

Praise the Lord in the Assembly of the Saints

by Professor James P. Tiefel

[A study on the subject of the worship of the church
delivered at the convention of the South Atlantic District on June 14, 1988]

Your praesidium has requested a study of the past and future of worship. Of course they were thinking of corporate worship, that event in the life of the church when the people of God gather in one place to express formal thanks and praise to God. This is a fitting subject for discussion in June of 1988. For the first time in some forty years people in our church body are feeling an obligation not only to learn new corporate worship forms but also to analyze their attitudes toward and involvement in corporate worship. That obligation will become more intense as the list of hymns which is headed for inclusion in our new hymnal begins to appear this fall. It is altogether likely that another year will not pass before four major service orders will be ready for distribution and perusal. The intensity of the obligation to analysis will deepen with their appearance. The pastors, teachers and lay leaders of our churches will be in the vanguard of those who must lead such analyses. It is not surprising, therefore, that you have chosen to emphasize worship at your convention.

Nor is it surprising that your committee chose to paraphrase Psalm 149 as the theme for this study. The opening verse of the psalm says, "Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of his saints."

Make an effort to transport yourself to the time and the place where this verse was first sung by God's people. The time is likely the seventh day of the week, Saturday, the Sabbath, in the year 445 BC. The place is probably Zerubbabel's temple, by this time some seventy years old. There may have been as many as several thousand people in the temple court that day; such was the norm at morning and evening sacrifices and white-hot events in Jerusalem may have swelled the attendance. The temple order of service called for the singing of a psalm following the sacrifices and there were almost a hundred and a half in the Davidic hymnal, most of them known from memory. But a new song had been composed for this occasion, a song which allowed Nehemiah and his countrymen an opportunity to give thanks for a victory over Judah's enemies and which expressed determination to gain the final victory. The song was fitting and it was contemporary. It was just the thing to allow God's people to praise him for the protection he had afforded them as they went to the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

The time and the place in which we find ourselves today is drastically different. The facilities, the assembly, the culture, the purpose of this meeting has very little in common with the likely setting of Psalm 149. And yet, this psalm makes a very fitting title for the study you have requested. It allows us an outline for a study of *corporate worship* in general and will lead us to a study of *liturgical worship* in particular.

Corporate Worship

I.

Psalm 149 is a corporate worship psalm. "The next to last psalm clearly marks the Psalter as the prayer book (liturgical book of prayer and praise) of the Old Testament."¹ But other psalms were no less designed for the corporate assembly than Psalm 149. Little wonder. The worshiping assembly was primary to God's relationship with his Old Testament people. The rites he established for both tabernacle and temple, the vestments and the rituals of the priesthood, the careful and explicit instructions on propriety and protocol, even the worship buildings themselves, all pointed to the centrality of the worship of the assembly. Jehovah was not opposed, of course, to individual meditation and private praise, but one cannot come away from the Old Testament scriptures without the clear inference that God had elevated the public gathering of his people to a

position of high importance. Three times in Psalm 149 the writer speaks of the gathering of the body of believers:

Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the *assembly* of his *saints*. (vs. 1)
 Let the *saints* rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. (vs. 5)
 This is the glory of *all his saints*. (vs. 9)

The psalm underscores a point which the whole of the Old Testament illustrates, a point we are wise to consider, and that is that the assembly of the body of believers occupies a primary place in the life of the church.

The New Testament writers know of no other principle. Luke observed that the first Christians, immediately after Jesus' ascension "all joined constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14). Pentecost changed nothing besides the boldness of the gathering: "Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts" (Acts 2:46). Peter and John were on their way to the evening sacrifices—corporate worship—when they met and healed the cripple at the gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1-10). It was Paul's custom to use the corporate worship of the synagogue as the stepping stone to the formation of Christian communities (cf. Acts 14:1). We are going to show elsewhere that the early New Testament forms of corporate worship were largely inherited from the temple and synagogue. T.W. Manson insists "The first disciples were Jews by birth and upbringing, and it is an *a priori* probable that they would bring into the new community at least some of the religious usages to which they had been accustomed."ⁱⁱ If the early church carried over Old Testament forms in corporate worship, it must be assumed that she also carried over Old Testament attitudes toward corporate worship, i.e., that corporate worship was the *primus inter pares* of the activities of her members to meet and be met by God.

It is surely unnecessary to trace the historical thread that runs from 30 AD to 1988 in an effort to underscore the point of the centrality of corporate worship. That the corporate gathering is central is simply so. It becomes necessary to overstate the principle only because the principle is not always accepted in practice.

Note the emphasis in Psalm 149 on the word *saints*. Recent controversies compel us to take special care to define a saint as one who by faith has received and enjoys the Lord's justifying decree. It is assumed in Psalm 149 that corporate worship existed for these saints. The Old Testament hierarchy was very careful to restrict all but Jews from the temple rite; even believing Gentiles were disallowed full participation. The church after the apostolic age purposefully divided its public service into two sections, the service of the catechumens and the service of the faithful, and stipulated that only the baptized could be admitted into the mysteries of the Sacrament. Paul used the synagogue service to testify to Jews who were fully aware of the promises of the Old Testament and the recent events in Jerusalem, but there is no evidence that he employed the formalities of corporate worship for witnessing to the uninitiated. The point is this: there is a strong mass of scriptural and historical evidence which says that corporate worship means to be the assembly of the saints, for the initiated not the uninitiated, for the mature and not the immature.

