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The Holy Trinity and Our Lutheran Liturgy

Timothy Maschke

I. Introduction

"We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God." So states the *Quicunque Vult* in *Lutheran Worship* and the Book of Concord.¹ As confessional Lutherans, we boldly and confidently declare that we worship the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The topic of the Trinity and worship seems to have such an obvious connection in our common Lutheran faith that we might question whether it is even worth a presentation at a Theologians' Convocation. Regularly, we invoke the Trinity at the start of each service and conclude with a trinitarian benediction. During the service, we confess the Holy Trinity in the creed, and the psalms and collects conclude with trinitarian doxologies. Many of our hymns make reference to the Trinity or conclude with a doxological stanza.² Our trinitarian theology saturates our worship ... or does it?

Recently I mentioned this topic to several students at Concordia University Wisconsin and discovered that an increasing number of Lutheran congregations omit the creed on many Sundays. Invocations and benedictions are being replaced with calls to worship and dismissals—using scriptural texts, of course, but avoiding trinitarian terms.³ A student, not aware of this present project on worship and the Trinity, came up to me recently and said

¹*Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), p. 134; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 24 [hereafter abbreviated Kolb and Wengert]; see also Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 19; *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), 53.

²*Lutheran Worship* has eight hymns in its "Trinity" section, five of the "Morning" and "Evening" section are traditional trinitarian hymns, and numerous other texts are trinitarian in the use of doxological stanzas or trinitarian in actual content. Perhaps one of the most ancient trinitarian hymns is #172, "Father Most Holy." Although dated in the tenth century, it has its roots in the early fourth century.

³Ruth C. Duck and Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God: The Trinity in Christian Worship* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999), 3, states "And, with many trinitarian theologians in recent decades, we sense that Christian worship in North America is rarely fully trinitarian."

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he had visited an LCMS congregation where they were singing the contemporary song, "Father, I adore you." After the second stanza, "Jesus, I adore you," they stopped. He asked the worship leader why and was told, "We don't worship the Spirit here."⁴ Robert Jenson asserts that "the trinitarian heritage includes the triune rhetorical and dramatic structure of Christian liturgy, but this structure is vital in few service books and fewer congregations."⁵ What is going on in Lutheranism?

Speaking of terms, I have heard that a few of our congregations have fallen into the politically correct, but theologically fallacious, pattern of speaking of our Triune God in terms of what He does rather than Who He is—Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer;⁶ or with more gender-inclusive titles, Source, Word, and Spirit; or Parent, Child, and Love.⁷ Although these alternatives in liturgical language have some biblical support, they are recognized almost universally as inadequate.⁸ This linguistic aspect of trinitarian theology is beyond the

⁴Jonathan Moyer, personal conversation, February 5, 2003. The evangelical scholar, Robert E. Webber, reported a similar experience at a conference a few years earlier, in "Is Our Worship Adequately Triune?" *Reformation and Revival* 9 (Summer 2000): 121.

⁵Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), x.

⁶"Methodist Maneuvers," *Time*, December 28, 1987.

⁷Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 36-38; earlier, they argue that "when used to the exclusion of other metaphors, the language of Father, Son, and Spirit is too limited and stereotyped to encourage trinitarian faith" (2). Duck and Wilson-Kastner conclude an "invocation," with the following: "Glory be to you, God, Fountain of Love, Word of Truth, Spirit of Power. Amen" (*Praising God*, 139). Kathryn E. Greene-McCreight, "When I Say God, I Mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit: On the Ecumenical Baptismal Formula," *Pro Ecclesia* VI, 3 (Summer 1997): 298-303, evaluates the arguments and several suggested alternative baptismal formulas, including Ruth Duck's "Fountain, Offspring, Wellspring," Gail Ramshaw's "Abba, Servant, Paraclete" and "Of Whom, Through Him, In Whom," and Brian Wren's "Mother, Lover, Friend." See Gail Ramshaw, "Naming the Trinity: Orthodoxy and Inclusivity," *Worship* 60 (November 1986): 491-498, for her proposed alternative. Yet, see S. Anita Stauffer, "In Whose Name?" *Lutheran Forum* 27 (Lent 1993): 6, where she endorses the traditional naming of God as "the only doctrinally acceptable way for a person to be baptized into the Body of Christ." Jenson says that such attempts to replace the biblical trinitarian terminology presupposes "that we first know about a triune God and then look for a form of words to address him, when in fact it is the other way around" (*The Triune Identity*, 17).

⁸Paul Johnson, *The Quest for God: A Personal Pilgrimage* (London: Phoenix, 1996), 47-49, affirms the feminist quest and allows for private variety, but warns against changing liturgical language, which should remain stable for the sake of the people. Frank Senn,

scope of my particular topic, as it is related more closely to the topic of contemporary trinitarian thought, an area assigned to another speaker.

What is behind this shift away from the Trinity? Is it an attempt to meet people's needs by being less doctrinaire, or is it a failure to recognize the importance of confessing our Triune God before an idolatrous world? Is there something happening in our congregations today in the area of worship that is affecting our theology, or are changes in our theology becoming evident in our worship?

II. Theology and Worship

Orthodoxy is one of those wonderful theological terms that is multidimensional. Orthodoxy refers both to correct teaching on the Trinity and to right praise or correct worship of our Triune God. Worship and doctrine go hand in hand, since they are expressions of the faith that has been formed. Robert Jenson articulates this aspect of theology: "It is in the liturgy, when we do not talk about God but to and for him, that we need and use His name, and that is where the trinitarian formulas appear, both initially and to this day."⁹ In the first few centuries of Christianity, trinitarian doctrine was formed and influenced by the liturgical life of the Christian community.¹⁰ We have heard of the strong relationship of worship to the Trinity in the church's history. "Worship is the situation in life out of which trinitarian doctrine evolved and is sustained."¹¹ Only in later years did the correctness of the theological formulations become a central concern.¹²

Recently, an author writing about the relationship of the Trinity and worship pointed to this same close connection between worship and doctrine with a warning: "Since, however, worship shapes the faith of Christians, over time inadequate language of praise will distort a church's understanding and experience of faith."¹³ We are formed by what we do and say – our culture

Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997): 685, makes the dubious comment, "Nevertheless, trinitarian language has been a tough nut to crack."

⁹Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 10.

¹⁰Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 244.

¹¹Christopher Cocksworth, "The Trinity Today: Opportunities and Challenges for Liturgical Study," *Studia Liturgica* 27 (1997): 65.

¹²Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 11, cites several early second century liturgical sources, including Ignatius' *To Magnesians* 13:1; Clement's *To Corinthians* 42:3; 46:6; 58:2; *Second Clement* 20:5; and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:3.

¹³Duck and Wilson-Kastner continue: "The liturgical language of Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Orthodox churches tends to be more fully trinitarian than that of Protestant churches just described [evangelical Jesus-only; charismatic Spirit-only; and

has overpowering influence on us. That is why we need to affirm over and over again that our worship forms us into a community of faith and then reflects the true faith of the community to the world.

One of my concerns in this article is to show how our Lutheran liturgical practices flow naturally from and fit neatly into our fully trinitarian theology – there is a mutuality of the *lex orandi-lex credendi* principle.¹⁴ Given the significance of liturgy for both expressing and shaping the theology and spirituality of Christian communities, I want to illustrate how blessed we are to have our confessional theology integrated so well into our liturgical practices.¹⁵

Most of us are aware of this mutual relationship between liturgy and doctrine. Liturgy communicates doctrine and certainly affects the lives of those who worship. Vilmos Vajta summarized Luther's understanding of worship in these terms, "Rites and ceremonies indeed form a training school of faith. . . . They can serve to bring the immature (the young and simple folk) in the orbit of the Word and Sacrament where faith is born. As long as man is 'external,' such outward orders will be needed for the sake of love, for love and order belong together."¹⁶ Therefore, what occurs in worship affects doctrine; similarly, the doctrine of the church should be evident in its worship, according to Luther.

