

THESES ON WORSHIP

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Eastertide 2010

In Nomine Jesu

THESIS 1

I CONFESS that worship (i.e., Divine Service, in German: Gottesdienst) is our triune God's service to us, and our faithful responses always direct us back to God from whom all blessings flow.

I DENY that worship is primarily a human activity, which is constituted by contrived efforts at emotion-centered adoration and praise.

What does this mean?

- Worship is always centered in our triune God's actions—thus the hymns, liturgies and messages must always convey God's work and not be seen as human activities. The hymns, liturgies and messages are to be evaluated on how well they bring an awareness of God's gracious activity into the consciousness and appreciation of the people.
- Worship is by and for those who have a living faith. It is therefore a faith-strengthening activity for the community as God comes to His people through the means of grace, resulting in evangelism activities by those who hear the Word of God and keep it.
- Trinitarian creeds and catechetical statements are regularly incorporated so that the ecumenical nature of worship is appreciated, yet the clarity of our Lutheran focus is evident.
- Worship practices or messages, which are designed to manipulate emotionally are inappropriately geared toward the worshipper and not to the One being worshipped.
- Likewise, worship will not be an entertainment event for the audience. While worship is edifying, engaging, and attractive, the focus must always be on that which is above and beyond the temporal and mundane. Clapping is viewed as inappropriate.

THESIS 2

I CONFESS that worship flows from the Gospel. At the heart and center of all worship is Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice for sin. In worship, the living and saving Lord comes to give us life.

I DENY that worship is based on the Law, namely, that our feelings or gifts supplement the work of Christ.

What does this mean?

- Our orders of service (liturgy) as well as our preaching must include God's Word of Law and Gospel. Most prominent will be the saving Gospel which offers the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ.
- When we gather for worship, our focus will be on God and not on ourselves. We will avoid going through the motions of the liturgy as if by such a work we merit God's favor.

- As we strive to engage the hearts and minds of the worshippers, we will try to avoid worship becoming mindless recitation, while valuing meaningful repetition of the Good News of God's gracious activity.

THEESIS 3

I CONFESS that in the liturgy God's Word and sacraments are proclaimed and administered. Through these means, God dispenses forgiveness, life, and salvation.

I DENY that the liturgy is a mere form to produce the desired responses in worshippers.

What does this mean?

- I recognize the great gifts of the liturgy, which have been handed down to us over the centuries. This liturgical tradition includes both the historic service of Word and Sacrament (the Divine Service) as well as the many prayer offices (such as Matins, Morning Prayer, Vespers, and Evening Prayer) that can provide a framework for our Sunday services and daily prayer. Our community will gain an understanding and appreciation of the variety of the Church's worship life and practice as we explore and experience these services.
- I use the historic liturgies because they have proven to be a reliable way to ensure the centrality of the forgiveness of sins, rather than merely for historic or aesthetic reasons.

THEESIS 4

I CONFESS that the purpose of music in the church is to bear the living voice of the Gospel.

I DENY that music is present for purely aesthetic reasons or for the satisfaction of personal tastes of worshippers or worship leaders.

What does this mean?

- Appropriate music and art is based on the church year and is in agreement with Lutheran theology. We seek to incorporate all elements of worship—including hymns, attendant music, and readings—into such a cohesive whole.
- Worship must be thoughtfully prepared and skillfully presented. Lay assistants must receive careful guidance and direction before serving in services.
- Although musical styles change, worthiness and craft, skill and suitability are qualities consistent with our desire to bring God our very best.
- The organ remains the best instrument for one person to lead congregational song, because it was originally a wind instrument which breathes like a singer and produces a variety of sounds.
- We stress that a choir's primary function is the teaching and leading of the congregation's singing of the liturgy and hymns, not performance ... again, clapping is viewed as worldly and inappropriate.
- Because our worship is directed to God, the location of the choirs and instrumentalists should encourage congregational singing without attracting the primary focus to themselves.

THEESIS 5

I CONFESS that worship is catholic (that is, universal). The gathering of God’s people around Word and Sacrament reaches across cultural and social barriers to transcend both time and space.

I DENY that worship is defined by the tastes and preferences of an individual or group of worshippers.

What does this mean?

- Worship will be shaped by the historic liturgical rites of Christendom, signifying that we are included in the corporate prayer and praise of the church.
- All services are public worship and will be conducted in accordance with the doctrine and practice of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
- Following the suggestions and guidelines of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, lay-assistants in the liturgy and in sacramental administration will be limited to men. Since the reading of Holy Scripture in the Divine Service is historically a continuation of the apostolic office, the pericopes will be read by the Pastor. In his absence they will be read by his designate.
- Orientation will be provided on the scriptural principles of the LCMS regarding pulpit and altar fellowship for the sake of genuine Christian unity.
- The celestial dimensions of worship, which unite us with “angels and archangels,” should be clearly demonstrated through the selection, explanation, and use of appropriate liturgical texts.
- All rites, ceremonies, and music used in worship will be evaluated according to the public teaching of the LCMS.

THEESIS 6

I CONFESS that the environment of worship should be theologically sound, aesthetically pleasing, and spiritually edifying.

I DENY that art and architecture are neutral factors in a setting for worship.

What does this mean?

- The architectural setting and artistic elements utilized in our worship experiences and environment will conform to Lutheran theology and practices.
- The centrality of Word and Sacrament will always be evident in the worship settings of our community—the Altar (or table of the Meal) and Pulpit (or table of the Word) are equally prominent, with the baptismal Font demonstrating its use as the site of our initiation into the Christian community.
- The furnishings, including paraments and vestments, will be used to enhance a sense of holy awe, reverent wonder, and spiritual adoration.
- While tastes may vary, only the best will be incorporated into the worship life of this community.

Soli Deo Gloria