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Lutheran Worship Today

The Lutheran Tradition

When Lutherans came to North America a new opportunity presented itself. In Europe, both on the Continent and in Scandinavia, Lutherans were a homogeneous population in each of the many countries where the Reformation flourished. In North America the situation was different. No longer was there a unified population in a relatively small country. Instead, on a vast continent with two nations, both of which spoke English (Lutherans generally did not settle in French Canada), people who were the inheritors of the Lutheran Reformation were thrown together with those of different national and linguistic traditions. There were Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Finns, Slovaks, and others all calling themselves Lutheran yet all speaking different languages. This situation had no parallel in any other Protestant group that came to this continent.

Besides this great diversity, the Lutherans of various nationalities settled near people of other denominations and backgrounds. From these neighbors, the Lutherans learned new ways of living and worshiping that many thought were "American." As Lutherans sought to accommodate themselves to the English language and to the traditions of Canada and the United States, they were faced with problems never faced by Lutherans in Europe. A new continent with new possibilities lay before them. It was of course a source of confusion and a handicap to them, but it was an unparalleled opportunity as well. The opportunity was to develop here on this continent a rich, broadly representative liturgy drawing on the resources of the several traditions of the past.

Following the Danish exploration of Hudson Bay by Jens Munck and the chaplain Rasmus Jensen in 1619-1620, the first Lutheran settlements in North America were those of the Dutch who settled along the Hudson River in 1623 and 1625 and the Swedes who settled along the Delaware beginning in 1638. Four of the Swedish church buildings are still in use, although the congregations have passed from the Lutheran to the Episcopal church. The liturgy in those churches was that of the Church of Sweden.

The first Lutheran pastor to be ordained in the New World was Justus Falckner, and the service of ordination was an impressive testimony to the international character of Lutheranism as it appeared in North America. Falckner was a German; the church was Gloria Dei ("Old Swedes'") Church in Philadelphia; the ordinator, Andrew Rudman, was acting as suffragan of the Archbishop of Uppsala; a men's choir sang in Latin.

Conditions in the New World remained primitive for a long time. Church order was chaotic, and many denominations competed for adherents. Clerical impostors abounded. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, together with his assistants Peter Brunnholtz and John Handschuh, prepared a liturgy, which was adopted by the Ministerium of Pennsylvania at its inaugural convention in 1748. Muhlenberg writes that he had considered using the Swedish liturgy, but it was too unfamiliar to the German congregations who "considered the singing of collects to be papistical." Moreover, the Germans had come from many provinces, and Muhlenberg notes that "almost every country town and village had its own liturgy." He therefore took as a model the liturgy of St. Mary's Lutheran Church in the Savoy, London, where he had served before coming to America, and adapted it to the circumstances in North America for provisional use until a better direction for an American liturgy became clear. Some dissidents complained that the liturgy was unsatisfactory, that they should have adopted some other German church order, that the authors had betrayed pure doctrine. Nonetheless, the liturgy was adopted, and the Ministerium of Pennsylvania resolved to use it exclusively. It was never printed but circulated in manuscript, and pastors had to copy out the text for use. Rather bare by modern standards, it was for its time a careful preservation of a representative German Lutheran liturgy. A notable feature was the form of the Benediction, which followed the Swedish practice by adding to the Aaronic blessing "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The form was restored in the *Service Book and Hymnal* of 1958.

A revision of the 1748 Muhlenberg liturgy was printed in 1786; the New

York Synod printed an English translation in 1795. A German liturgy of 1818 marked a decline to a pastor-centered service and reflected the Rationalism of the time. (One formula for the distribution of Holy Communion was, "Jesus says, 'Take, eat. . . .'" Candidates for ordination were not required to subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions.) The Joint Synod of Ohio published an English liturgy in 1830. In 1847 the Ministerium of Pennsylvania authorized an English translation of the liturgy.