Would you, however, be willing to agree that we have had a tendency to try to make the objective of corporate worship much broader than this? In our circles Sunday morning worship wants to speak at the same time not only to adult believers but also to the child, the teenager, the prospect, the delinquent and even to the cynic. Especially those in our mission districts may be inclined to agree with Dr. Arthur E. Graf, retired professor of practical theology at Concordia, Springfield, who wrote:

Knowledgeable men outside our church tell us we (the LCMS) have the potential to really move, if not explode. One predicts that we can grow by twenty percent a year, but adds that one condition we need to meet if we are in earnest about winning people for Christ is to use an order of service in which the members of a congregation and its community feel at home.ⁱⁱⁱ

He goes on to state that what his church body needs is "a service order which everybody can follow—members, unchurched, those in mixed marriages, the elderly, older children."^{iv}

I feel compelled to ask if such a noble goal is possible in the worship service. St. Paul insisted that he would become all things to all men “so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22). What do we give to children, prospects, delinquents and cynics for the sake of their salvation? Does a twenty minute sermon (or even a fifteen minute one) based on a pericope serve best the spiritual needs of a ten-year-old child? Does the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (from which he is excluded) serve best the needs of the prospect? Do applications which urge good stewardship serve the needs of the delinquent or sweet Gospel the needs of the cynic? One hears the criticism from time to time that our liturgical way of worship is not conducive to the worship of the community. I grant the point. But then I will raise another: what are we willing to eliminate from corporate worship in order to serve best the needs of the community? Even if we were to eliminate every “sacred cow,” could we honestly say that we were serving the needs of the wide variety of people at whom some would like corporate worship aimed? In a recent article in our *Quarterly* I wrote in a similar vein:

Corporate worship does not have as its primary objective education, evangelism or church discipline. That all these occur when Christians gather in Sunday or midweek services cannot be denied. But the church has for centuries felt it wise to employ other forums besides the worship service for teaching, witnessing to the lost and correcting the erring. Corporate worship, therefore, takes for granted that the participants already are members of the body of Christ. This assumption was in place before the formation of the church’s liturgy and calendar. Both temple and apostolic worship assumed a faith-orientation. The liturgy and church year grew out of that assumption.^v

The twelve men who are members of the Joint Hymnal Committee are convinced to a man that our new hymnal ought to be a “body book,” a hymnal for corporate worship of believers. The Hymn Committee is not planning, for example, a children’s section nor does it plan to eliminate hymns which are part of our Lutheran heritage, albeit difficult to sing. The Liturgy Committee is composing services which are designed for believers in regular worship situations; special circumstances must be met by special considerations. Both groups understand that the members of the Wisconsin Synod are no longer a homogeneous unit and neither group wants to confuse our own people. But the new hymnal will undoubtedly speak to WELS worshipers as the mature Christians they are and will presuppose that these worshipers will understand who it is they are worshiping and what it is they are doing as they worship him and hear his word.

II.

In the foregoing paragraphs I have tried to establish a principle which is based, I believe, on the testimony of the scriptures and of history and to which common sense adds credence, i.e., that corporate worship is primary in the life of the church and therefore primarily for the church, the assembly of the saints. The second principle which will be discussed is this: corporate worship has the greatest influence on the faith-life of the saints.

The excellency of the choice of this psalm-theme becomes apparent again as we wade into the study of this principle. As I said previously Psalm 149 is a corporate worship song, sung, probably, as the people of Nehemiah’s time rejoiced that the Lord was protecting them as they rebuilt the walls of their city. One can almost imagine the oriental exuberance of their rejoicing (no north-German stiff-upper-lip there!); There was liturgical dance and tambourine music. It may be that there was even a reenacting of their recent defense measures (“those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other...” Neh. 4:17); the dancers may have sung while they waved “a double-edged sword in their hands” (Ps 149:6). Whatever the ceremony, we can be sure that the priestly leaders held forth with a lengthy review of God’s grace to the people of Judah. The saints surely “rejoiced in this honor,” but their rejoicing did not stop with the end of the service. They went home where they could “sing for joy on their beds” (vs. 5). Surely there would have

been private rejoicing in Judah even if no one had determined to arrange for a special service of thanksgiving. But the rejoicing at home was heightened, guided and encouraged by the nation's corporate service of praise.

The worship service in the life of God's people has never been solely or even primarily an opportunity for praise and prayer. The dominating factor has always been and continues to be proclamation. This was certainly true in both temple and synagogue, although in the temple the sermon was more symbol than speech. The New Testament church placed a premium on proclamation. Luther restored proclamation to its place of primacy after centuries of a corporate worship in the Roman Church which was dominated by the man-to-God sacrifice of the mass. Corporate worship is not totally proclamation. It means to hold a balance between proclamation and prayer and praise. But it is surely proclamation, and there lies its value for the faith-life of the church.

Think how clearly Scripture connects the Means of Grace to growth in faith and Christian living. Despite the contemporary penchant for trying to effect growth by psychological gimmickry, Lutheran Christians understand that "the Word does not return empty" (Is 55:11). It is the Arminians, the Baptists and the Pentecostals, with their lack of confidence in the Means of Grace and their reliance on an emotion-wrought infusion of the Spirit who must rely on spectacle to effect life change. Lutherans rely only on the Spirit's Means, although they are eager to use all of God's gifts (e.g., language, music, art, etc.) to communicate and underscore the message of the Means.

Corporate worship is the forum where all of these gifts are joined to the Means of Grace for the benefit of the saints. And corporate worship is the place where most of the saints come into contact with the Means most of the time. The last point is one which needs to be stressed. Synodical statistics indicate that five times as many of our members attend church as attend Bible classes. (The averages are better in your district; three to one is the ratio here.) The statistics say that the average WELS member has his one weekly association with Word and Sacrament in corporate worship.

Join the previous double observation—proclamation is central to the sanctification of the believers and the believers come into contact with proclamation most often in corporate worship—and you find the rationale for the second principle I am reviewing in this study: corporate worship has the greatest influence on the life of the church.

Notice how well Paul summarized that principle. In his letter to the Colossians he urged his readers to godly living:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature...As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion...And over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Then he pointed them to the power for possibility: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..." Finally he pointed out the forum where such peace and such a word could be found: "as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart toward God" (Col 3). The writer to the Hebrews spoke similar language. He invited his readers to "draw near to God...to hold unswervingly to the hope (you) profess...spur one another on to love and good works." He concluded his exhortation by calling to mind that place where his readers could find power to perform: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (Heb 10:19-25).

