

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 2 K. WORSHIP

# A Lutheran approach to the theology of worship

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## 1. THE DIVINE MYSTERY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

- a. In holy baptism, we the people of God, are drawn into the fellowship of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
  - The risen Son of God gives us the privileges of his sonship. He does this through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14–17; Eph 1:5, 13–14).
  - The Holy Spirit gives us access to the Father's gracious presence. The Spirit does this through the Son (Rom 8:14–16; Gal 4:6; Eph 2:18).
  - The Father accepts those who come to him through the Spirit in the name of the Son, and receives them as children of God (John 16:23–27; Gal 4:4–7).
- b. Christian worship is a divine mystery, for God is present and active in worship. The Triune God has worked faith in people, drawn them into the divine fellowship, and initiated them into the sacred mystery of worship. If God had not done these things, we Christians would not and could not worship God (Col 3:16; Apol IV, 49, 154; XXIV, 27).
  - The sacred word reveals the mystery of divine worship and shows the church how to worship God (Col 3:16; Apol XXVIII, 69–70; LC I, 16, 17).
  - Through baptism God has given us the right and privilege to approach God in worship (Gal 3:25–27; Heb 10:19–22; LC III, 36).

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- In the holy supper God's faithful people receive the body and blood of their Lord for the forgiveness of sins and as a wonderful pledge and foretaste of the fullness and perfection of divine worship in the age to come (1 Cor 11:26; Rev 19:6-9; Apol XXIV, 49; SC VI, 1-6; LC V, 64).
  - Through these means (that is, the word and the sacraments) the Holy Spirit empowers us to call on the name of the Triune God and to receive God's gifts (1 Cor 2:12; 12:3; AC XXI,3; Apol XXIV,26,29,88).
- c. Through divine worship the communion of saints participates in the divine, eternal life of the Holy Trinity, in which the Son glorifies the Father (Hebrews 2:12), as the Father and the Spirit glorify the Son (John 16:14; 17:1).
- We praise the Father through the Son (Rom 16:27; 2 Cor 1:20; Heb 13:15; 1 Pet 4:11), and through him we already now join with the angels in their eternal praise (Rev 5).
  - As beggars before God who depend totally on his grace, we glorify our risen Lord even in suffering and persecution (Matt 5:3, 11–12; 1 Pet 1:6–8; 4:12–14).
  - Divine worship is doxology. It is the eternal praise of the Triune God as God (Rom 11:36; 16:27; Jude 24–25; Rev 5:13; 7:11,12; Apol XXIV,25,74; LC I, 84). Doxology is the essence of worship.

## 2. THE MEANS OF WORSHIP

- a. People tend to think *they* can determine how to worship the Triune God. But all such self-determined worship is idolatry (AC XXVII,36ff; Apol XV,18; XXVII,69; S Art II,2,26; II,3,2; LC I, 16ff).
- b. In and through the word of God we learn how God wants to be worshipped.
- In both the Old and New Testaments God has shown what is false worship and what threatens true worship.
  - In the New Testament Jesus has given and established the public ministry for the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments as the divinely appointed means of grace in worship (Matt 26:26–28; 28:16–20; AC V, VII, XIV, XXVIII).
- c. The crucified, risen, and ascended Lord gives his Holy Spirit through the means of grace. In this way he continues his ministry in and through the church (Acts 1:1-8; Matt 28:18–20; AC V; XVIII,3; FC Ep II,4).
- d. To save all people, God's Son took on created flesh and blood. He now uses his creatures and created things in his ongoing ministry. He uses human language in preaching God's word, and also uses it with the water in baptism and with the bread and wine in the Lord's supper to heal both body and soul (SC IV; VI; LC IV,19ff; V,68).

## 3. THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

- a. The word of God reveals to us the nature of divine worship. That means that subjective human experiences do not decide what is divine worship (see 1.b.1; 2.9 above for references).
- b. Through God's word the Holy Spirit initiates God's people into divine worship and

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reveals to them mysteries which are beyond natural, human experience and understanding (1 Cor 2:9–10; see 1.b.4 above for references).

- c. God's word assures us that in worship the Triune God is present and active in serving us (Apol IV,49; 310; LC I, 84).
  - Thus God calls us into God's presence, forgives us, and speaks to us. God listens to us, gives us his gifts, and invites us to the heavenly banquet. God gives us Jesus' body and blood, blesses us, and equips us to work with him for others
- d. In response we entrust ourselves to God, and react appropriately to God's activity (Apol IV,49; 154; XXIV,27; LC I, 84).
  - Thus we gather in God's presence, confess our sins, listen to God, and pray to him. We offer our gifts, dine with God, give ourselves totally to him, thank and praise him, and go out with others to work for him.
- e. Worship involves both rest and work.
  - On the one hand, in worship we cease from our labours, rest in Christ, and wait in faith on God to act (Matt 11:28; Heb 4:3–11). On the other hand, in our worship we serve our God, each other, and the world (Rom 12–13; 1 Tim 2:1–6; Heb 13:14–18; 1 Pet 4:7–11). Yet the reception of divine blessing doesn't depend on human actions, thoughts, or feelings. It depends on God and God's grace (Rom 10:17; Gal 3:2,5; LC I, 84,86,91f).
- f. Christian worship is based on the presence and activity of the Triune God through the divinely- appointed means of grace. Therefore the essence of worship is the proclamation of God's word, the performance of baptism, and the administration of the Lord's supper (Apol XV,42; XXIV,69ff; LC I,84).