Meanwhile in Germany liturgical development was under way with a recovery of more historic Lutheran forms as part of a revival of interest in the Lutheran Confessions. In 1844, Wilhelm Loehe's *Agenda for Christian Congregations of the Lutheran Confession* (a liturgy for North America) appeared and gave impetus to numerous liturgies in the provincial churches, which restored many elements of the sixteenth-century church orders. In America in 1855 a new German liturgy was prepared which reflected the new interest in Germany in the historic order; an English translation was published in 1860 as *A Liturgy for the Use of the English Lutheran Church.* A notable advance in Lutheran liturgy in America was the publication of the *Church Book* of 1868 by the General Council, which restored forms and usages that had been obscured by Rationalism and by the conditions of the frontier. It was an extremely important book that established the basic model for the *Common Service Book* and the *Service Book and Hymnal.*

The Augustana Church used the liturgy of the Church of Sweden of 1811, and adopted various changes in 1870. In 1895 it adopted a complete liturgy based on the revised liturgy of the Church of Sweden.

Among the Danes and the Norwegians a great variety of liturgies and of attitudes toward liturgy appeared. Pastors and congregations exercised great freedom with regard to liturgical forms, picking and choosing as they would. Some saw the Danish-Norwegian liturgy (1887-1889) as the proper model for ordering worship; others saw liturgy as a sign of a formalism which hindered the free movement of the Holy Spirit. Among Norwegian Americans worship basically took two forms: the liturgy of the Church of Norway and the informal service of those influenced by the pietistic revival of Hans Nielsen Hauge.

In 1878 the General Synod South proposed to the General Synod and the General Council that they unite in the preparation of a common service book for all English-speaking Lutherans in America. The proposal was accepted. The guiding rule of the work was "the common consent of the pure Lutheran Liturgies of the 16th century, and when there is not entire

agreement among them, the consent of the largest number of those of greatest weight." The Common Service appeared in 1888 and, according to its Preface, reproduced "in English the *consensus* of these pure Lutheran Liturgies. It is therefore no new Service, such as the personal tastes of those who have prepared it would have selected and arranged; but it is the old Lutheran Service. . . ."

This Common Service had enormous influence. Increasingly it appeared in the service books of the Danes and Norwegians, even though it was understood to be one among several liturgies churches might choose from. It was subsequently adopted by the Augustana Church as an alternate form and included in the *Hymnal* of 1924. The English Synod of Missouri (for a time part of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) adopted the Common Service in 1899, and *The Lutheran Hymnal* of 1941 of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted the service. It had become indeed the common service of Lutherans in North America.[1]

In 1944 an invitation was extended by the United Lutheran Church in America to the other Lutheran churches in the United States to join in the production of a new service book. The churches which came to form the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America accepted the invitation. (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, having just published *The Lutheran Hymnal* in 1941, declined to participate.) The result of this cooperative work was the *Service Book and Hymnal* of 1958. Its basis was broader than that of the Common Service. The Common Liturgy, as it was called, was "grounded upon both the *Common Service* and upon other forms significant to American Lutherans, especially those of Scandinavian origin." Beyond the creation of broadly representative Lutheran liturgy, there was a desire also to reflect "the rich treasury of ecumenical liturgy, especially in the ancient Greek tradition antedating the Roman Rite from which European usage has been derived." Moreover, it recovered some elements lost in the controversies of the Reformation, such as the Prayer of Thanksgiving and the use of the term "catholic" in the creeds. The collects and prayers and the variety in the musical settings of the liturgy reflected a growth in congregational devotion. The Common Liturgy then was "rooted in the developed worship of the ancient and medieval Christian Church, both East and West, and grounded on the historic German, Scandinavian, and American uses of the post-reformation centuries."

In 1965, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, at work on a revision of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, issued an invitation to the other Lutheran bodies

in North America "to pursue a co-operative venture with other Lutheran bodies as soon as possible in working toward under a single cover:

a) a common liturgical section in rite, rubric, and music;

b) a common core of hymn texts and musical settings; and

c) a variant selection of hymns, if necessary."

The *Service Book and Hymnal* of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America had just been published seven years earlier, in 1958, but times had changed rapidly and both churches accepted the invitation of the Missouri Synod. A preliminary meeting was convened in Chicago in 1966.[2] Upon its formation, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada joined the work. A representative commission of 24 members was created that eventually included one delegate from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada and one from the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (Slovak Synod). There were four standing committees: liturgical text, liturgical music, hymn text, hymn music. This Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship held its first meeting in November 1966.

In 1969 the Missouri Synod added to the worship resources of *The Lutheran Hymnal* with the publication of *Worship Supplement.* This book, which included, for the most part, material already prepared before the 1965 invitation, offered three forms of the Holy Eucharist with propers, services for morning and evening, as well as for prime, noonday, and compline; three services of prayer and preaching; together with a supplementary hymnal. It was a Missouri Synod supplement to its own existing hymnal, but its influence extended beyond that denomination.