The Danish Lutheran theologian Regin Preter carried on Luther's approach to theology and liturgy. In a masterful article, titled simply "Liturgy and Theology," Preter exhibited this unique Lutheran approach in relating the two to each other: "The liturgy of the Church is theological. It speaks to God and man about God and man. . . . The theology of the Church is liturgical, a part of the liturgy in the wider sense. . . . It serves God and neighbor."¹⁷ The separation of either from the other has detrimental effects warned Preter:

If liturgy is separated from theology, i.e., if it is no longer in its essence "theology" or true witness to the revelation of God, it then becomes an

even liberal "fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man"-only]" (*Praising God*, 4).

¹⁴Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 218-283.

¹⁵John D. Witvliet, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Theology and Practice of Christian Worship in the Reformed Tradition," Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1997, 9, makes the same general argument.

¹⁶Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 175.

¹⁷Regin Preter, "Liturgy and Theology," *Theologie und Gottesdienst: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Århus: Forlaget Aros, 1977); published in English as *Liturgy, Theology, and Music in the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1959), 151.

end in itself, a "good work," performed with the intention of pleasing God. . . . If, on the other hand, theology is separated from liturgy, i.e., if it is no longer seen as a part of the liturgy of the Church, part of the living sacrifice of our bodies in the service of God and our fellow men, it, too, becomes an end in itself, a human wisdom competing with and sometimes even rejecting the revelation of God. . . . These two dangers arising out of the neglect of the essential unity of liturgy and theology are, I think, imminent in our present situation in the Lutheran Church.¹⁸

And that was written almost 50 years ago! Peter Brunner underscored this mutuality of doctrine and worship in his introductory comments to his classic work, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*. He wrote, "The church's doctrine on worship will determine which liturgical order it employs, which it leaves to freedom of choice, and which it rejects."¹⁹ On the other hand, he also states, "But if the dogmatic statements do not simultaneously express what takes place in the concrete worship service in which we take part, this worship will find itself in a bad way. It would then cease to be the worship instituted by God and Christ."²⁰ To be a Lutheran means that we retain this mutual tension between our orthodox worship life and our orthodox doctrine.

When I speak of the relationship between the Trinity and worship,²¹ I am speaking of the relationship between what some theologians have described as the distinction between secondary and primary theology,²² between cognitive and affective theology; between thinking and doing. That is, the theological expressions of the Trinity in worship are foundational for our

¹⁸Regin Prenter, "Liturgy and Theology," in *Liturgy, Theology, and Music in the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1959), 141.

¹⁹Peter Brunner, "Introduction," *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 24.

²⁰Brunner, "Introduction," 27. In an article cited by Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, ix, Brunner wrote: "Liturgy is dogma prayed and confessed" ("Die Ordnung des Gottesdienstes an Sonn- und Feiertagen" in *Der Gottesdienst an Sonn- und Feiertagen: Untersuchungen zur Kirchen agende*, I:1 [Gütersloh: Güterslohe Verlag, 1949], 10).

²¹Jim Busher sees a little different relationship. "When we speak of the relationship between the Trinity and worship, we are speaking of the relationship between theology and liturgy. Since theology is the language of Christ and liturgy is the language of the church, their relationship reflects the marital union between Christ and the church. In other words, theology is to liturgy as husband is to wife. This defines theology as the source and life of the liturgy, and liturgy as the expression and glory of theology" ("Worship: The Activity of the Trinity," *Logia* 3 [July 1994]: 3).

²²Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), distinguishes these two kinds of language from the perspective of time. Before the theological controversies, which began in the fourth century, the language of the liturgy was primary and the doctrinal reflections on the liturgy were secondary.

beliefs as they manifest what is really "inside." In that light, I have taken into consideration two recent disciplines: the *theology of liturgy*, the discipline that describes the nature, purpose, and significance of public worship in terms of (systematic) theology; and *liturgical theology*, the discipline that articulates the theology that corporate worship actually expresses.²³ The German Lutheran theologian, Oswald Bayer, recently noted that a textual variant in the title of the Apocalypse of John adds, "the Theologian," and then comments: "According to the ancient Greek usage, the term 'theologian' does not denote an academic thinker about God. Rather, the term refers to the person who speaks in the context of the liturgy. As the poetic proclaimer of God, the theologian is localized in a particular *Sitz-im-Leben*."²⁴ True theologians, therefore, are liturgists and proclaimers. It is this synthesis of liturgist and theologian which can serve as a model for us.

Worship provides the arena in which the majority of Lutheran Christians experience and respond to the Trinity without getting into the fine points of philosophical distinctions and theological abstractions. Worship, as we recall from our seminary days, was subsumed under the discipline of practical theology. Whether that is proper is a matter of debate. It is in the area of worship, however, in which our real theologizing takes place and our actual beliefs become evident. A retired professor and former colleague of mine would always say of younger pastors, "You can tell more about a man's theology by what he does than what he says."

A simpler way of saying this is: in worship, we Lutherans see our biblical and confessional theology in action.

A. Lutheran Perspective

I was amazed at the number of books and articles on the subject of Trinity and worship, yet I was frustrated by the near silence on trinitarian worship by Lutheran authors.²⁵ I kept wondering: Are we so orthodox in both our

²³See Aidan Kavanagh and David Fagerberg, *What Is Liturgical Theology? A Study in Methodology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994). Witvliet notes that the former, *theology of liturgy*, is "the most fruitful path for Reformed theology, where liturgical theology is nearly impossible, given the lack of fixed liturgical texts, rubrics, and practices" ("Doctrine of the Trinity," 8-9).

²⁴Oswald Bayer, "Poetological Doctrine of the Trinity," trans. Christine Helmer, *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (Spring 2001): 44.

²⁵Witvliet, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 1-2, lists in his first footnotes a plethora of recent studies by Orthodox (3 works), Roman Catholic (5 studies), Protestant (7), Reformed (5), Feminist (2), and Liberation (2) theologians. Only one Lutheran has published a book on the subject of the Trinity – Jenson, *The Triune Identity*. Several articles by Lutherans are available, but nothing of any major size.

worship and our theology that we do not need to consider the issue or have we failed to recognize the contemporary significance of this theological dimension in our worship life?

Whatever the answer, I have tried to narrow my remarks to what I perceive as specifically Lutheran understandings and practices of worship and the Trinity. That is, I am coming from the evangelical-catholic perspective that grew out of Luther's Reformation, is reflected in an acknowledged adherence to the Book of Concord, and is expressed in our recent synodical hymnals. This theology and its resultant liturgical practices, I acknowledge, are never isolated from other denominational influences and confessional perspectives.

"Evangelical and catholic" describes Lutheran worship today in many parts of our synod: evangelical in its Gospel orientation toward outreach and catholic in its universal expression of and living witness to the Christian faith for all time.²⁶ I cherish this Lutheran heritage of worship—especially in light of my assigned topic. We have maintained a strongly trinitarian understanding both because of our great biblical theology and our dynamic liturgical tradition.

Before I go too much further, I want to explain why I am focusing on liturgy rather than Christian worship in general. I understand the concept of worship to be something that is both public and private, while liturgy is a little more narrow and is always corporate. Similarly, when Christians worship they may use ritual, whereas liturgy by its nature is ritual action of theological import. I'm focusing on Lutheran liturgy rather than general Christian worship, because Lutherans historically have been identified as a liturgical church in the evangelical-catholic tradition of Christian public worship.²⁷ My perspective on Lutheran liturgy also helps me focus our thoughts on what we are doing Sunday after Sunday and how our liturgy reflects our theology and our theology is reflected in our liturgy. Other denominations are facing

²⁶For another perspective on the definition of this phrase, see David P. Scaer, "Evangelical and Catholic—A Slogan in Search of a Definition," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (October 2001): 323-344.

