

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 2 K. WORSHIP

Worship at Luther campus: a declaration and appeal

Prepared by the faculty of Luther Seminary in March 1995.

Edited November 2001.

Christian worship glorifies the name of our Triune God; it builds up the faithful; and it expresses our unity in the faith. On the basis of these convictions, and with the welfare of the church at heart, we make the following declaration and appeal to the pastors and people of our church.

1. Christian public worship takes place in the presence of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; we are present in the heavenly sanctuary of the Triune God. The heavenly Father offers the riches of his grace in Jesus Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Spirit we approach the Father through and with the Son. The Spirit leads and empowers us in our response to God's presence and activity.
2. Christ leads us in our worship. He invites and brings us into the holy presence of the Father. Through his word and sacraments Christ gives us the Father's forgiveness and grace. This releases the pastor from being a liturgical performer, from carrying the liturgy, and from having to create worship.
3. So Christian public worship is something different from the everyday. It takes us into the realm of the sacred. The holy God shares his holiness with his people. We are invited into the presence of the Holy One and we approach with our shoes off, as it were. We worship with an awareness of the tremendous mystery which is at the heart of Christian worship. The liturgical bearing of the pastor, the clear demarcation of sacred space, and the drama of the liturgy itself all present a clear message that we are in the presence of the holy God. This is the time and place for reverence, awe, and wonder.
4. The heart of worship is God's own service to God's people. Worship is always divine service, because in worship God serves us. Divine service is God at work, giving to us as he forgives, renews, sanctifies, blesses, empowers, and equips us for service. What God requires of us before all else is a listening ear, receiving hands, and a believing heart. In worship we hungry beggars come to be filled.

WORSHIP AT LUTHER CAMPUS: A DECLARATION AND APPEAL

5. Christian worship is itself a gift of God. It is not a human invention. It has biblical warrants and foundations. It centres on the spoken and acted word of God as revealed in the Scriptures. It obeys the Lord's own instructions to baptise, preach, teach, absolve, eat and drink, bring offerings, give thanks, and pray. It speaks the language of the Scriptures, not only in sermon and sacrament, but also in the responses, acclamations, cries for help, prayers of the liturgy, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. These link us with the people of God of both the Old and New Testaments, whose worship is a guide and model for us. Our worship is thus biblical, even though its order is not fixed by any biblical prescriptions.
6. We are not the first people to whom God gave the gift of worship. Rather we follow in a long line of faithful men and women who recognise that worship was not their creation but a gift from God to be received with joy and handed on with integrity to the next generation. When we worship we confess our oneness with God's people in all times and in all places. The catholic nature of worship helps us see that worship happens in a context which is far broader than our own time and space, knowledge, and understanding.
7. In worship we join not only with God's people of all times and places, but also with the angels and the heavenly hosts in offering praise to our gracious God and celebrating God's mighty acts. Furthermore, we anticipate the time when the whole of creation will perfectly adore God in heavenly glory.
8. Thus our worship happens in this world, but its content, language, and participants are never only of this world. Our worship is culturally specific, so that all who worship are addressed as saint and sinner in their cultural context. Yet our worship is transcultural; it transcends all cultures. In worship, heaven and earth meet.
9. What we do in worship is given to us by God. The particular way we worship is determined by such factors as the patterns we have received from our mothers and fathers in the faith; what is theologically right; what is ritually effective; what is culturally appropriate; and what is suitable in view of local conditions and circumstances.
10. Our worship says what we believe. What we believe determines how we worship. The language and actions of the liturgy publicly express and enact our common faith. Our worship is therefore Christian, and confessionally Lutheran. The faith we confess as Lutherans determines how we worship as Lutherans. What is preached from the pulpit is enacted in the liturgy. Our worship is therefore of such a nature that others who share our confession know at once that they are one in faith and confession with us. They may, therefore, confidently participate in the full unity of faith.
11. Our worship is intentionally evangelical. Our liturgy deals with the reality of sin, so that the sinner is addressed by both law and gospel, both of which do what they say: kill and make alive, wound and heal. In the liturgy of word and sacrament God gives us his gracious, healing, and saving gifts. Our faith does not create the gifts; it simply receives them.
12. Public worship is personal but it is not individualistic. Every aspect of divine service is corporate. All who worship are addressed as sinners and saints. All are reassured that they belong to the baptised family of God. All are built up through word and sacrament into the body of Christ. All are united in common adoration, in confession of their faith, in thanksgiving, and in prayer.
13. Our corporate worship is public witness to the world. It is not a private act. It is done in public view and with the public in view. In our ministry of priestly intercession we bring the world to God, and through his ministry to us God authorises and equips us to bring him in all his saving mercy to the world.

WORSHIP AT LUTHER CAMPUS: A DECLARATION AND APPEAL

14. In worship we offer God the best we have to offer. We use the best words and the best forms, the best music and the best arts. Only the best is appropriate in the divine service in which God gives us his best.

These then, are the principles which guide our worship at Luther Seminary. We hope and pray that these principles will be affirmed by the whole church and followed by its pastors as they initiate God's people into the divine liturgy.