The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship began the publication of a series of exploratory booklets with provisional services for trial use, "designed to broaden the scope of currently available liturgical resources." The booklets were produced through the cooperation of the three publishing houses (Augsburg, Concordia, Fortress). The books were:

Contemporary Worship 1: Hymns (1969). Twenty-one hymns, some old, most new.

Contemporary Worship 2: The Holy Communion (1970). Four musical settings of the new text: contemporary, hymnic, chant, folk.

Contemporary Worship 3: The Marriage Service (1972). One form within the context of Holy Communion; a second to stand alone.

Contemporary Worship 4: Hymns for Baptism and Holy Communion (1972). Thirty hymns, some old, some new.

Contemporary Worship 5: Services of the Word (1972). For Advent, Christmas-Epiphany, Lent, Easter, two for general use.

Contemporary Worship 6: The Church Year, Calendar and Lectionary (1973).

Contemporary Worship 7: Holy Baptism (1974). One form for use with the Holy Communion, one for use with other services.

Contemporary Worship 8: Affirmation of the Baptismal Covenant (1975). One form for use with Holy Baptism; one for use when Baptism is not celebrated.

Contemporary Worship 01: The Great Thanksgiving (1975). Introductory essays and eight eucharistic prayers.

Contemporary Worship 9: Daily Prayer of the Church (1976). Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Prayer at the Close of the Day, Responsive Prayer, the Litany.

Contemporary Worship 10: Burial of the Dead (1976). The service, with optional inclusion within Holy Communion, and the committal.

The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship reviewed the responses and reactions to these booklets, and on the basis of these comments revised the services. Official review committees in each of the participating churches were appointed, and they examined the emerging body of liturgical material with great care. The liturgy was revised in the light of this review. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* of 1978 is thus the result of a widely representative cooperative effort. That book is a step in the unending process of liturgical revision and reform as the church seeks continually to shape its worship in responsible historic and relevant ways, reflecting the best of contemporary scholarship about where the church has been, where it is now, and where it is to go in the years to come.

THE ECUMENICAL CONTEXT

All of this Lutheran liturgical history was not happening in isolation. Many other Christian denominations were also experiencing a similar development. In the middle of the twentieth century a series of movements—historical, biblical, theological—began to acknowledge their mutual interdependence and began to converge.

An important step toward Christian unity was the formation in 1947 of the Church of South India, which united former Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists. Soon after its formation, the Church of South India began to work out and test common forms of worship. These appeared in a series of separate booklets from 1950-1962. The best

known order was the highly-regarded *Order for The Lord's Supper*. All the services were revised and authorized for general use in 1962.

In 1950 the Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church began to publish a notable series of Prayer Book Studies, which examined the Anglican liturgical tradition looking toward a revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Various experimental and provisional rites were published, tested, and revised. Eventually from these studies the *Proposed Book of Common Prayer* came into being and was approved by the general convention of the Episcopal Church in 1977.

In the Roman Catholic Church a continuing history of liturgical scholarship and work toward liturgical reform had a two-fold focus in the United States. The first aspect was the journal, *Worship*, published by the Benedictines at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota. The second aspect was the formation of the Liturgical Conference, which inaugurated its influential Liturgical Weeks in 1940. These annual weeks studied liturgical reforms and enacted them in impressive celebrations, giving those who attended a glimpse of what the liturgy could be. At a large meeting in St. Louis in 1964 the mass was first sung in English and, to the surprise of some, Luther's hymn "A mighty fortress is our God" was used. Rome had begun the reform of the liturgical rites in 1956, and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the resulting Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963) approved far-reaching and even revolutionary changes: increased participation of the people, the reform of the lectionary to the three-year cycle of three lessons for the Eucharist, the presiding priest facing the people across a freestanding altar, simplification of ceremonial, a required sermon at all masses on Sundays and Feast Days, communion under the forms of both bread and wine on certain occasions.