Of all the problems he discovered to exist in Corinth, none received as much of Paul's attention as did the problem in the people's corporate worship. Paul thought enough of the issue to include instructions concerning corporate worship in his first letter to Timothy. All this means to illustrate just how important the early church and the Holy Spirit himself considered corporate worship to be in the faith-life of believers.

The principle so clearly understood by the apostles is wisely reconsidered by the churches of the 1990s. It is finally in corporate worship that most of the 417,000 members of the WELS receive their only weekly contact with the faith-empowering Means of Grace. It is in corporate worship that these thousands receive their

primary instruction and motivation to be faithful stewards, eager evangelists, wise parents, loving spouses and devoted students of the word. This is a very timely reminder as our church body embarks on what has been called spiritual renewal. After a recent presentation in the Seminary's lecture series, Dr. Robert Kolb of Concordia College, St. Paul, remarked that any call to a new Lutheran piety (a term he prefers to spiritual renewal) must be centered on a return to one's baptism, on confession and absolution and on the Means of Grace. We were not able to agree with everything Dr. Kolb said in his post-lecture remarks (essayists in the aforementioned series are not necessarily of our confessional stripe), but we had no arguments with the sentiments he expressed concerning growth in sanctification. Missouri's president, Dr. Ralph Bohlmann, carried the point a step farther in a recent issue of the *Lutheran Witness*:

Worship is central to growth, and we dare not forget it. With all the attention we place on our efforts, our organizational know-how, our studies and surveys, let us never forget that the power by which God's people live and serve him is the power that comes through Word and Sacrament. If we want to grow in members, we must first and continually grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Growth occurs as we read, study, learn, and inwardly digest the Word of God with its new and powerful story of the redeeming love of Christ. Through our baptism, lived daily as we repent of our sins and cling to the forgiveness offered by Christ, we continue to be renewed and strengthened in our Christian faith and life. Through the body and blood of our Lord in his precious supper, our sins are forgiven and we are strengthened to love and serve him. God's Word and Sacraments are not only means by which he forgives our sins, daily and richly, but the sources of God's power in and through us.

When congregations, like individual Christians, experience a lack of spiritual energy and enthusiasm, the reason may well lie in our neglect of the worship of God that centers in the joyful use and reception of his Word and Sacraments. Too often, our worship life has grown cold and we find ourselves spending more and more time on programs and less and less time in the Word.^{vi}

Corporate worship is central to the life of the church because there, week by week, God proclaims to the greatest number of his saints the faith-empowering message of the living Gospel of Jesus Christ. And if the saints rejoice in church, they will sing for joy in their lives!

III.

There is a third place in your chosen psalm where the assembly sings of the activities of the saints: "This is the glory of all his saints" (vs. 9). However, we need to review the verses before this statement to determine what the glory of the believers is. Again, I ask you to picture the temple congregation at worship. The voices of the singers and the sound of the instrumentalists are raising a mighty song to the Lord God. The final stanza, the climax of the song, sings,

May the praises of God be on their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands,
to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples,
to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron,
to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints.

This worship experience is nothing for sissies! Worship in that church service wasn't easy. H.C. Leupold, in his commentary, points out that those who repeated these words through history were just as strong, although not as godly:

There is historical evidence that this psalm has been put to unholy uses. (Franz) Delitzsch points out that Catholic princes were incited to warlike fervor at the beginning of the Thirty Years War by reference to it; and in the Protestant camp by use of it Thomas Muentzer incited the peasants to rebellion at the beginning of the Peasants' War.^{vii}

He adds (as if, perhaps, to soften the blow) that the armies of Gustavus Adolphus carried the same attitude into the battle of Luetzen as they sang "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

I will leave it to your opinion if it is going beyond the boundaries of legitimate application if I use these verses to suggest that corporate worship is an integral part of the church's holy war against Satan, the world and the sinful flesh. Any war is serious business, but the church's war is more serious than any other. Whether you accept the traditional defensive interpretation of Matthew 16:18 ("the gates of hell will not overcome" the church) or the more contemporary offensive idea ("the gates of hell will not prove stronger than" the church), the church's war is a matter of spiritual life and death. If corporate worship is the armory where the believer prepares for his part in the holy war, then there must be hanging in the armory weapons of steel and strength. Change the picture to underscore the point: mature believers need meat, not milk.

Adopting and then implementing this last principle likely goes against popular sentiment. I get the impression sometimes that American Christians are inherently lazy. It seems that too many like their religion, to say nothing of their worship, to be either fun or familiar. They don't like to work at worship. They like neither the sad songs they know nor the happy ones they don't know. We find too few, I fear, among both leaders and laypeople, who are looking for strength in their church service and weapons in their worship.

I mentioned previously the current idea that the worship service must be able to address the child and the prospect as well as it addresses the mature believer. But if we give our members what they too often want and the prospects what they always need, we will be withholding from the saints what they absolutely require. Be practical, professor. All right; I will. I think the new mode proponents are onto something; we can't serve the weak very well with liturgical worship. But the hymnal people are equally correct, I believe; we can't serve the strong very well without it. We must be prepared to discover and then foster besides corporate worship various forms and outlets of ministry which can be employed in various situations or at various stages in a congregation's life. And we must be equally prepared and committed to use corporate worship optimally and then to defend it strenuously for the benefit of the saints in Christ.

I see the activity of corporate worship standing at the pinnacle of a congregation's ministry. It is not intended for all whom the church serves but it is the goal of all. It holds the deepest and most sublime mysteries of God in Word and Sacrament. Participation presupposes training and maturity, but it best equips the saints to do battle in the name of Jesus Christ. It is only one part of the church's ministry but it is the highest part and all other parts either lead from it or to it. It calls for the best God gives in language, art and music and for the best efforts of pastor, organist, choir and people. The concept is summarized well, I believe, by Paul's words to the Ephesians:

It was Christ who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph 4:11-16)

Liturgical Worship

I.

