



# Worship the Lord

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Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Some Christians have suggested that use of the liturgy in corporate worship puts a damper on our exercise of Christian freedom. In this fifth article in our series on *Christian Worship Supplement*, Pastor Johnold Strey addresses that concern. Pastor Strey serves Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Belmont, California, and is the worship coordinator for the Arizona-California District.

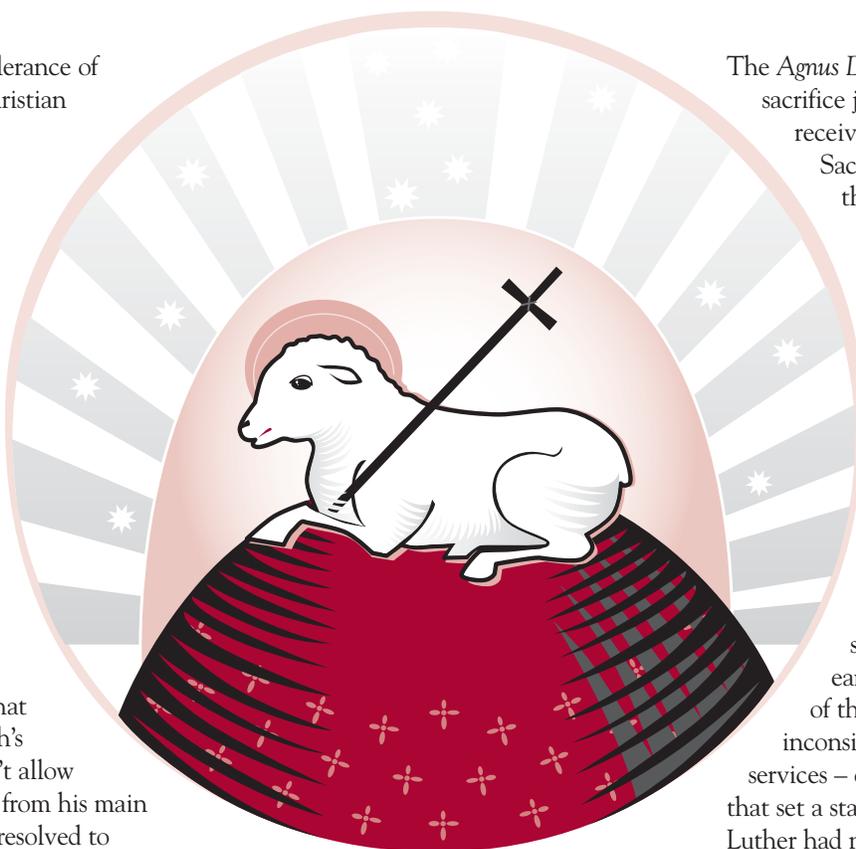
## Christian Worship Supplement: Divine Services

By Johnold Strey

Bickering among members. Tolerance of gross immorality. Abuses of Christian freedom. Disorderly worship. Disrespect for the ministry. Mishandling the Sacrament. Denials of the resurrection. Does this bleak picture sound like the state of affairs in American Christianity at large today? Perhaps, but the situation I have in mind is not the church of modern America, but the church in ancient Corinth. These were the issues St. Paul addressed in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Problems in the church often distract its members and ministers from the one thing that matters. Paul addressed Corinth's problems head on, but he didn't allow those problems to distract him from his main focus as a servant of Christ: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul knew what message mattered most – the gospel of the crucified Christ, who came to earth on a rescue mission. Jesus' rescue mission sent him to hell and back to rescue hell-bound souls from the consequences of sin. This gospel message creates and sustains the faith that receives God's forgiveness and salvation. Paul reminds us, "The gospel... is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

Because the gospel is God's power, Christians and pastors naturally want the gospel to be



central in worship. That's why the order of service called the liturgy has stood the test of time in the Lutheran Church. The great strength of the liturgy is its gospel content. With the absolution echoing in our ears, we sing the *Gloria*, a text full of great gospel truths: peace between God and mankind, the deity of Christ, universal atonement by the Lamb of God who now reigns victoriously from heaven. Old Testament pericopes point us forward to Christ in the Gospel; New Testament selections point us back to Christ in the Gospel. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds summarize the truths of the Christian faith and highlight Jesus' saving work.

The *Agnus Dei* points us to Jesus' self-giving sacrifice just before we come forward to receive his body and blood in the Sacrament. Week in and week out, the liturgy proclaims "the power of God for salvation."

### Luther, Liturgy, and Christian Freedom

Martin Luther was a champion of the liturgy because it put the focus on Christ's gifts to us in the means of grace. Luther wrote, "Among Christians the whole service should center in the Word and sacrament" (LW 53:90). Many orders of service were composed in the early Reformation era. The quality of these services, however, was inconsistent. So Luther produced two services – one in Latin, one in German – that set a standard for Lutheran worship. Luther had no intention of imposing his rites on the church, but he did desire to offer a good model for public worship.