In the Presbyterian Church a renewed interest in liturgy was evidenced in the *Book of Common Worship: Provisional Services and Lectionary for the Christian Year,* published in 1966 by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The first task, the preface said, was to provide an order for the public worship of God to guide the churches as the people assemble for worship on the Lord's Day. A booklet, *Service for the Lord's Day*, had been published in 1964 and revised in the provisional services. In 1970 the *Worshipbook* containing services and hymns was published. The basic service for the Lord's Day, as in the previous publications, was the celebration of the Holy Communion. ("It is fitting that the Lord's Supper be celebrated as often as each Lord's Day,"

the rubric reads.)[3] The Service included a Preface and a Prayer of Thanksgiving followed by the Lord's Prayer and the Words of Institution.

In 1968 the churches cooperating in the Consultation on Church Union (Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ) published *An Order of Worship for the Proclamation of the Word of God and the Celebration of The Lord's Supper* to enrich the worship traditions of the several churches.

Clearly a consensus was growing with regard to both the content and the form of Christian worship. Sensing this, a group of pastors from the large Lutheran bodies in the United States came together in 1966 with representatives of the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches and one minister of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, for an informal discussion of what might be done to pool the thinking of liturgical scholars of all denominations. Out of the discussion evolved the Ecumenical Days which were held for some years just prior to the annual Liturgical Week. People interested in Christian worship came to know one another across denominational lines and began to realize, through exchange of materials and personal conversations, how parallel their respective work had become. The groundwork was laid for convoking the (American) Consultation on Common Texts and subsequently the International Consultation on English Texts.

At the invitation of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, representatives of various interested churches met in 1968 to begin work on new formulations of liturgical texts which were in common usage. The representatives attending the meeting agreed that the fundamental texts which were the common property of Christendom should appear in language agreed to by all. The first results of the work of this Consultation on Common Texts were used in the *Worship Supplement* of 1969.

It was soon obvious that the project need not be limited to North America but should have wider scope. Already the Roman Catholic Church had formed the International Consultation on English in the Liturgy. The International Consultation on English Texts met in London in 1969, a meeting of representatives of English-speaking churches all over the world. This group, which met several times, published as its final report a booklet called *Prayers We Have in Common* (second revised edition, 1975), which gave both the texts and an explanation of the translation of each. These commonly agreed upon texts are now being used in Roman Catholic liturgies, the new *Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church,* the *Lutheran Book of Worship,* and worship orders of other denominations. English-speaking Christians all over the world have the

opportunity to address God in the same words. The goal is that no longer need there be confusion over, for example, whether it is "debts" or "trespasses" in the Lord's Prayer and whether it ends "for ever" or "for ever and ever." It is, not unexpectedly, the Lord's Prayer that still is treasured by people in the form in which they learned it and which they are reluctant to abandon. So the Episcopal and Lutheran Churches in their books have chosen to place the traditional version in parallel columns with the new translation whenever the prayer appears. The Roman Catholic Church published its English Liturgy prior to the work of the International Consultation on English Texts and so retains the traditional version.

The Work of the People

Liturgy means "work of the people," but too often in the past the liturgy gave the impression that it was the work of the pastor. It seemed as though the minister (usually singular) did the work—he (always male) preached, he celebrated the sacraments, he "conducted the service." But the liturgy has always been the responsibility of all of the people of God. Sometimes congregations were trained by conscientious pastors to participate intelligently in the service, knowing why they sang the song of the angels, why they stood for the Gospel, how they silently should add their own petitions and intercessions in the Prayer of the Church, what it meant to share in the bread and the cup of the Eucharist.

The German Church Orders which led to the formation of the Common Service all stemmed from Luther's revision of the mass and ultimately from the Latin historic Eucharist of the church of western Europe. In addition to this continental tradition, there is in Lutheranism in North America the strong influence of a Scandinavian tradition of lay participation in worship, indeed of lay leadership and preaching. Hauge in Norway, Rosenius in Sweden, and Ruotsalainen in Finland are examples of laymen who revitalized the church. Hauge and Ruotsalainen remained basically within the historic pattern, Rosenius moved somewhat outside of it.

This tradition that recognized that the presiding pastor was not the only leader of worship has been embraced not only by other Lutheran bodies in North America but by other denominations as well. One feature of contemporary worship is the emphasis on shared leadership to indicate that the service is not something that the pastor does while the people watch but is something which is an action shared by all who assemble to worship and over which one is called to preside. Moreover, the people are

encouraged to provide all of the petitions for the prayers of intercession in the Eucharist, and the presiding minister gathers all of them together in the concluding paragraph.