The principles we have reviewed in the first section of this study are not all what we would call doctrinal principles, although some of the conclusions which led to the principles are incontestable. I hope I have been able to convince you, however, that these principles are drawn from the example and the advice of the Scriptures. The subject matter of the second half of the essay is less grounded in the word of God. However, I want to show you that the following observations flow logically and practically from the aforementioned principles.

With a clear understanding that corporate worship is designed primarily to foster the faith-life of the saints of God, the church has for fifteen centuries and more adopted a form of corporate worship which is said to be liturgical. The word liturgy (Greek: *leiturgia*) is a combination of two other Greek words (*leitōs*, from *laos*, and *ergon*) which mean public and work. In actual usage liturgy is the formal, public rite. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) the word is used for the formal temple function of the priests. In secular literature it was used to describe the public service a Greek citizen offered his city-state. On the other hand, Paul in Romans 12 used a close synonym, *latreia*, as he described the whole of the Christian life, given to God in view of his mercy. We have some liberty, therefore, to give liturgy and liturgical our own definition. (Perhaps we would have taken such liberty even without the precedent of antiquity!) However, that liberty often leads to confusion when we speak about being a liturgical church or having a liturgical worship. The term implies much more than that we follow a specified order of service. Baptists and Presbyterians follow an order of service, too, but they are not liturgical churches. Some of you may have forsaken *The Lutheran Hymnal's* service orders for your own worship forms, but you may in fact have remained liturgical. To be liturgical does not mean to be doggedly ceremonial or ruggedly traditional. To be labeled liturgical need not be an insult, even in the WELS!

When we speak of our worship as being liturgical, and when I suggest that we remain a liturgical church, we are simply saying that our corporate worship is and ought to be built on the forms and focuses of the worship of the western church. This is to say that our worship patterns are neither those of the eastern church (Orthodox) nor of the sectarian churches which grew out of the Reformation. We continue to be what Martin Luther thought himself to be: simply the visible manifestation of the one church, that based on Jesus Christ. Therefore, we continue to worship today as that church has always worshiped. And the emphases of the western church are three: an order of service which reaches back to temple and synagogue and retains a continuity through the entire history of the New Testament Church; a church year and the set of propers it brings to the service; the Sacrament and the understanding that the corporate worship of the church regularly includes it and is designed to include it.

Almost all of the various forms of worship we use today were being used by the patriarchs in the Old Testament. Proclamation, song praise, acclamation, purification (confession and absolution), personal and intercessory prayers, sacrifices and offerings were all in place by the time Jacob died.

God set down a great deal when he established the worship of the tabernacle but there were no divinely appointed rubrics for the order of the service. The best description we have, found in the apocryphal book *Ecclesiasticus*, (second century BC) indicates that the morning and evening sacrifices were followed in short order by songs, a libation of wine, a benediction and a final song.^{viii} There is little in this order that we could call proclamation; the “sermon” was in the symbol of the sacrifices. We can see an embryo of our post-communion liturgy—communion, prayer, *Benedicamus*, Benediction, closing hymn—but this is more a contemporary emulation than it is part of the historic transmission of the liturgy.

The real roots of the western rite lie in the service orders of the synagogue. The destruction of Solomon's temple and the forced move to Babylon ended any thought of sacrifice, the very essence of Jewish worship. In an effort to retain something of their worship the Jewish exiles took to assembling to hear formal readings of the sacrificial stipulations. The custom became embedded in their way of life and continued in Judah even after the temple was rebuilt. These reading services became the basis for the synagogue order. Eventually sections from the Prophets as well as the Law were read and commentary was added to reading.

Important synagogue visitors became guest preachers; Jesus served as such in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4). Paul took advantage of that custom on his missionary journeys. The synagogue's preaching service looks familiar to any WELS Lutheran: song (*Introit to Gloria*); prayer (collect); lesson (Epistle); song (Gradual/Alleluia); lesson (Gospel); commentary (sermon).

As I said previously, it was natural that the first Christian assemblies should employ almost exactly the order of the synagogue. What the synagogue did not have and what the early Christians needed to have was an order in which to observe the supper Jesus had given them. From Paul's dealing with the Corinthians we gather that the supper was not far separated from the regular fellowship meal, the *agape*. The Corinthian problem was likely the first indication to the early church that the combination of *agape* feast and Lord's Supper was idealistic at best. The need to separate the two as well as the obvious fact that the Passover ritual (which Jesus would have used on Maundy Thursday) was an inappropriate setting for the supper led the church fathers on the path of innovation. By 100 AD we can see a communion liturgy which looks familiar; by 200 the Roman churchman Hippolytus has composed this order: offering of elements; dialog (preface); eucharistic prayer (with the Words of Institution); distribution. By 300 a general prayer of intercession, to which the people responded "Lord, have mercy," appears before the offering and the Lord's Prayer is spoken after the Words. A hundred years later Epistle and Gospel have replaced Law and Prophets as the lessons in the old synagogue remnant and the *Introit, Kyrie and Gloria in excelsis* are added in front. Just about everything that serves our worship life in 1988 was firmly in place 1600 years ago!

The order that was in place by 400 AD hardly changed as the centuries passed even though the theological emphasis of the western church became sacrifice instead of proclamation. It was the sacrifice of the mass which was stressed in the lengthy addition that was made between the offertory and the distribution. These additions formed the Canon of the Mass and these were what Martin Luther cut out (calling them "that abominable concoction drawn from everyone's sewer and cesspool"^x) as he went to the task of reforming worship life in Wittenberg.