Luther was also a champion of Christian freedom. Nowhere is this better seen than in his approach to worship. Although he retained a liturgical outline for his two services, he didn't bind himself slavishly to its form. The *Gloria* could be omitted if the pastor saw fit. Hymn paraphrases could replace the traditional texts of the *Creed* and *Sanctus*. The elevation could be included or omitted. He made no legalistic requirements: "Do not make it (i.e. the German service) a rigid law to bind or entangle anyone's

conscience, but use it in Christian liberty as long, when, where, and how you find it to be practical and useful" (LW 53:61).

Luther's model of freedom also exemplified wisdom. He avoided an every-man-for-himself mentality. He encouraged brotherly agreement to use similar rites for the sake of the laity, who could be easily confused if every parish followed its own order: "As far as possible we should observe the same rites and ceremonies, just as all Christians have the same baptism and the same sacrament [of the altar] and no one has received a special one of his own from God" (LW 53:61). Luther encouraged ceremonies and symbolism as visual proclamations of the gospel, so long as they seemed natural: "Moderation should also be observed in the use of ceremonies, lest they become a burden and a chore" (LW 41:175). In short, Luther's worship reforms were a careful application of St. Paul's words on Christian freedom in Romans and First Corinthians.

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### Liturgy and the Supplement

Because the liturgy clearly proclaims the gospel and wisely puts Christian freedom into practice, the supplement committee based both services in *Christian Worship Supplement* on this historic form, though there is plentiful room for variety in each.

*Divine Service I* was previously available as a new setting of *The Common Service* in *Christian Worship: New Service Settings* (2002). This setting of the liturgy offers a wide degree of musical flexibility. The organ accompaniment sounds majestic; parts for brass and timpani are available for festive occasions. Or congregations may hear and sing the same tunes with a different sound, provided by piano accompaniment and optional instrumental descants included with the supplement's Accompaniment Edition.

*Divine Service II* is a new setting of the liturgy. This order picks up the idea Luther offered in his German service. It substitutes paraphrases of the liturgy's canticles for the traditional texts. The canticle paraphrases in *Divine Service II* fit a number of different hymn tunes. For example, the *Gloria* could be sung to the melody of *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come* (CW 38) during the Christmas season, *I Know that My Redeemer Lives* (CW 152) during the Easter season, and *Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow* (CW 334) during the Sundays after Pentecost. The confession, absolution, and *Kyrie* incorporate death and life imagery. In the Sacrament portion of the service you'll find new proper prefaces and a newly composed *Prayer of Thanksgiving*. Footnotes offer useful educational comments about elements of the liturgy.

Lutherans don't observe the liturgy because we believe it's the only acceptable way to worship. We make use of the liturgy because we believe it to be a wise exercise of our Christian freedom. *Christian Worship* and its companion volumes have emphasized a wide array of worship forms. Historic services like the liturgy and the services of the Daily Office (Morning Praise, Evening Prayer, Prayer at the Close of Day) stand alongside new Christ-centered, corporately useful resources (such as the supplement's two gathering rites).

May God give our congregations the continued desire and ability to make wise use of our Christian freedom. May God's people continue to proclaim the gospel in Word, Sacrament, and even in the service itself!



### The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Since the earliest days of Christianity we've been saying it in the preface to communion. "M: Let us give thanks to the Lord. C: It is good and right so to do." Lately we haven't been getting to the thanksgiving until the post-communion collect.

You may know that in his revision of the Mass, Luther completely eliminated the Eucharistic Prayer (a.k.a. the *canon* of the Mass). He recognized that in Rome, Communion was being treated as a rite of sacrifice rather than as a means of God's free grace. Much more recently, some on the liberal side of Lutheranism have re-introduced the Eucharistic Prayer as a way of promoting false ecumenism.

But what about a thanksgiving prayer before communion that is distinctly Lutheran? *Divine Service II* of *Christian Worship Supplement* includes just such a prayer.

It's true, an additional prayer does make the communion service a little longer, but maybe a little extra time spent on communion is time well spent. It's a way of encouraging our people to slow down and savor the depths of God's love to us in this means of grace.

Whether or not we choose to make use of a prayer of thanksgiving is a matter of Christian freedom, but we shouldn't believe that such prayers originated in Rome. Jesus gave thanks before he distributed the sacrament. There is a good deal of precedent for this kind of prayer found in ancient liturgies.

You can read more about *Prayers of Thanksgiving* from a confessional Lutheran perspective at [www.wels.net/jump/cwsupplement](http://www.wels.net/jump/cwsupplement).

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