The role of the clergy is therefore to preside at the worship of God. The ordained ministers are those specially trained and called to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. Only one who is ordained presides at the Eucharistic celebration of the people of God. Such has been the church's regard for the Gospel and for the sacraments—those means by which the Word of God is imparted to the people—that the function of presiding was reserved exclusively for the ordained servants of the church. By restricting the presidential function at the Eucharist to those who have been ordained, the church exercises a measure of control over the celebration. The restriction of presiding at the Eucharist to ordained clergy is based on an understanding of the variety of gifts in the body of Christ in which not all members have the same office or function (Romans 12:3-8). "Nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call" (Augsburg Confession XIV).

Moreover, the restriction depends on an understanding of the sacraments as the God-given property of the church, which are to be guarded against abuse. The church controls the "right use" of the sacraments by committing them to its ministers, who are under the authority of the church organization—congregation and synod or district, who are trained by the church and pledged at ordination to the Scriptures and to the Confessions. The clergy are not only representatives of the denomination but of the ministry of the whole Christian church, and the presidency of the liturgy is given to those who are in communion with the whole church. Thus the local community is in contact with the larger Christian community. An inevitable tension results: The need to maintain this ecumenical communion is balanced by the necessity of avoiding a clergy-dominated liturgy. To these specially commissioned servants of the people of God the church entrusts the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments, and these ministers are accountable to the church which ordained them for fulfilling their responsiblity.[4] Those who preside, therefore, must do so not only with fidelity to the traditions but also with attention to people, and this requires warmth and grace.

The leadership role is expanded in modern liturgies. In the absence of clergy, laypeople are encouraged to lead the daily prayer services—Morning and Evening Prayer, Prayer at the Close of the Day. In the Holy Communion the leadership ought to be shared by several people: the Presiding Minister who must be ordained and the assisting ministers who

need not be ordained. (These assisting ministers are not to be confused with assistant or associate pastors. At a celebration of the Holy Communion, the pastor of a parish might be an assisting minister and the assistant pastor might be the presiding minister.) Laypeople—women as well as men—ought to be encouraged to share in the assisting roles as their abilities allow, in addition to the clergy of the parish. They are not just helpers in the absence of ordained people; they have their own rightful role to fulfill. A parish with five pastors, for example, ought not let that deter them from the use of lay leadership. All five pastors and laypeople as well should be involved in the service. Laypeople ought to be given roles in the service as a matter of principle to show the broadened understanding of leading worship.

The New Style of Language

There is evident in the liturgies produced by Christian denominations in North America a marked change in language style. From the middle of the seventeenth century to the middle of the twentieth century—300 years—there was, at least for Protestants, one common, universally known Bible translation, the Authorized Version, called the King James Version, of 1611. That was the Bible nearly everyone owned, read, and memorized. It was therefore natural that the language of worship reflect that archaic (even when it was made, it was deliberately a bit archaic), elevated, noble prose.

A second influence on the style of worship in English was the sonorous prose of the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Anglican Communion. Many denominations, even those which had little use for liturgical forms, when they provided a form at all, would echo with remarkable fidelity the language of the Anglican Prayer Book. It was thought that that book and the King James Bible were together the two great monuments of English religious prose and so ought to be regarded as models for the language of all worship.

But language, like all living organisms, changes. It cannot remain static. The Authorized Version of the Bible became increasingly obscure as the old verb forms and the pronouns were lost in everyday speech. More and more people found the old expressions difficult to imitate and sometimes hard to understand. Protestantism, which had begun protesting the use of an archaic and largely unknown language, Latin, in the Roman Catholic Church, now found itself in the position of using an increasingly obscure language. It was time, more and more people admitted, to use con-

temporary expression. Paradoxically, what had begun as a form of intimate address, "thou," as opposed to the formal and respectful "you" had become itself a form of reverent address reserved for God alone. God was called "thou" and in ordinary speech everyone—family, friends, superiors, strangers—were all called "you." Moreover the Roman Catholic Church in translating the mass into English had no such tradition as the *Book of Common Prayer* to draw upon and so chose ordinary (some would say flat) colloquial English to render the Latin into the vernacular. Increasingly then, the distance from the language of the King James Bible and the Tudor style made itself felt, and there was a growing concern to speak to the world outside as well as to the people inside the church.