²⁷Theodore M. Ludwig makes this association, "Liturgical denominations include the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran churches; nonliturgical groups would be Baptists, Quakers, and the variety of free evangelical churches. Somewhere in between are such groups as the Methodists and the Calvinist (Presbyterian, Reformed) churches, who do not emphasize the traditional liturgies and sacraments but do follow commonly accepted forms of worship" (*The Sacred Paths: Understanding the Religions of the World*, 2nd Edition [Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996], 431).

similar situations, although for some of them it is very nearly a crisis condition regarding the very trinitarian theology they espouse.²⁸

B. *The Trinity in Theology*

It has been suggested by some worship scholars that, perhaps, we are beginning to reap the results of Immanuel Kant's assertion that "the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has *no practical relevance at all*."²⁹ I hope that is not the case. For it is precisely in the area of worship that the doctrine of the Trinity has its most practical relevance and also its greatest evidence for the Christian believer in the world. It is in our Lutheran liturgy that our trinitarian theology is most clearly identifiable.

Some theologians have wondered whether our worship and theology has become Unitarian—focusing only on one person of the Trinity, usually the Son. Karl Rahner once wrote, "Despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, most Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.'"³⁰ Even among Lutherans, care must be exercised in our christological emphasis that we do not exhibit an unintentional monotheism or, what others have called a "binitarian deity"—Father and Son, or Son and Spirit—neglecting the interrelationship between all the persons and the unity of activity among the persons.³¹

An avowed feminist, yet trinitarian theologian, Ruth Duck, stated the issue pointedly:

These days the doctrine of the Trinity is generally peripheral to everyday Christian faith, life, and worship. Many Christians, lay and clergy, consider the Trinity to be an abstract doctrine describing the inner life of God, of interest only to academic theologians. Whether they consider the

²⁸Witvliet, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 20, reflects this. I have also read articles by several Reformed theologians who bemoan the fact that they have no prescribed liturgical texts and so have no basic trinitarian doctrine of worship to fall back upon.

²⁹Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 65. American Protestants often echo the derogatory comment made by Thomas Jefferson about the "incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three" (cited in Thomas Cuming Hall, *The Religious Background of American Culture* [Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1930], 172).

³⁰Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10. Jenson makes that accusation of "denominational Lutheranism's centuries-long affection for forms of prayer and praise with only second-article remembrance-content and no invocation of the Spirit. . . ." (*The Triune Identity*, 131).

³¹Robert W. Jenson, "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (Summer 1993): 300-302, underscores this dilemma of Barth's trinitarian theology that over-emphasizes the relationship of the Father and the Son in Augustinian terms of love and ends up with a "two-sided" modalistic deity. Some have labeled it "binitarian."

Trinity a late doctrine unsupported by scripture, or they accept the teaching as true but beyond the average person's understanding, such people do not consider the Trinity essential to Christian life or even worthy of thoughtful reflection.³²

I hope Lutherans have not fallen into that same dilemma.

In this article I wish to underscore the profound beauty of our trinitarian worship as it has been retained in our worship books . . . and to sound a warning about some alternative contemporary resources. I will advert to liturgical practices, but cannot be exhaustive or even inclusive of all that occurs even within our own synod because of the diversity of ideas in popular worship literature.

C. Trinitarian Relationships

Our Trinity is one God in three persons and three persons in one God. As Robert Jenson helpfully points out, "Trinitarian discourse is Christianity's effort to identify the God who has claimed us. The doctrine of the Trinity comprises a proper name, 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,' in several grammatical variants, and an elaborate development and analysis of corresponding identifying descriptions."³³ I do not intend to explicate the doctrine of the Trinity. But, because of the incomprehensibility of that doctrine, various terms have been used to illustrate the relationship of the persons, of which two are particularly pertinent to liturgical worship, *koinonia* and *perichoresis*, as expressions of the comprehensive and integrated view of the Trinity's economy.

True trinitarian worship will reflect the *koinonia* (fellowship) that lies at the heart of God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are related in a fellowship to each other in a way that is beyond our comprehension. This harmonious relationship, however, provides hope for the community of believers who gather in His name. They are bound in that same partnership by the working of this same Triune God through the word and sacraments. The Father's word draws us into a distinctive kinship, the Son's body and blood feeds us as His mystical body, and the Spirit's evoking keeps us in a unique affiliation faith.

True trinitarian worship will also reflect the *perichoresis* (indwelling) that describes the activity of the divine persons in themselves.³⁴ The Father, Son,

³²Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 3.

³³Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 4.

³⁴Don E. Saliers speaks of this in a more literal sense of "dancing around": "This dance around (*perichoresis*) of honor and blessing in the very heart of God will not rest content until it is also shared in brokenness and in the actualities of life" (*Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1994], 41). The feminist

and Holy Spirit move together in a partnership that is beyond our comprehension. This interpenetration of persons, however, provides comfort for the community of believers who gather in His name. They are engaged in that same mutuality by the working of this same Triune God through the word and sacraments. Richard Eyer's latest book captures this dimension, when he says, "This is the function of the Divine Service in the Christian life: to be taken out of ourselves and into the life of God."³⁵

The miracle and marvel of the Trinity is that we believe in an utterly transcendent deity who created the universe and sustains it daily, yet who has chosen to come to us human beings in human form and in human language so that we can embrace Him in a community of love and obedience.³⁶ He is our Father because of our Brother who establishes fellowship with us by His Spirit.

We cannot call upon the name of the Father except the Spirit enables us (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15), because God who is the Father of light and thus beyond creation (Jam. 1:17) dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). At the same time, Christ who is the icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) reveals the Father to us. In Christ we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Thus the whole Trinity is involved in God's relationship with us and our relationship with God.³⁷

III. The Thesis

Lutherans experience the Holy Trinity in three distinct, yet interrelated, spheres of our liturgy – praising the Father who forgives us, remembering the Son who serves us, and invoking the Spirit who sanctifies us; to worship without all of these is to do a disservice both to God and to the worshipers. I will use three interlocking circles, the typical Trinity symbol, as a way of understanding the interrelatedness of the Trinity in our liturgical activities.

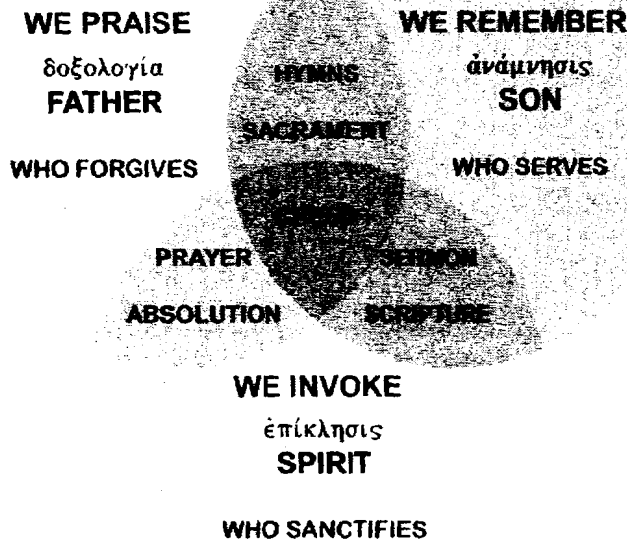
theologian, Catherine Mowry LaCugna (*God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* [San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993], 272), expands on this concept by encouraging liturgical dance as an expression of the Trinity.

³⁵Richard C. Eyer, *They Will See His Face: Worship and Healing* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 34.