Luther's primary interest in corporate worship was that it should proclaim the Gospel. He wrote, "When God's Word is not preached, one had better neither sing nor read, or even come together."^x He was not unwilling to drop something or change something to make the Gospel clearer. For the sake of the people he was not at all afraid of changing language. He was loathe to drop Latin because it was the language of scholarship; he felt it should be retained in the services at the university. But those who favor a specialized language for worship will find no hero in Luther. "It is wrong to read (the Lessons) in a language the common people do not understand."^{xi} The fact that he composed a German revision of the service besides one in Latin is further evidence of his attitude toward language, as is, of course, his translation of the Bible.

What Luther was not willing to touch was the historic sequence of the western rite, by his time already over 1100 years old. We could read several pages of quotations that sound similar to these: "It is not now nor ever has it been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched additions which corrupt it."^{xii} Luther was especially determined to defend the historic rite against those who challenged it use because of its Roman origins.

The service now in common use everywhere goes back to genuine Christian beginnings, as does the office of preaching. But as the latter has been corrupted by the spiritual tyrants, so the former has been corrupted by the hypocrites. As we do not on that account abolish the office of preaching, but aim to restore it again to its right and proper place, so it is not our intention to do away with the service, but to restore it again to its rightful use.^{xiii}

The reformer obviously saw the value of historical continuity.

Nor did I make any innovations. For I have been hesitant and fearful...because of the fickle and fastidious spirits who rush in like unclean swine without faith or reason and who delight only in novelty and tire of it just as quickly when it has worn off.^{xiv}

The strong feelings Dr. Luther had for the western rite he passed on to his co-workers. Philip Melancthon wrote in the Augsburg Confession (and to this we subscribe by constitution and ordination vow):

Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. Actually, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns are interspersed here and there among the parts sung in Latin. These are added for the instruction of the people, for ceremonies are needed especially in order that the unlearned may be taught.^{xv}

He wrote in the Apology (defense) of the Augsburg Confession:

Nothing should be changed in the accustomed rites without good reason, and to foster harmony these ancient customs should be kept which can be kept without sin or without great disadvantage. This is what we teach.^{xvi}

It was the 17th century demise of confessionalism at the hands of pietism and rationalism which brought about the loss in the Lutheran Church of the historic continuity of liturgical worship. And it was a confessional awakening in the 19th century which brought liturgical worship back. For this we can thank Missouri's great leader, C.F.W. Walther, and Wilhelm Loehe, founder and father of Michigan's Franconian colonies. Our direct benefactor, however, is Charles Porterfield Krauth (author of *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*) and his east coast colleagues who were determined to restore to America's English speaking Lutherans a confessional integrity and a confessional liturgy. Out of Krauth's efforts came an 1879 General Council resolution that an order of service should be formed which would be derived from "the common consent of the pure Lutheran liturgies of the 16th century."^{xvii} The result of that resolution, The Common Service of 1888, is exactly the service we have used in our congregations since the appearance of *The Lutheran Hymnal* in 1941.

I'm hoping the line of continuity is clear to you. The order of service we follow has roots which reach back through Luther, Paul and Jesus to the 4th century BC. Since 400 AD the western rite has changed only for the sake of clarity (e.g., Luther and Krauth) or because of a loss of doctrinal purity (e.g., Romanism and pietism).

This historical observation has been the guiding principle as the Hymnal Committee has worked to produce both a revision of the Common Service (the *Sampler* order) and a new setting of the communion service, the so-called Service of Word and Sacrament. The Liturgy Committee began its work on both services with the presupposition that a confessional church does well to copy its confessional ancestors and retain the liturgical order of the western church. There are changes from the 1888 Common Service in both new orders—but then the Common Service was also an interpretative rendering of the western rite. The *Sampler* service reordered the *synaxis* (confession to epistle) in an effort to clarify some of the Common Service's idiosyncrasies. The Service of Word and Sacrament attempts a setting of the historic order without the influence of the Common Service. Until the sermon the service is closer to Luther than it is to the 1888 model and thus more streamlined. The placement of the Creed reaches farther into the past and allows the Creed to once again serve more naturally as a response to the entire Word section. A reversal of the position of the offering and the Sacrament is very innovative, but reflects the fact that not in 500 years have we offered bread and wine for use in communion; for us the offering is a response of thanksgiving for the Means of Grace. One might be able to categorize the two services like this: The *Sampler* service is a WELS revision of the Common Service, a 19th century setting of the western rite. The Service of Word and Sacrament is a 20th century setting of the same ancient service. The service orders are different, but both are liturgical because they follow the order of worship which Christians have used as long ago as 400 AD. In your spare time you may be interested in comparing the five services which are charted in the appendix: the classic Roman Mass, Luther's Latin service, the Common Service (*The Lutheran Hymnal* order), the new Service of Word and Sacrament and the *Sampler* service.

There has not always been nor is there always now either among professionals or laypeople, a strong appreciation for the historic continuity of worship. This surely has something to do with our American attitudes. Americans tend not to be much impressed with history. We are a nation of innovators. At the same time we can be extremely parochial. What can be better, we too often wonder, than “Made in America”? Both attitudes reach into our worship life. The Hymnal Committee has dealt with questions from both points of view. Some have asked, “What can be better than what we have devised for our own use?” Others wonder, “What can be better than what we have used for forty years?”

Throughout the history of Christianity there has been a striving among confessional Christians to hold to the historic continuity of the worship rite. This determination is a part of our confession of faith in the Holy Christian Church. With heart and hands and voices we unite with the church of the past (although its members are already in heaven) and with the church of the future (although its members are not born) in a similar song of public praise. Our worship patterns also speak of our faith in the fact that our fellowship is horizontal as well as vertical. When we use the liturgical rite we unite with unseen and unknown brothers and sisters throughout the world. For this same reason we endeavor, whenever possible, to employ worship forms which are similar to those other Christian bodies are using: a similar translation of the Bible, similar worship forms (e.g., the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the *Gloria in Excelsis* and the *Te Deum Laudamus*). We also sing Christian hymns which first belonged to believers in other times and in other places besides our own.

