.<sup>39</sup>

The issue today is usually slightly different, in our context, anyway. There is still often a need to teach a congregation to sing, but it is more because the western entertainment culture has taught people to be observers rather than participants. Another issue is sometimes the need to give the song back to the congregation because the music group or worship leaders have assumed it as their responsibility. In fact, the two things are linked in the Australian context. In some instances the band may lead well and encourage congregational song, but the congregation is so used to being observers in the broader culture that, without catechesis and encouragement, they will assume that stance in worship too.

In time, music was thought of by Luther and in later Lutheranism as the *viva voce evangelii*, the living voice of the gospel.<sup>40</sup> It is a question for us whether that understanding still remains. How many churches for example would still insist that school principals must know how to sing and candidates for ordination must have studied music.<sup>41</sup>

A final point of interest, which is significant when we think of liturgical growth in the mission field, is to distinguish the words of the liturgy from the musical setting of the liturgy. The Lutheran Confessions teach us to identify the status *controversiae* when discussing conflicted issues. Many worship discussions and so-called worship wars fail to progress very much because they don't distinguish text and music in liturgical discussion. Three new contemporary musical settings of the liturgy were generated in our own church when musicians were asked to use the wording of two common Holy Communion orders as closely as possible and write a new musical setting. Many complete settings were submitted and three complete settings were chosen.<sup>42</sup> In recent years a new setting has also been released by the Commission of Worship titled *Five Songs of Faith*. I don't mention this to necessarily

<sup>32</sup> “A Simple Way to Pray,” *LW* 43: 193–211.

<sup>33</sup> “A Simple Way to Pray,” *LW* 43: 200.

<sup>34</sup> Readers are directed to the work of Robin Leaver in this connection, especially *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, 86–97.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. Theodore Tappert (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2003). See for example, “Letter to Joachim of Anhalt,” 1534, 94, and “Letter to Matthias Weller,” 1534, 97.

<sup>37</sup> Herl, *Worship Wars*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, 107–61.

<sup>39</sup> Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 142–43.

<sup>40</sup> Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 267.

<sup>41</sup> See Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, 277, quoting Tischreden, 292.

<sup>42</sup> These were released under the title *Sing the Feast* and are available in musical score and CD. <http://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/commission-worship/order-resources>.

suggest any other Lutheran church use them, although you are welcome to, but to illustrate possible outcomes when the text of the liturgy and the music of the liturgy are distinguished. These contemporary settings illustrate that all musicians grapple with the integration of words and appropriate musical setting, but they are an attempt to practice Luther's encouragement for congregations to be participants, not observers, in the liturgical life of the church.

## Summary

The impact of Lutheranism on worship is an interesting topic. We recognise that worship in general, and the liturgy of the Lord's Supper specifically, is not a Lutheran invention. There is an ecumenical perspective in all liturgical studies and conversations that needs to be kept firmly in view. Where confessional integrity leads us or perhaps even constrains us, it does so by urging us to be what I have called renovators, not innovators. Liturgy in Lutheran churches ought to be recognised as at least a cousin, if not a sibling, of liturgy in Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches.

So what is the impact of Lutheranism? In the examples I have given both from the sacramental and the sacrificial aspects of worship, the impact relates to two main things. Justification by grace through faith in Christ means that standing in and with Christ gives us confidence in worship, both in terms of divine service, and in the response of faith. Secondly, when Lutheran liturgical life is grounded in the actual commands and promises of the word of God, and even uses the actual words of Scripture for absolution, prayer, and praise, those who gather gain confidence that the forgiveness won on the cross is offered and received by faith in the liturgical assembly.

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*Rev. Dr. Andrew Pfeiffer is head of the school of Pastoral Theology at Australian Lutheran College.*