³⁶In one sense, this illustrates a point made by Robert Jenson when he points out that when Lutherans (or any theologians for that matter) use the doctrine of the Trinity, they are "led – indeed, compelled – to treat the three as *parties* of divine action, and that also 'imminently'" ("You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," 299).

³⁷Jay Cooper Rochelle, "The Mystery of the Trinity and Christian Prayer," *Lutheran Forum* [Una Sancta edition] 35 (Fall 2001): 15.

THE HOLY TRINITY



AND LUTHERAN LITURGY

This diagram depicts the relationship I see in our Lutheran liturgy and our doctrine of the Trinity. I am indebted for the initial ideas contained in this diagram to Robert Webber, who in several articles called for a return among evangelicals to the trinitarian nature of worship by praising the Father, remembering the Son, and invoking the Spirit.³⁸ I have tried to have this diagram reflect the truths underscored so beautifully by Norman Nagel in the "Introduction" to *Lutheran Worship* and by Roger Pittelko in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, that worship, as Lutherans understand it, starts and ends with God's activity. We merely respond to Him in gratitude and praise.³⁹

³⁸Robert Webber, "In the Name of the Father," *Worship Leader* (September-October 1996); Webber, "In the Name of the Son," *Worship Leader* (November-December 1996); and Webber, "In the Name of the Spirit," *Worship Leader* (January-February 1997). Available at <http://www.instituteforworshipstudies.org/Resources/Articles>; accessed 11/20/2002.

³⁹Norman Nagel, "Introduction," *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), 6. Roger D. Pittelko, "Corporate Worship of the Church," in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993): 45. One of my regrets with this diagram is that it is not animated. There are elements that are placed in one static location on this diagram which should really be floating between spheres. I hope this will become clear in my explanation. I am aware of the inadequacies of any model or illustration, knowing that Jesus also is our great Intercessor (Heb. 6:20; 7:25-28; 8:1-6) and that the Spirit is active in the Sacrament of the Altar, too (John 14:26).

Worship as *Gottesdienst* (one of those favorite German Lutheran words because of its double-entendre) underscores the dynamic relationship of Lutheran liturgy—God comes to us through word and sacrament and we respond in prayers and praise—thus, worship is more like a gift to be received than an obligation or accomplishment to be fulfilled. Worship does not define or explain the Trinity, but it expresses that which is most basic in our understanding of God—He is three in one. The liturgy is the regular circumstance in which the faithful receive from Him and respond to Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We experience the Trinity in the liturgy as He is—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And this pattern of the *saving action* of God is what the Trinity is all about—how God works to save us from our sin and bring us into fellowship and communion with him. And *where* God does this, in the same pattern and form, is at the font, at the pulpit, and at the altar. . . . And that rhythm—to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit—by the Father from the Son in the Spirit—that spiritual rhythm of prayer and font and pulpit and altar—*that is God!* God is not something “above” or “behind” that rhythm of Father, Son and Spirit—God *is* that Rhythm in our spiritual and prayerful and sacramental life in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whatever we do or say or believe or act upon as Christians in the name of God, we do so *to* the glory of the Father, *through* the glory of the Son, *in* the glory of the Spirit, so that all we do as disciples of our Lord Jesus we do to the glory of the one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

This is doxological worship.

True, genuine trinitarian worship will always be christocentric. God comes to us most clearly in the incarnation, and the liturgy will be incarnational as God comes to touch us with His presence. The Father is honored, as is any father when his child is recognized for what he has done and for who he is, when we look at His gift of love, Jesus, the Christ. The Spirit is honored, in His self-deprecating focus on Christ, whom we see was conceived in the virgin and who was inscripturated as the Word. Yet, this Spirit also connects with our spirits and enables us to worship fully! Such worship not only involves the three persons of the Trinity, but it requires the participation of the worshipers as they are incorporated into the body of Christ. John Kleinig reiterated this thought when he spoke of worship in the name of Jesus: “He

⁴⁰Mark E. Chapman, “The ‘Three-In-One-God’ At Font, Pulpit and Altar,” *Bride of Christ* 19 (Pentecost 1995): 25.

comes to us and does things for us when we gather together in His name. He brings the Holy Spirit with Him and ushers us into the presence of His Heavenly Father. In worship, then, we come into contact with the Holy Trinity. We come into the presence of the Triune God and share in the ministry of Jesus."⁴¹

Robert Jenson has noted that "... Barth is the theologian . . . by which Western theology rediscovered that the doctrine of Trinity, while indeed a mystery, is not a puzzle, that instead it is the frame within which theology's mysteries can be shown and its puzzles solved."⁴² Brian Wren, the British hymn writer, in a collection of his hymns entitled, *Praising a Mystery*, captures the powerful image of this divine mystery when speaking of the Trinity:

God is not one-dimensional, but a multi-dimensional mystery, decisively known in Jesus, active now as the Holy Spirit. The living God is a mystery, not a secret: secrets puzzle us, but lose their fascination when they are revealed. A mystery deepens the more it is pondered and known. At their best, worship, thinking and action are attempts to praise that mystery, to know God, and be known.⁴³

Jay Cooper Rochelle elaborated on the need for mystery, yet the need for knowing God, particularly His name. "Genuine negative theology says, God is indeed *absconditus* (hidden) and dwells in unapproachable and ultimate mystery that cannot be mouthed fully, but (praise be to God) we have been given revelation enough to save us and word enough to allow us to speak to God by name."⁴⁴

IV. The Holy Trinity and Our Lutheran Liturgy

God's people are gathered by the Spirit to respond to the Father in Jesus' name.

Luther, more than any other Reformation theologian, recognized the importance of participation in the Trinity through the liturgy. The very structure of the mass invited and involved the people as members of the priesthood of all believers. In addition, it provided them with the opportunity

⁴²John W. Kleinig, "The Biblical View of Worship," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 58 (October 1994): 247.

⁴³Jenson, "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," 297.

⁴⁴Brian Wren, *Praising a Mystery* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope Publishing, 1986), second [unnumbered] page of the introduction.

⁴⁵Rochelle, "Trinity and Christian Prayer," 14.

to be in the presence of God Himself. The Father was providing, the Son was speaking, and the Spirit was working on the hearts and minds of all.⁴⁵

When we consider a liturgical Sunday service, we find three major elements. First, our Triune God gathers His guests who humbly and unworthily acknowledge the mystery of His presence and forgiveness and respond in with confession and praise. Secondly, our Triune God speaks to us of His saving work and eternal hope as we respond with prayer and thanksgiving. Thirdly, our Triune God nourishes us with His very presence for continuing ministry in the world as we receive and share His life of love with each other and the world.

The invocation is more than an announcement of God's presence or a way of getting His attention.⁴⁶ Because of our baptismal faith, God's people gather together in His name, bearing witness to this faith, seeking the opportunity to be strengthened and nurtured as well as to respond. Luther D. Reed explains the invocation this way:

This formula sums up all that we know of the divine Being in a brief scriptural phrase which has long been used in devotional and liturgical acts of many kinds throughout the universal church. . . . As used here at the beginning of the Service, however, it has the value of an "invocative blessing," as the name indicates, it is addressed to God and not to the congregation. It is an affirmation of faith, prayer of

⁴⁶Martin Luther says, "For participation in the Supper is part of the confession by which they confess before God, angels, and men that they are Christians" ("An Order of Mass and Communion," in J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, editors, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols. [St. Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986], 53:34, hereafter abbreviated as *LW*). Jeremy Driscoll stated this trinitarian dynamic from his Catholic perspective in this way: "The trinitarian doctrine of the church, achieved by theological reflection and expressing the central content of her faith, is rooted in the plunge into trinitarian life effected by the eucharist and the other sacraments. . . . Thus, it is the *form* of the rite that manifests this divine *form*. In one of the dimensions of this form, it can be said that in the eucharist the *Father* gives himself through the *Son* to the world in the church, and the *Spirit* illumines and vivifies every dimension of this gift. In another dimension, the church responds in thanksgiving by offering to the *Father* the very gift she has received: the *Son*. The *Spirit* effects the transformation of the church's gifts into the body and blood of the *Son*. Here we see that this manifestation of the Trinitarian mystery is at one and the same time participation in it. *Many* are *one*, through sharing in the death and resurrection of the Lord, in the *oneness* of Father, Son, and Spirit" ("Theology at the Eucharistic Table: Master Themes in the Theological Tradition," *Pro Ecclesia* 11 [Fall 2002]: 395).