When corporate worship has as its objective the members of the church we retain the ability to confess our faith in the church by employing that order of worship which the church has used for centuries. This, I believe, is wise and good and has much of Christian history to support it.

In a changing world the liturgical rite offers changelessness—1600 years of it. In a diversified society the service speaks of unity among believers all over the world. Among people who are searching for roots the service offers a tie to the past. To people who are terrified of the future the service looks ahead to the next generation of worshipers. In a society of casual carelessness the service brings dignity. In a world in which other worlds are discovered and explored almost daily, the service offers a certain other-worldliness. The historic form of the worship of the Christian church is not trendy, cute or preppy. It is not out of date today nor will it be out of date tomorrow. It does not speak of nuclear power or the arms race or Ethiopia’s starving masses, but it does speak about sin, grace, forgiveness, life and heaven. It does not make God folksy. It does take human beings out of their mundane daily existence once each week and whisks them before the mystery and majesty of God. The service is timeless and uncommon; it means to be so. And thereby it puts the mature believer once each week into a setting which reminds him that his relationship with Christ is also timeless and uncommon. The Sunday service with its liturgical order has nothing to do with earth—and neither do the worshipers. And yet, as they come before the throne of grace they receive power to live on their earth as God would have them live.

II.

We would be hard-pressed, however, either to edify the believer or defend liturgical worship only on the basis of historical continuity. There is much more which recommends the rite of the western church. The second emphasis of liturgical worship, as I have mentioned, is the Christian Church Year and the set of propers it offers to the worship rite.

It is not part of the purpose of this essay to trace the formation of the Christian calendar. It is enough to say that it developed at about the same time as the service. By 1000 AD it was in the form we know it today. It is part of our purpose to point out the immense influence the church year has on corporate worship. It places into the service two distinct focuses: the *ordinary* and the *proper*. The ordinary are those parts which are repeated Sunday after Sunday and which review each week the primary teachings of the Christian church: the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria*, the Creed and the Communion. The proper are those sections which change according to the Sunday and season of the church year and which review the principal events in the story of salvation and important aspects of the Christian life: *Introit*, psalm, collect, lessons, Verse (gradual).

The proper is the distinctive element of the western rite. The Orthodox churches did not and do not change their services themes from week to week. Luther valued the yearly cycle and saw no reason to change it. A set of psalms, lessons, prayers and hymns developed through the centuries which was used so consistently in Lutheran churches that many laypeople knew in advance of a Sunday what the readings would be. In the early 1970s a three-year cycle of lessons was composed by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. The new series offers more of the scriptures to our worshipers and brings to the service parts of the Bible which our people had not heard in worship before, e.g., the Old Testament and the Acts of the Apostles. Despite its contemporary status, the three-year cycle is built on the most historic Christian customs and has no interest in compromising the church year or hindering a full use of the proper.

The Hymnal Committee brought to its work a commitment to retaining this liturgical emphasis. Both communion services and the new service without communion, the Service of the Word, encourage a complete use of the proper. While the old *Introit* has been eliminated in every service, both *Sampler* and *Word* add a proper psalm; *Word* and *Sacrament* wants the opening hymn to serve as the first proper of the morning. All three services call for the announcement of the day and the Hymn of the Day and include at least two lessons and the Verse. Both communion services have the Prayer for the Day (collect) and the seasonal sentences (Proper Preface).

The inclusion of the proper does more, however, than point to the church year. Especially the psalm and the Verse mean to add pace and variety to the worship order. The framers of the synagogue service (who gave us the psalm—lesson—psalm—lesson concept) may have been practicing a little amateur psychology when they arranged for a singing break between the read lessons. You can expect a strong push from the Hymnal Committee to lead your congregations and choirs (even little choirs and soloists, pastors included!) to sing some of the proper so as to break the monotony of reading. There has been an effort in recent years to create musical settings for these propers which any worshipping congregation can master.

It should not be supposed, however, that an emphasis on a rich use of the proper will be appreciated by all. There is and has been another point of view. Already the disciples of John Calvin deprecated the idea of church year and proper. Pietism, a tragic reaction to Lutheranism's 17th century excesses, espoused a similar point of view. In America pietistic and then rationalistic pastors guided the Lutheran Church away from the church year. Not until *The Lutheran Hymnal* arrived on the scene did WELS members begin to experience this emphasis on worship.

Despite some initial resistance WELS members have grown to appreciate the church year and its influence on their worship. We have become comfortable with the calendar cycle of lessons and psalms. But the Hymn of the Day (or Week, depending on your terms), that recurring set of core hymns, is not widely used nor are the graduals, seasonal sentences and collects. Sermons which do not match the proper theme for the day and sermon series during the festival half of the calendar are too much with us. For all of the reasons our sermon professors mentioned when we were at the seminary, we pastors need to continue to be liturgical preachers. The dropping of the proper in the 17th century was an influence of pietism; in the 20th century it is an influence of neo-Evangelicalism. Both are part of the same Calvinistic strain; both emphasize Christian living before they emphasize the Gospel, the source of the Christian life. Both eventually rob the saints of the objective facts of Christianity which are vital for faith and life.

A corporate worship which means to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ to the saints of God does well to retain liturgical worship with its church year and balance between proper and ordinary. Liturgical worship keeps the leader of worship away from pet projects. It tyrannizes him to review each week God's saving work and each year the life of the Savior who accomplished that work. It forces the message of the Gospel to be proclaimed and heard and there is no better objective for worship than that.

III.

Pietism is the great enemy of liturgical worship. In the 17th century Pietism opposed liturgical worship in the German Lutheran church. In the 19th century Pietism prohibited liturgical worship in the American

church. Today pietism is fighting and clawing to withstand every effort toward liturgical revitalization. A letter arrived in the mail several weeks ago from an LCMS churchman who opined: “I’m convinced we are a pietistic church which is stuck with a liturgy and we don’t know what to do with it.”