Recognizing the damage language can do in preserving and encouraging racial sterotypes and sexist assumptions, pleas were made for a careful examination of religious language, and especially the language used in worship, to eliminate damaging expressions.[5] The line in the hymn "And now, O Father, mindful of the love" (*SBH* 278) that prays "From tainting mischief keep them white and clear" was obviously inappropriate for a black congregation to sing or for that matter for a white congregation to sing since it reinforces the notion that white is good and pure and desirable and that black is evil and sinful and undesirable. There were, it came to be recognized, racist implications in the language of the liturgy, often innocently unperceived by generations of worshipers but subtly and powerfully reinforcing existing stereotypes and assumptions. The evening prayer "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord" was understood to be a phrase that a sensitive congregation might choose to avoid.

The sexist implications of much of the traditional language also became clear under the impact of the women's movement. Why, it was increasingly asked, must the English language assume that male is the normal condition and that female is either a deviation from the norm or a derivation from it? Must we always say "man" when speaking about all of humankind, male and female? Cannot this be avoided in at least many instances? And with the ordination of women in Lutheran churches the constant reference to the pastor as "he" became obsolete and incorrect.

Behind this concern for language lay a deepened concern for the inclusiveness of the Gospel as the Lutheran Church moved out of its ethnic ghettoes. First, slowly, Germans and Swedes and Danes and Norwegians and Finns came to talk together and eventually merge with one another in the formation of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada. The next step was for a new multi-ethnic Lutheran church to expand its view and become

aware of other non-European groups it had not traditionally had much association with. And then, at last, the increasingly sensitive churches became aware of the pervasive prejudices against women and also against the young and the old. Church and society together were discovering a new respect for the richness of humanity in its diversity and in its unity.

The Easter Focus

From the time of Luther, Baptism has been a basic emphasis in Lutheran theology. It is central to Luther's understanding of daily repentance and renewal as the way we make use of our Baptism day by day. Luther says in the fourth part of the *Small Catechism* that baptizing with water "signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence." Baptism also underlies Luther's advice in the *Small Catechism* to begin one's prayers upon rising in the morning and upon retiring at night by making the sign of the cross and saying "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is an effective reminder that one has been made a Christian by Baptism and "marked with the cross of Christ forever."

Baptism is central to Lutheran theology—not to mention Christian theology—because Baptism is rooted in the Easter mystery of death and resurrection. The two facets of the one event—death and new life—must be held together as in the rites of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. Luther's "theology of the cross," which opposed the prevailing "theology of glory" of the church of his time, was an effort at restoring this ancient dialectic. The theologian of the cross, he says, is one who speaks of God crucified and hidden in his sufferings.

> In Christ, suffering and triumphant, He has decisively asserted His Godhead in the midst of a hostile world; and in the Incarnate and Crucified Saviour we behold the supreme majesty of that 'uncreated love, which is God Himself.'[6]

Easter is the central feast of the Christian year. Christmas and Epiphany are preparations for it; Pentecost is its culmination. Lent prepares for Easter and the seven weeks of Easter celebrate the rich mystery of life out of death, cross and resurrection, renewal by the Spirit of God. Every Sunday is a celebration of Christ's mighty rising "on the first day of the week." It is a

time of glad and joyful celebration marked not by obligation and duty but by willing and eager participation in the recreation of the universe. The centrality of Easter leads to the primacy of Sunday over other days and other festivals. It also is seen and felt in the rich liturgy for Holy Baptism which the *Lutheran Book of Worship* provides; and it is echoed in the Paschal Blessing with which Morning Prayer may conclude. The orders for confession and forgiveness, the Service of the Word, and the Burial of the Dead also underscore the centrality of Easter. Christians are reminded again and again that they are the baptized people of God and that their Baptism is not just for this time and this world but forever.

As Passover is central to Judaism, so the Christian Passover, Easter, is central to the church. And it is the passage through the waters of Baptism and in the sharing of the Christian Meal that the church celebrates the Passover in the context of the new covenant. In the celebration of Sunday, especially when the ancient joining of the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper is experienced, the Christian, in company with other renewed people, finds contact with the risen Christ.

The fullness of the church and the union of Christ with his people at no other time and in no other way become so real and so dynamic as in the celebration of the Holy Communion. It is there that the church really becomes the church, the body of Christ, and that Christ and his people are joined together. Easter thus becomes a continuing experience. Sunday is not just a commemoration of a historical event but a realization (both an awareness and a making real) of union with the risen and reigning Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.