⁴⁷Kleinig explains the common order of service and says, "It begins with the invocation which announces the presence of the Triune God" ("Biblical View," 249). As noted in this paper, the invocation is much more than an announcement.

profession—an approach similar to . . . the words “Our Father” at the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer. We formally express our “awareness” of the presence of God, we place ourselves in that presence, and invoke the divine blessing upon the service which is to follow. We confess our faith in the Holy Trinity, for whose worship we are assembled. We solemnly call God to witness that we are “gathered together” in His name (Matt. 18:20) and in that name offer all our prayer, praise, and thanksgiving (John 16:23).⁴⁷

Or, as Norman Nagel eloquently and poetically echoed these ideas:

The Lord’s triune name comes first in Holy Baptism. If He had not given us His name we would still be making up our own gods. His is the initiative; the action is from Him to us. “In the name” means—along with much more—at His bidding, by His authority, His mandate. . . . This is the name that was put on us with the water at our Baptism. Gathered in the name of God are those who rejoice in their Baptism. . . .⁴⁸

The service begins with and is initiated by the Holy Trinity.

A. *The Forgiving Father is Praised*

1. The forgiving Father restores us in the Absolution

In the first sphere of the liturgy, the focus is on the Father. Confession is an acknowledgment not only of our humanity, but of our recognition that our Creator is also our Judge, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. We join with the prodigals of all time in confessing, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you” (Luke 15:18b). While we acknowledge the Father as the Absolver, the second form of confession in *Lutheran Worship* is most explicitly trinitarian:

O most merciful God [referring to the Father], since you have given your only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy on us and for His sake grant us forgiveness of all our sins; and by your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of you and of your will and true obedience to your Word, to the end that by your grace we may come to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Father’s gift of His Son and the Spirit’s sanctifying work are properly distinguished in this confession. Similarly, the declaration of grace is particularly trinitarian:

⁴⁸Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 252.

⁴⁹Norman E. Nagel, “Holy Baptism,” in Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 262.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy on us and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins. To those who believe on His name he gives power to become the children of God and has promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. Grant this, Lord, to us all.⁴⁹

Thus, the preparatory portion of our worship is clearly and carefully trinitarian as this trinitarian confession seems to be intentionally reminiscent of the post-baptismal blessing: "Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given you the new birth of water and of the Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with His grace to life everlasting."⁵⁰

2. The forgiving Father pardons us in the Supper

This forgiving Father comes to us again. The assurance of forgiveness is made more concrete later in the service as we receive God's gift of His Son, whose body and blood are given and shed for us. Certainly our attention is drawn again to the Father as Forgiver, but in the eucharistic prayer we are also reminded of the Father's initiating grace which engages the whole Trinity:

Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have had mercy on us children of men and given your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We give you thanks for the redemption you have prepared for us through Jesus Christ. Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts that he may establish in us a living faith and prepare us joyfully to remember our Redeemer and receive him who comes to us in His body and blood.⁵¹

Notice the carefully crafted prayer's trinitarian consciousness, each person of the Trinity is involved in the benefits of the Supper – the Son is remembered and the Spirit is invoked – yet it is the forgiving Father whom we address.

3. We praise the Father in song and hymns

As a result of the Father's gifts to us, we respond with our songs of praise and thanksgiving. From the opening hymn to the closing song, our Lutheran hymnody reflects strong acclamations of praise, yet they are also filled with trinitarian images. After a hymn, usually called the Entrance Hymn, we sing the *Kyrie*. The triple-reference in the *Kyrie*, "Lord..., Christ..., Lord, have mercy," indicates that this prayer of mercy is directed to each person of the Trinity. Immediately following the *Kyrie*, the community of faith joins with the

⁵⁰Lutheran Worship, 137.

⁵¹Lutheran Worship, 203.

⁵²Lutheran Worship, 171.

Christmas angels in praising the Father. The *Gloria in Excelsis*, however, expands the angel's message with a trinitarian focus on the Father's gift, the Son's sacrifice, and the Spirit's presence.⁵²

Later in the Communion liturgy, the *Sanctus* provides a profound hymn of adoration to our triune God. Luther's hymnic setting of the *Sanctus*, for example, reflects this dynamic trinitarian dimension of our Lutheran worship service, as he depicted the great throne room of heaven and the seraphim singing their triple-holy (LW 209). Positioned as it is in the midst of the Service of Holy Communion, we join with "angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" to sing God's praises. This triple-holy (*Trisagion*) echoes the songs of the seraphim in Isaiah 6, as the congregation joins the choirs of angels in Revelation. We see that our worship is both trinitarian and trans-temporal. Similarly, we join the choruses of Jerusalem as the *Sanctus* leads us into the Benedictus, with its haunting plea in the triple "Hosanna!"

Many of our communion hymns express appreciation to the Father for the Son's presence and the Spirit's activities. The traditional post-communion canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis*, introduced by the Lutheran reformers from Vespers via Compline, is exemplary of this emphasis on the Father's gift.⁵³ The congregation joins Simeon of old in responding to the real presence of the Son in the sacrament, by acknowledging the Father, "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled."⁵⁴

4. We pray for blessings from the Father with grateful hearts

The community gathers not only to receive, but also to petition the Father of lights for His continuing help. While the Father is normally addressed in Christian prayers, the other persons of the Trinity are certainly recognized.

In response to the Father's invitation and direction, the worshipping community offers its prayers to Him. In the early church, prayers were addressed to the Father *through* the Son *in* the Spirit.⁵⁵ This practice is being restored in recent years, since it noticeably reflects Paul's words in Eph. 2:18 "For through [Christ], we . . . have access in one Spirit to the Father." Our collects, however, typically conclude, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever," in

⁵³Lutheran Worship, 160-161; as well as Luther's hymn, "All Glory Be to God Alone" (# 210) or Nikolaus Decius' hymn, "All Glory Be to God on High" (# 215).

⁵⁴Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 379.

⁵⁵Lutheran Worship, 173-174.

⁵⁶Evidence abounds for this formulation as the following ancient sources illustrate: *The Apostolic Tradition*, *The Anaphora of Basil*, *The Sacramentary of Serapion*, *The Apostolic Constitutions*, and *The Canons of Hippolytus*.

order to show the equality of persons. This is not mere piety, but a strong confession of the activity of the Trinity in our lives together, which grew out of the early trinitarian controversies. While the Arian viewpoint was strongly and debilitatingly opposed by this change, Andrew Horseman suggests that "the Church found it had lost the 'shape' of the Trinity."⁵⁶

Yet, a trinitarian equality in prayer forms is also evident from earliest times in Christian corporate prayer. Perhaps typical of these properly trinitarian prayers is the prayer of Polycarp upon his martyrdom, which was addressed to "Lord God, almighty Father of your beloved and blessed Servant Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of you, 'the God of angels and powers and all creation' and of the whole race of the righteous who love in your presence." It concluded with this trinitarian doxology: "For this and for everything I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Servant, through whom be glory to you with him and Holy Spirit both now and to the ages to come. Amen."⁵⁷ Similarly a prayer at an ordination, recorded in the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, exhibits the following trinitarian doxological termination: "Through your Servant Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom be glory, might and honour to you, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, both now and always and world without end. Amen."⁵⁸ Prayers addressed to the Father have always been trinitarian.