Invariably pietism begins with good motives as it reacts to a lack of obvious fruits of faith in the lives of church members. It was primarily that observation which brought about the pietistic reaction in Germany in the 1600s. The Lutheran church in Germany was in a bad way. Just as she was wrapping up her theological battles with the writing of the *Formula of Concord* (1580) and just as her theologians were completing their golden tomes of Lutheran dogmatics, Catholic princes attacked and the Thirty Years War was on. Between 1618 and 1648 Germany literally was a battlefield. For as much as the land and the people suffered, the church suffered more. Pastors were killed or driven into exile, churches were burned and congregations were scattered. A whole generation of German youth grew up without religious education and the great Lutheran emphasis on doctrinal precision began to seem somewhat superfluous amid the carnage of the battlefield and the sorrow of the cemetery. For both of those reasons Lutheran pastors found it very difficult to restore an orderly church life and practice at war’s end. There was a third reason: there were not nearly enough pastors to solve the other two problems. It was not uncommon that congregations with more than 10,000 members were served by one pastor. When pastors experienced problems with flagging church and communion attendance, the local government made attendance mandatory. It was not uncommon in the German state churches for a rank unbeliever who lived a notably impious life to be regularly seated below the pulpit and kneeling at the communion rail.

Pietism reacted; little wonder. Tragically, Pietism labeled as the cause of the problem not manpower but the church’s doctrinal standards and her emphasis on the Means of Grace. It was obvious to the Pietists that the preaching of the objective facts of Scripture did nothing but foster hypocrisy. What was true of objective preaching was also true of objective confessions and objective liturgies as far as the Pietists were concerned. Their over-reaction and false analysis led the Pietists to de-emphasize the Means of Grace and over-emphasize personal feeling. “What Jesus did for me” (fact) was not nearly so important as “what Jesus means to me” (feeling).

It is not surprising, given their point of view, that the Pietists should have been the ones to undermine liturgical worship which, if it was grounded on anything, was grounded on confessionalism and objectivity. Nor should it be surprising that the third great emphasis of liturgical worship was abandoned by the Pietists and that is the emphasis on the regular use of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Liturgical worship assumes the proclamation of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. From the apostolic age to the era of Pietism—seventeen centuries—the Lord’s Supper was offered in every regular Sunday service (although in the Roman church this was an incomplete sacrament). Gathering all the evidence which supports an every-Sunday communion besides an every-Sunday sermon would fill many volumes; gathering all the evidence which discourages such a practice would hardly fill a page. That the early Christians received the Sacrament whenever they gathered on the Lord’s Day is obvious as one reads in the Acts and 1 Corinthians. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession says, “In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the Sacrament is offered to those who wish for it.”^{xviii} Wilhelm Loehe, whom I credited earlier as being one of the champions of a liturgical emphasis, wrote in his *Agenda* for the Franconian colonies:

A morning service on Sundays or festivals without communion is like a broken column...God is rich toward all who seek him, and those who come to his table shall be satisfied with the abundance of his house. Nor ought anyone to say that frequent celebration serves to bring the Sacrament into contempt, for those who are rightly prepared will always hunger for this bread and thirst for this drink; and the more frequent that they commune, the firmer becomes the persuasion that all of the earthly life is only a preparation for the celebration of the great Supper on high...It should not often occur that the Communion is altogether omitted from the morning service.^{xix}

Edward T. Horn, one of the framers of our familiar Common Service, wrote:

A weekly communion service rests on the principle that, in any given congregation, on any given Sunday, there may be people who are particularly desirous of receiving the Sacrament. Instead of having their church say, in effect, “Sorry, but you’ll have to wait until the next scheduled communion,” the church says, in effect, “The Sacrament is here for you.” Much of our thinking about the Sacrament has been tinged by non-liturgical Protestantism which has long regarded communion as a kind of congregational roundup...In our church communion ought not be an extraordinary occasion, but part of the normal devotional life of every member, and available when that devotional life needs or requires it.^{xx}

Not often in the history of our Synod until in recent years has there been a strong emphasis on the use and reception of the Sacrament. Up until the 1950s it was the exceptional congregation which offered communion more often than four times a year. There are still today over 100 churches which do not offer a monthly communion; less than half of our churches offer the Sacrament twice a month. A glance down the column of “average times communed” in past WELS statistical reports reveals many numbers less than five and four (although even four years ago your district could be commended on this score).

It is likely that our long-standing lack of appreciation for the Sacrament has several causes. Our Synod’s deep roots in Pietism left an influence which still affects our practice if not our theology. We have so strongly emphasized the doctrine of the Word that the Sacrament may have been unintentionally overlooked. Pro-sacrament movements in other Lutheran church bodies have tended to discourage a more regular use in our circles. One fears becoming guilty by association since those movements invariably include not only an every-Sunday communion but also an over-emphasis on Sacrament as unity meal (along with a false ecumenism) and a de-emphasis on Sacrament as Means of Grace. There is a strong urge in us to display our Christian liberty when these movements seem to insist that worship without the Sacrament is incomplete. Add to all this that in congregations which use the service as a tool for outreach close communion is difficult to deal with. It is good for us to face the fact that, while the above may indeed be causes for our sacramental attitudes, they are not necessarily legitimate reasons for failing to foster a stronger and deeper love among our people for the Lord’s Supper.

The Hymnal Committee is intent on using our new hymnal to encourage such attitudes. It wants to carry on the 2000 year old tradition that the liturgical service of the church regularly includes the Sacrament. We are not forming services which foster a pre-communion dismissal (a pre-communion dismissal in the Service of Word and Sacrament is also a pre-offering dismissal!). Both communion services have been streamlined so that even larger congregations can be at the benediction within an hour and ten minutes. We are suggesting that the historic service always be connected to the Sacrament and that the Service of the Word, a non-traditional service, be used whenever the Sacrament is not offered. We are also hopeful that, as congregations are obligated to study worship principles, they will be led to discover how natural and vital a part of their Sunday morning worship the Supper really is.

