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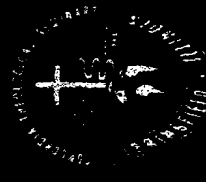


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Worship In The USA

REINHARD MUMM, GERMANY

Translation by Theodore DeLaney, *Executive Secretary*, Commission on Worship, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Editor's Note: The following article, entitled "Gottesdienst in den USA," appeared in QUATEMBER, a journal edited by Bishop Dr. Wilhelm Staehlin, and written by Pastor Richard Mumm, a son-in-law of the bishop. As a review of the WORSHIP SUPPLEMENT from an outside source, it should be of some interest to pastors who have instituted its use in our congregations.

LUTHERANISM CONSTITUTES the fourth largest church membership in the USA—after the Catholics, Methodists and Baptists. Substantially, it involves three church bodies which adhere to the Augsburg Confession. These three work together in various jurisdictions and thus strive to unite themselves in a common Church within a reasonable time. The well-known Missouri Synod has participated in this effort for years.

General agreement, as much as possible, belongs to the unity of the Church. During this year, a general commission of several Lutheran churches has published a new handbook for the weekly worship services. It is called WORSHIP SUPPLEMENT—we would say "supplemental agenda." It is very instructive to see what direction further worship development is taking in English-speaking Lutheranism. Some things arising therefrom might possibly amaze us. However, if we consider that our American brethren live in a particularly ecumenical horizon, we shall better understand their way.

The weekly chief service, as a rule, will be conducted as a preaching and communion service. As far as possible, every Sunday has at least two worship services, one of which includes the sacrament of the altar. According to the usage of the ancient church—which has become naturalized in the English-speaking world—this worship service is called holy *eucharist* or holy *communion*. "Eucharist" was called the Prayer of Thanksgiving already in New Testament times, as we also recognize in our communion liturgy.

The Entrance Song is followed by an expanded Kyrie with petitions for the Church and the world. Eastern Christianity has approved this from the beginning to the present, while the western churches—Catholic and Reformation—as yet have kept (as a remnant) only the Kyrie, the cry for the mercy of God. In America, there is now the experiment to restore the original form: on the one hand so that the petition be filled with substance, and on the other so that in this way the ecumenical tie with the Orthodox churches be strengthened.

In our tradition, we recognize two *readings*, Epistle and Gospel; the Old Testament thereby receiving scant attention. Early Christendom depended heavily on the Prophets. Hence in the USA, they are trying to put an Old Testament reading in first place. Though such wealth is certainly to be welcomed, we wonder if this overburdens the worshipers. Thus it seems best for us to persist in letting the Old Testament come to voice through the changing series of preaching texts.

Through religious war, our congregations acquired the custom of reciting together the Apostolic Creed. It thereby has gained new importance among us. However, we ought not overlook the fact that the first Reformation Mass formulas recognized the Nicene Creed as the regular creed. If the Nicene Creed is now introduced as the regular one also in the USA, then the ecumenical line would again be accented thereby (since also the Catholics—and above all the Orthodox congregations—use just this confession in their worship services; the Apostolic Creed being reserved for baptism).

In his own time, Luther energetically opposed considering worship as an offering which man brings as an act with reconciling power before God. This protest of the Reformer is still valid. However, the idea of offering is not thereby ruled out because the thankoffering of the Christian for the reconciling act of God remains steadfast. From this, one can speak, in a good sense, of an offertory prayer (Offertorium). Our Lutheran brethren in the USA have printed this at length through selected Psalm verses which change with the course of the church year.

In the past year, we have adopted a common form for the Our Father. A similar experiment is going on in the English-speaking world. Also here, people have united in the ecumenical composition of the Lord's Prayer. As in world Christianity, we see the endeavor of the work is to bring together the separated churches in all things where this is possible without surrender of one's own faith.

After a decade of intensive theological and liturgical preparation, our agendas have taken up certain prayers which were handed down from the ancient church—prayers which, on the other hand, have been strongly adhered to in the Eastern Church: the remembrance of the saving acts of God (called "Anamnese" in Greek) and the prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit ("Epiklese," i.e., invocation). We find both in the recommendations of the American Lutheran churches.

Where people gather for worship, they need not only the text of the Word but also bodily participation. We have experienced this, for example, in the evening youth service during the 1968 plenary assembly of the World Council in the cathedral at Uppsala. And we know it, moreover, from other experiences. Consequently, the liturgical commission of the Lutherans in the USA gives the worship certain recommendations to which we give ear:

Whoever enters church on Sunday should not simply hasten to his place, but rather greet the unseen but present Lord of this house by bowing before the cross. This rule applies in every worship place, whether it be a traditional church or a hall prepared for worship.

Martin Luther taught us to sign ourselves with the cross at morning and evening prayer. In the course of history, we have virtually lost this meaningful Christian custom. Many evangelical Christians are of the opinion that crossing one's self is a typically Catholic sign, unsuited for an evangelical. This is a mistake. Since we have maintained the practice of the pastor's making the sign of the cross at the blessing, is it not reasonable that the individual Christian might employ the sign of salvation? In ecumenical circles—also in international Lutheranism—this is widespread and accepted. Thus the advice of our brethren in America may help us also regain it as a living sign of our faith.

Kneeling is similar. We are accustomed to the kneeling position at blessings and at the reception of holy communion. Our pews, however, are usually so constructed that kneeling for prayer is impossible. Only certain congregations — some of those in the Wilhelm Löhe tradition—use kneelers. Now this universal Christian prayer usage is being recommended in the USA. Whoever has opportunity to participate in worship services in other parts of the world will learn how widespread this ancient Christian usage is. In growing together with Christendom, may intelligence also grow among us to place pews so that one can kneel without difficulty for confession of sins and other prayers.

But isn't this all legalistic? Germans will ask thus: Do we depend on such external things? The practice of the heart and not of the body is decisive. What should the aged and infirm do? Often they are unable to kneel—and others won't do it because they are not in the habit.

Our Lutheran brethren meet such objections with the following sentence: "It is not necessary that the pastor announce what you are to do." Regarding the action, freedom rules in the worship service. As a result of our habit, we put too much emphasis on everyone's doing exactly the same thing. Why should everyone always be alike: standing, sitting, or even kneeling? Whoever has difficulty in standing may remain comfortably seated even when the others arise. Whoever can't kneel—or won't—may arise or remain seated. No law reigns here. Conversely, the question goes: why prevent those from kneeling who can kneel? It is not so much a matter of forcing someone to kneel, but rather of making it possible for those who want to kneel.

On television, when we see a meeting of ambassadors from oriental countries, we notice that they exchange the brotherly kiss in which they turn toward each other and lay cheek on cheek. This custom comes from ancient Christian and, especially, oriental church

usage. Whoever goes to the Table of the Lord seeks not only communion with Christ, but at the same time communion with the brethren. A meaningful expression of this brotherly communion is the "holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16). Our western feelings make us decline the oriental usage. The American Lutheran churches recommend that—from the altar outward—each turn to his neighbor, extend both hands to him, laying the right hand on his shoulder, and say: "The peace of the Lord be with you." The one addressed answers: "And with your spirit." Then he turns to his neighbor, and so the greeting passes through the entire congregation. It also includes those who, for various reasons—such as belonging to another confession, are not receiving the Sacrament in this church. Here and there we know this strongly expressive custom among us as well. It helps us strengthen the communal nature of Christian worship.