In prayer we use the name of God properly. As noted before, Robert Jenson shows that God's name is indeed "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." By praying to the Triune God, we are following Luther's catechetical directives regarding the second commandment: "the proper way to honor God's name is to look to it for all consolations and therefore to call upon it. Thus, we have heard above, first the heart honors God by faith and then the lips by confession."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Andrew Horsman, "The Shape of the Trinity: Eucharistic Worship and the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Theology* 102 (March-April 1999): 92. Actually, the phrase suggested by Basil was "glory to the Father with (*meta*) the Son with (*syn*) the Holy Spirit" (*On the Spirit* 7:3, 16, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, V). Later in the same document, Basil would write, "For myself, I pray that with this confession I may depart hence to the Lord, and them [my accusers] I charge to preserve the faith secure until the day of Christ, and to keep the Spirit undivided from the Father and the Son, preserving, both in the confession of faith and in the doxology, the doctrine taught them at their baptism" (10:26).

⁵⁸ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:1, 3, in *Early Christian Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics vol. 1, ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970), 154.

⁵⁹ *Apostolic Tradition* 1:3, ed. Burton Scott Easton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).

⁶⁰ *Large Catechism* I, 70 (Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 395).

One area, however, where our Lutheran liturgical prayer formula is weak in its trinitarian emphasis is in the general prayer in *Lutheran Worship*. While the diaconal form of the prayers are addressed to the Father as "Lord," the conclusion eliminates any reference to the Spirit, as the presiding minister says: "Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord."⁶⁰ With the strong trinitarian emphasis throughout the rest of the service, this omission of a direct reference to the Holy Spirit is probably not hazardous.

B. The Serving Son is Remembered

The second sphere of our Lutheran liturgy centers on the Son. God's Son serves as our Liturgist (*leitourgos* in Heb. 8:2). He provides for us and makes our worship not our work at all, but a gift of God. John Kleinig has written:

The chief celebrant is Jesus, our great high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. He leads us in our worship by representing us before the Father in intercession and thanksgiving (Hebrews 7:25; 9:25) and by representing God the Father to us in proclamation and praise (Hebrews 2:12). By means of His service in the heavenly sanctuary Jesus leads us, together with the angels and the whole communion of saints, in the performance of the heavenly liturgy (Hebrews 2:11; 8:2; 12:22-24; 13:15).⁶¹

1. The serving Son nourishes us with the Bread of Life in Scripture.

Early in His ministry, Jesus quoted Moses, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4 citing Deut. 8:3). Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14), the *Pantocrator* who was the Word at creation (John 1:1), and continues to sustain His creation with that word and speaks to us today through the words of men. Every liturgical Lutheran worship service includes readings from Scripture.⁶² "I am the Bread of Life," Jesus said (John 6:35, 48). These words feed and nourish God's people. Old Testament passages point to the promises of God. New Testament verses recall the benefits of Christ's coming. The Gospel always features some work or word of Christ that affects the daily lives of the assembled believers as reminders of God's nurture and care.

In addition to the prescribed readings themselves, Christians have utilized the great hymnal of the church, the Psalter. In so doing, they have supplemented each psalm with a trinitarian doxology. This is not some kind

⁶¹*Lutheran Worship*, 168.

⁶²Kleinig, "Biblical View," 246.

⁶³Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship, 1523," LW 53:11.

of a negative statement, suggesting that the Old Testament is a Jewish book or is somehow inadequate; rather, it is a positive example of being clear in affirming our trinitarian theology. Luther D. Reed explained:

The Gloria Patri or Little Doxology (as distinguished from the Gloria in Excelsis) has doctrinal as well as devotional values. It distinguished the Christian use of the Psalter and connects the Old Testament texts with . . . the New Testament. Thus it is regularly added to every psalm, canticle, or portion thereof. Its use in the early church affirmed the orthodox belief in the divinity, equality, and eternity of the three Persons, in opposition to Arian and other heresies. Yet the continued use of the Gloria Patri in the liturgy today is more than a memorial of ancient controversies. It is a brief but clear profession of faith in the Holy Trinity and particularly in the divinity of our Lord.⁶³

Thus, the Psalter is a Christian worship resource, and the doxologies point to that trinitarian reality.

2. The serving Son feeds us with Himself in the bread and wine.

Later in the service our Savior comes again. Here again, we see how our Lutheran trinitarian and sacramental theology comes out tangibly during the liturgy of Holy Communion. Here we again affirm the fact that we receive the very body and blood of Him who offered Himself and said, "This is my body . . . this is my blood." We take Jesus for His word and He feeds us with Himself. But more than that, our trinitarian theology is present. The Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, is given by the Father. The eucharistic prayer underscores this trinitarian emphasis as we praise the Father, remember the Son, and invoke the Spirit.⁶⁴

3. We remember our Savior's service as we reflect on Scripture and the sermon.

Our response to Christ's activity is to remember Him, as He requested (Luke 22:19). Remembering Christ includes His incarnation as the Logos of God, the creator of heaven and earth, His suffering both actively and passively, His death and resurrection, and His promise to come again (a strong eschatological dimension in our worship).

⁶³Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 264.

⁶⁴See *Through the Church the Song Goes On*, ed. Paul J. Grime, et. al. (St. Louis: Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1999), 43-72, for a discussion on the use of a more elaborate and traditional Eucharist Prayer. The traditional eucharistic prayer of early Christian liturgies with its anamnesis and epiclesis were fervently and faithfully trinitarian in nature.

This remembering is not merely a recalling of dates or events or facts, but is a participating in the past event with present and future blessings – “contemporaneity” is the word I have used to describe it.⁶⁵ When God’s word is read and proclaimed and sacramentally distributed, He makes Himself present among us and we enter into that story as the text is applied to our lives. James B. Torrance describes this effect: “True theology is done in the presence of God in the midst of the worshiping community. The ‘two horizons’ of the Bible and our contemporary church life fuse in worship. . . .”⁶⁶

Particularly in the sermon, the message of Christ is central (Rom. 10:17). Carefully distinguishing and applying the Law and Gospel propels the word into the hearts of the hearers.⁶⁷ With St. Paul, Lutheran pastors repeat, “We preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23). The message of Christ can only be preached by the power of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul reminds us, “. . . No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3b). Philip Pfatteicher has expressed it this way:

In the power of the Holy and life-giving Spirit, the work of God in Christ is remembered. The story of the salvation of the world is renewed. The paschal mystery at the heart of the Christian faith is recalled and brought into the present as a living reality as the Church remembers before the Father the deeds of the Son, who in fulfillment of His promises, makes himself present to the congregation.⁶⁸

Thus, even without making a direct reference, our remembering the Son is a trinitarian activity.

4. We remember Christ through our songs of praise and sacrament.

We also respond to Christ with our voices. The angels’ song, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, mentioned earlier with its expansion from Luke, is an affirmation of praise to the Father Almighty, but also to the only-begotten Son, the Lamb of God, the Son of the Father, who only is Lord; who “with the Holy Spirit are most high in the glory of God the Father.”⁶⁹ Our celebrative and joyful remembrance of the Son is trinitarian.

⁶⁵Timothy Maschke, “Contemporaneity: A Hermeneutical Perspective in Martin Luther’s Work,” *Ad Fontes Lutheri: Toward the Recovery of the Real Luther* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 165-182.

⁶⁷James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 10.

⁶⁸Martin Luther, in commenting on 1 Pet. 4:1, said: “Christ is present and preaches to the hearts wherever a preacher proclaims the word of God to the ear” (“Sermons on the First Epistle of Peter,” LW 30:138).