Conclusion

“Praise the Lord in the assembly of the saints!” Unlike liturgical worship this injunction from Psalm 149 is not a part of Christian liberty. The faith-felt obligation to gather for proclamation, praise and prayer is just as much a part of the believer’s life in 1988 AD as it was in 445 BC. The questions that stand before us, as they have stood before every gathering of believers since the end of the theocracy in Israel, are these: What forms should we use to proclaim, praise and pray? What serves God’s people best? What is appropriate to lead God’s people to a stronger confidence in him and to a life which is more consistently in harmony with his will? These are questions which you need to answer by virtue of your standing in your congregations. The example of the Scriptures and the history of the church have some worship lessons from the past to teach you. The Joint Hymnal Committee, its project director and the men and women who are working within the sphere of the effort

are following those principles as they lead us into the future. Because the forms of worship in the past and in the future lie within the liberty God has given us, there will be disagreement in the future as there has been in the past. My advice and plea is this: listen to the voices, try the spirits, consider the implications, consider the validity of the principles which stand behind decisions. And as you do, share with your people what you discover. The worship of the body of believers is just that: the worship of the body. The church service is for them and it is by them. Sadly, they are sometimes unaware of what they want and need in their worship life.

God go with you, worship leaders, during what will be both a difficult and joyful era of your ministries. And may God the Holy Trinity grant you a wise and willing spirit as you lead the assembled saints in your care to praise the Lord.

Appendix: A Comparison of Five Services

Luther's Latin Service 1523	The Common Service 1888	The Roman Mass 1970	The Sampler 1986	Service of Word & Sacrament, 1989?
<i>Introit</i>	Invocation	<i>Introit</i>	Hymn	Salutation
<i>Kyrie</i>	Confession of Sins	Invocation	Invocation	Confession
<i>Gloria in excelsis</i>	<i>Introit</i>	Confession	Confession	Absolution
Salutation	<i>Kyrie</i>	<i>Kyrie</i>	<i>Kyrie</i>	Opening Hymn
Collect	<i>Gloria in excelsis</i>	<i>Gloria in excelsis</i>	Absolution	Responsive <i>Kyrie</i>
Epistle	Salutation	Salutation	Song of Praise	Song of Praise
Gradual/Alleluia	Collect	Collect	Salutation	Prayer/Day
Gospel	Epistle	Lesson 1	Prayer/Day	Lesson
Nicene Creed	Gradual/Hallelujah	Psalm	Psalm/Day	Verse/Day
Sermon (or before <i>Introit</i>)	Gospel	Lesson 2	<i>Gloria Patri</i>	Gospel
Preface	Creed	Alleluia	Lesson	Gospel Song (canticle)
Institution	Hymn	Gospel	Verse/alleluia	Sermon
<i>Sanctus</i>	Sermon	Sermon	Gospel	Nicene Creed
Lord's Prayer	Offertory	Nicene Creed	Nicene Creed	Hymn/Day
<i>Pax domini</i>	General Prayer	Offertory	Hymn/Day	Preface
<i>Agnus dei</i>	Hymn	Canon of the Mass	Sermon	<i>Agnus dei</i>
Distribution	Preface	Preface	Offertory	Distribution
Collect	<i>Sanctus</i>	<i>Sanctus</i>	Prayer of the Church	Offertory
Salutation	Lord's Prayer	Eucharistic Prayer	Preface	Prayer of the Church
<i>Benedicamus</i>	Institution	Verba	<i>Sanctus</i>	Lord's Prayer
Benediction	<i>Pax domini</i>	<i>Agnus dei</i>	Lord's Prayer	Exhortation
	Distribution	(many other sections which stress the sacrifice of the Mass)	Institution	Benediction
	<i>Nunc dimittis</i>		<i>Pax domini</i>	Closing Hymn
	Thanksgiving		<i>Agnus dei</i>	
	Collect		Distribution	
	Salutation		<i>Nunc dimittis</i>	
	<i>Benedicamus</i>	Distribution	Thanksgiving	
	Benediction	Salutation	Prayer	
		Dismissal	Benediction	
		Benediction		

Endnotes

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- ⁱ *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, commentary on Psalm 149, p. 940.
- ⁱⁱ Manson, T.W., “The Jewish Background” quoted in *Worship in the Early Church* by Ralph P. Martin, p. 19.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Graf, Arthur E., “Liturgics and Legalism,” *Affirm*, December, 1986.
- ^{iv} *Ibid.*
- ^v Tiefel, James P., “The Use of the Liturgical Arts in Corporate Worship,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 85, No. 2, p. 96.
- ^{vi} Bohlmann, Ralph, “Worship and Growth,” *The Lutheran Witness*, February 15, 1987, p. 24.
- ^{vii} Leupold, H.C., *Exposition of the Psalms*, p. 1001.
- ^{viii} Shepherd, Massey H., *The Psalms in Christian Worship*, p.23
- ^{ix} Luther, Martin, “An Order of Mass and Communion,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 53, p. 21 .
- ^x Luther, Martin, “Concerning the Order of Public Worship,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 53, p. 11.
- ^{xi} Luther, Martin, “An Order of Mass and Communion,” *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- ^{xii} *Ibid.* p. 20.
- ^{xiii} Luther, Martin, “Concerning the Order of Public Worship,” *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ^{xiv} Luther, Martin, “An Order of Mass and Communion,” *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- ^{xv} *Augsburg Confession*, Art XXIV, 1-3.
- ^{xvi} *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, Art XV, 49-51.
- ^{xvii} *Proceedings of the General Council*, 1879.
- ^{xviii} *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, Art XXIV, 1.
- ^{xix} Loehe, Wilhelm, *Agenda for Christian Congregations of the Lutheran Confession*, 1844, (translation).
- ^{xx} Horn, Edward T., *Altar and Pew*, 1916, p. 62.