⁶⁹Philip Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1997), 99-100.

⁷⁰*Lutheran Worship*, 139.

I found it interesting that several years ago, the United Church of Christ prepared a "mostly gender-neutral" *Gloria*, yet was criticized for keeping the term "Lord," when referring to Christ. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth," it begins. As it concludes, it states, "For you alone are the Messiah, you alone are the Lord, you are alone the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of the triune God."⁷⁰ That last line, in substituting the word "triune" for the name "Father," in effect eliminated the Trinity from this hymn of praise, by distinguishing the Triune God from Jesus and the Spirit.

The second hymn of praise in *Lutheran Worship*, "Worthy Is Christ (This is the Feast)," recalls Christ's victory for us and for our salvation, yet it goes beyond. This paean of praise, a "new" song adapted from the songs of Revelation, is lifted to the Holy Trinity. The hymn centers the worshipers' attention on Christ, the Lamb, whose victory has been won and whom all heaven joins in praising with the Father. Specific references to the Spirit are absent, although the triple Alleluias give subtle witness to the trinitarian frame of reference.

Our remembering is most sustained in the distribution of the Lord's body and blood. Again the contemporaneity of our worship is evident—Christ is truly present with us as we experience His Supper by the Spirit's activity and the Father's gracious giving. This contemporaneity contrasts the Reformed concept of the real presence being only something faith grasps or the Roman Catholic concept of re-presenting Christ's sacrifice. Christ is really present with His gathered guests.⁷¹

C. The Sanctifying Spirit is Invoked

Our third circle encloses the activities of the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier.

1. The sanctifying Spirit assures us of our forgiveness.

As our Lutheran confessors stated, "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel."⁷² This activity of applying the words of God to our personal lives is the chief activity of the Holy Spirit. He takes what are the Father's and the Son's and makes them ours (John 16:15).

⁷¹Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 51.

⁷²Perhaps most illustrative of this concept is Lucas Cranach's altarpiece in St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, where Martin Luther is seated with the twelve apostles at the Last Supper.

⁷³Augsburg Confession V, 1-2 (German text, Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*), 40.

Particularly for us pastors, who preach and speak the words of Absolution, we need to know that those words are indeed God's word spoken in Christ's place by us as called ministers of Christ.

2. The sanctifying Spirit communicates with our spirits through the sermon and Scripture.

Frank Senn, citing Roland Allen, an evangelical theologian, spoke of the work of the Spirit as working "through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the administration of the sacraments of Christ to bring the disobedient, hostile, and recalcitrant world into a new and redeemed community, the church, the body of Christ on earth."⁷³ What a comfort it can be for us to know that the Spirit uses our words and His word to reach out into the world.

The readings from Holy Scripture are the promised means that the Triune God uses most concretely to communicate with humanity. It is His word, not the words of mere human writers. This we acknowledge when we hear the lector say, "This is the word of the Lord." To which we respond, "Thanks be to God." God is speaking and we express our gratitude to God for blessing our hearing.

When the Holy Gospel is read, the trinitarian references become more full. We anticipate the Holy Gospel by singing the Hebrew "Hallel" or the Greek "Alleluia," praising God for His divine and Spirit-ed presence and His good news in Christ. "Glory to you, O Lord" is our response to the announcement of the Holy Gospel, and it echoes the imagery of the Old Testament *Shekinah Yahweh*. After the reading of the Gospel, our "Praise to you, O Christ" reaffirms our recognition that Jesus is LORD, something only possible by the activity of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). As Norman Nagel wrote, "Where Jesus' words are going on, there is also the Spirit (John 6:63). Any spirit apart from Jesus is not the Holy Spirit (John 16:15). The Holy Spirit is most pleased when we speak of Jesus and not of him. He gives only Jesus gifts."⁷⁴

In the sermon, the Spirit draws us into the dialectic messages of Law and Gospel, which are proclaimed in the life, death, and resurrection of the Father's only-begotten Son. By the power of His Spirit, that word, which He caused to be written, is now explored, explained, and expounded for the life of God's people in the sermon. The activity of the Trinity is never more potent than during the sermon.

⁷³Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 39, citing Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit*, ed. David M. Paton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

⁷⁴Norman E. Nagel, "Holy Communion," in Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 290.

In the early church, the activity of the Spirit was underscored particularly well in the *Didascalia*, an early Christian book on worship and instruction from the third century: "prayer is . . . said through the Holy Spirit, and the eucharist is accepted and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and the scriptures are the words of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁵ The Spirit was active in all three spheres of worship.

3. We invoke the Spirit's presence as we listen to the word proclaimed.

Invoking the Spirit is more than merely a third link in our liturgical activity; it is a vital and personal relationship in trinitarian worship. The place of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation and the economy of the Trinity has always been that of the stage crew in a dramatic production—present, but invisible to the audience. Jesus tells us that the Spirit directs our attention to Jesus, not to Himself (John 16:15). Whenever we address the Father or the Son, the Spirit is active in His proper work.

Liturgically, the Hymn of the Day reflects the Spirit's activity in and through the word, as does the traditional offertory, "Create in me a clean heart" (Ps. 51), which requests the continuing activity of the Spirit in response to the word for a living faith. The texts for the Hymns of the Day, specifically selected to complement the readings, routinely conclude with a doxological stanza or are written around some particular revelation of the Trinity, emphasizing the activity of the Spirit through the word of the Father in Christ.⁷⁶

4. We are moved by the Spirit to pray for the community.

In all of this, we reflect Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, that "The Holy Spirit . . . calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." This gathering by the Spirit also involves the gathering of our sighings, which He transforms into effective, prayerful speech understood by the Father (Rom. 8:26-27). The intercessory activity of the congregation is in reality the intercessory activity of the Spirit. These corporate prayers echo Jesus' final and profoundly trinitarian words on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 24:46). Our spirits are united with Christ's Spirit as we speak to the Father in prayer. Thus, the Spirit moves us to pray, and the Spirit offers our prayers to the Father through the Son.

⁷⁶*The Didascalia* 1:32 in *The Liturgical Portions of the Didascalia*, ed. Sebastian Brock and Michael Vasey (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1982).

⁷⁷*Lutheran Worship*, 976-978, provides a listing of the "Hymn of the Day" for each Sunday in the church year.

Arthur Just has helpfully drawn our attention to the Lukan account of Jesus' Easter appearance as centered in a worship setting.⁷⁷ As the word was expounded their "hearts burned within them" (24:32) and as Jesus broke the bread their "eyes were opened" (24:31). That experience should occur for our people, too, as the Spirit communicates through the words of Christ at the Table of the Lord. This dimension of our worship is evident in the post-communion prayers as we pray to the Father, giving thanks for His Son, and do so in the powerful name of the Trinity.

The invocation of the Spirit is finally evident in the eucharistic prayer in *Lutheran Worship*. In this prayer we see our Lutheran theology coming out distinctly. The Father's love is recalled and the Son's gift of Himself is remembered and then the Spirit is invoked. Not in the Eastern Orthodox or Catholic Eucharistic prayer form, but the epiclesis of the Spirit follows Luther's explanation of preparation for the Lord's Supper. Luther reminds us that "Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but *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* [emphasis added]."⁷⁸ The Spirit is invoked to strengthen the faith of the recipients so that they are truly worthy and well prepared.

D. The Creed is at the Center

The Invocation and Benediction serve as artistic and theological bookends to the liturgy with the Creed at the center. The Creed summarizes our understanding of the object of our worship, the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I have already spoken of the Invocation as directing our attention to the Trinity as the subject of our gifts and the object of our worship. The three ecumenical creeds, indeed in their placement, show the centrality of a trinitarian creed in our liturgy. The confession of the Trinity is placed near the climax of the Service of the Word – the sermon. Some liturgies indicate that the creed is said prior to the sermon and others just after it. In both locations, the creed is a summary of the word – the key to our understanding of our triune God's gifts to us.

Confessing the Apostles' Creed, Lutheran worshipers acknowledge the mystery of the Trinity and the name by which we have been claimed in baptism.⁷⁹ With the Nicene Creed, the errors of the past are rejected and the biblical truths of the three persons of the Trinity are affirmed. Occasionally,

⁷⁸Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke*, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996).

⁷⁹Small Catechism, VI, 9-10 (Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 363).

⁸⁰Norman Nagel, "Holy Baptism," in Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 262.

usually on Trinity Sunday, the Athanasian Creed is spoken by the congregation as they proclaim the mystery of the Godhead in three persons – “not three uncreated or three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.”

The Aaronic blessing is a unique Lutheran contribution to evangelical-catholic worship. Most worship services end with a dismissal or the Pauline benediction. Lutherans have followed Martin Luther in re-introducing this blessing which was commanded by God Himself.⁸⁰ As Luther D. Reed notes:

The Benediction is the final sacramental feature of the Service. It is more than a prayer for blessing. It imparts a blessing in God's Name, giving positive assurance of the grace and peace of God to all who receive it in faith. God's command to Moses (Num. 6:22-27) and our Lord's final act in taking leave of His disciples on the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50) strongly support this conviction.⁸¹

Although the service concludes with the Benediction, God's activities continue throughout the week as God's people are empowered for service of word and deed. In addition, the service is eschatological, preparing us for eternity. John Kleinig, writing about the graciousness of God's gifts to us, said, “In worship He gives us as much of Himself as we can receive this side of heaven, so as to prepare us for eternal intimacy with Him in heaven.”⁸²

V. Beyond the Divine Service

A. Other Trinitarian Witnesses

I have mentioned the texts of our Lutheran hymnody, which reflects strongly our trinitarian theology. As noted earlier, many hymns include doxological stanzas. Other hymn texts give voice to specific aspects of the Trinity. Musicologist Lionel Pike has noted another aspect of liturgical music that is more subtly trinitarian: the use of triple time, three pitches or three-note phrases. He has documented numerous Christian musicians who have utilized these triplicates as ways to celebrate the depth of trinitarian texts.⁸³ Therefore, the Trinity is not only in the texts, but on the lips and voices of the

⁸¹Martin Luther, “Order of Mass and Communion,” LW 53:30.

⁸²Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 384.

⁸³Kleinig, “Biblical View,” 251.

⁸⁴Lionel Pike, “Church Music I: Before the Civil War,” in Ian Spink, ed., *The Seventeenth Century*, Blackwell History of Music in Britain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992): 66-96.

people as the congregation participates in a most intimate way with the Trinity.⁸⁴

In Matins and Vespers, we see the Trinity explicated in the liturgy. The invocations, doxologies, and benedictions give witness to the trinitarian faith of the worshipers. In the midst of these services are Scripture readings and prayers and, for our consideration, the peculiar form of song, the canticles. Unique among them is the *Te Deum Laudamus*, which is one of the greatest trinitarian confessions in the liturgy of the church. The origin of this great hymn of the church dates to the years following the Arian controversy, particularly in Western Europe.⁸⁵ Martin Luther included it in his list of creeds of the church.⁸⁶ Joining with angels, all the heavenly hosts, the apostles, and the martyrs, the three persons of the Trinity are explicitly addressed and praised with the thrice-holy. The traditional canticles, the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus*, and the *Nunc Dimittis*, conclude with the traditional doxology, affirming the God or Lord spoken of in the text is none other than the Triune God.

Finally, I can only mention in passing the import of the Church Year. Acknowledging the presence of the Trinity also influenced our liturgical calendar, as we celebrate the Father's Day on Christmas, the Son's Day on Easter, and the Spirit's Day on Pentecost, along with the doctrinal Festival of the Holy Trinity. The festival season of the Church Year directs the attention of the worshipers on specific activities of each person of the Trinity, yet draws our overall experience of the Trinity's work in our lives.

B. A Contemporary Concern

I would like to conclude with a few comments on recent innovations in the area of worship. Popular songs used in contemporary services (of whatever stripe or detail) reflect a popular American deity, expressed in vague terms so that one is never sure if it is personal or impersonal, powerless or powerful, linked with historical events or distanced from them — even songs about Jesus as a friend, lover, and companion, seldom complete the biblical imagery by also portraying Him as the blood-stained criminal on a Roman tool of torture who dies for the sins of the whole world. The language of the songs

⁸⁵Marilyn Kay Stulken, "Singing the Trinity," *Liturgy: Journal of The Liturgical Conference* 13 (Winter 1996): 28-35.

⁸⁶Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *Profiles in Belief*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 148-151.

⁸⁷Martin Luther, "The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith, 1538," *LW* 34:197-229, names the *Te Deum* as the third creed after the Apostles' and Athanasian creeds. Earlier he had prepared a paraphrase of it for congregational singing (*LW* 53:171-175).

emphasize God's awesomeness over against God's graciousness and the distinctive activity of each person is often clouded.

I came across a "creed" prepared for an informal service, which began with these words: "I believe God is real and the world was created with *me* in mind. I believe I am loved by a loving Heavenly Father who knows *all about me* and is prepared to *meet my every need*. . . ." ⁸⁷ Such language points to the worshiper as the center of worship rather than the Triune God. When the worshiper is the center of attention, or the service is centered on the seeker, there will be a distorted focus in our worship. ⁸⁸ James Torrence warns that an anthropocentric form of worship emphasizes human activities to the detriment of understanding God's initiating and continuing work in worship: "In theological language," he says, "this means that the only priesthood is our priesthood, the only offering our offering, the only intercessions our intercessions." ⁸⁹ Such a service no longer is trinitarian and orthodox.

I believe it is safe to say, that it is not in the overuse, but the underuse of trinitarian language that has brought about a crisis in trinitarian worship.

One author, in talking about the Trinity in worship, offered three guidelines for speaking about the Trinity, which are not profound, but are certainly worthy of reflection for anyone considering alternative terms in liturgical language:

1. The ways we speak about the Trinity should reflect co-equality among the three persons, rather than a subordination of one to another. The triune reality is eternal; though the Word is begotten and the Spirit proceeds, this does not refer to a time sequence, but to the distinctive relationship of Word and Spirit to Source.
2. The unity of the trinitarian persons should also be lifted up in Christian worship.
3. The distinctiveness of each partner should not be blurred but recognized in Christian worship. ⁹⁰

I would add a fourth point: The regular use of God's revealed name, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," is necessary to retain a liturgically orthodox worship life of a Christian community.

⁸⁸"Contemporary Worship Service," St. Paul Lutheran Church and School, Grafton, Wisconsin (February 23, 2003), 7.

⁸⁹Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 80-81.

⁹⁰Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 20.

⁹¹Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 27.

VI. Conclusion

The importance of worship and the Trinity is evident in the close connection between our theology and our liturgy. Our liturgy is most doxological when it is theologically centered in God's self-disclosure as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Lutheran worship is trinitarian, not Unitarian; christocentric, not anthropocentric; incarnational, not theoretical; sacramental, not sacrificial; catholic and evangelical, not sectarian and denominational; as long as it keeps its focus on biblical and confessional expressions of God's revelation. Lutherans can rejoice in our catholic-evangelical form of worship that is scripturally-based, christologically-focused, and doxologically-directed to our Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I conclude with the words of the traditional collect for Trinity Sunday:

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given your servants in the confession of the true faith [the gracious ability] to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and, in the majestic power, to adore the Unity; we ask that you make firm this faith that we may be fortified from all adversities; who, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.⁹¹

⁹²Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 518 (my translation).