#### 4. THE PLACE OF WORSHIP

- a. In the new covenant, the risen Lord Jesus is the new temple of God where God the Father meets us and we meet God (John 2:21).
- b. Jesus, the Word-made-flesh, is God's way to the human race and its way to God and life with him (John 14:6).
- c. In the new age, worship is tied to the person of Jesus, rather than to particular places (John 4:20–24). Yet it is proper to consecrate particular places for the benefit of space-bound human beings, because Christ once entered our world to save all people, and he still meets us in our time and space.
- d. There is no true worship of God except through Christ Jesus as he comes to his people through the means of grace (Col 2:9–10; 1 Tim 2:5; AC XXVII, 36,37).
- e. Christian worship occurs in heaven and on earth at the same time.
  - Since God's Son has come to earth as a human being to reveal the Father's name to the human race, Christians participate in divine worship through his name here on earth (John 17:6; Matt 18:18–20; Apol IV, 154ff; 299; LC II, 27ff).
  - Since God's Son has ascended as the God-man into his Father's presence, Christians also participate in the heavenly worship of the angels with the triumphant church in heaven (Heb 10:19–22; 12:22–24; Rev 4,5).

- f. Divine worship thus breaks the boundaries of time and space. In worship earthbound believers look ahead to, and get a taste of, their life with the Triune God in heaven (Isa 6:1-5; Rev 4).
- g. The consecration of particular places for divine worship symbolises and looks forward to the final sanctification of all creation for divine worship (Rev 21:2-22:5).

## 5. WORSHIP AND TIME

- a. At creation God not only established the cycles and seasons of time to promote life here on earth, but also blessed and sanctified the Sabbath to provide a foretaste of eternity within the bounds of time (Gen 2:1-3).
- b. By instituting the tabernacle at Mt Sinai, God regulated the worship of the people of God in the old covenant. God set up the rules and regulations for the Sabbath (Exo 20:8-11), the festivals for pilgrimage (Exo 23:14-17), and other holy times (Lev 23:1-43). All these holy times find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ, who ushered in the new age (Mark 1:15; Col 2:17).
- c. Through Christ, the faithful enter the eternal rest of God (Matt 11:28; 12:8; Heb 4:1-11) and already now join in the eternal worship of God by the angels (Luke 2:14; 19:28; Rev 4,5).
- d. Worship in the new covenant is therefore not tied to special times, but to Christ who sanctifies every time of worship through his presence in the means of grace (Col 2:16-17; compare Rom 14:5,6).
- e. The Lord did not designate any special times for worship. But the church has set apart certain times of public worship for God's time-bound people. In this way we confess that our Lord not only meets us in time but also rescues us from the tyranny of time for our eternal service of him.
- f. The early church set apart Sunday to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus, the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the inauguration of the new age for the people of God (Acts 20:7; Rev 1:10).
- g. In the liturgical year (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany and so forth), we not only commemorate the events of Christ's life and ministry, but also express our temporal participation in the eternal worship of God.
- h. The consecration of particular times for divine worship symbolises and looks ahead to the fullness and completion of all time in eternity with its perfect worship of the Triune God.

## 6. THE FORMS OF WORSHIP

- a. Christ did not command and establish a particular order or pattern of worship for his church. He did, however, give clear directives on the constant and essential features of Christian worship. These essential features are: baptism, confession and absolution, reading and preaching the word, prayer, and the sacrament of the altar (Matt 28:19; John 20:23; Luke 24:46-47; Luke 11:1-13; Matt 26:26-28; AC VII; XV; XVI,40-45).
- b. In the Lutheran tradition a distinction is made between the essentials of worship, which have been divinely instituted, and the non-essentials (known as 'adiaphora') which have been neither commanded nor forbidden. While these non-essentials are not necessary for creating faith and the unity of the Spirit, some humanly-instituted rites are necessary in the church for maintaining the unity of love which is expressed by common ritual forms (1 Cor 14:33; Eph 5:17-21; AC XXVIII,54ff; FC SD X,8ff).

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- c. Even though no particular order of worship is essential to the life of faith, all orders should nevertheless act as confessions of the faith.
  - Orders of worship should highlight the presence and work of the Triune God in the means of grace, be consistent with the truth of God's word and the teaching of the gospel. They should, therefore, use the words of the holy Scriptures (LC I, 92ff), and express the teaching of the Lutheran Church, for correct doctrine defines what is correct in worship. Likewise, dogma and liturgical form go together (FC SD X, 5ff).
  - Orders of worship should also be faithful to the catholic tradition of the church and be ecumenical, provided always that this is consistent with God's word and the teachings of the Lutheran church (AC XXIV,1–3).
- d. The forms of worship should be culturally appropriate and corporate in character (FC SD X,9ff). Hence they should use ways of communication and expression which people can readily appreciate and understand. At the same time they should allow for continued growth in the understanding and practice of the divine truths conveyed.
- e. Forms of worship should also provide a framework for each person to respond to God's presence and grace, as led by the Holy Spirit, in corporate adoration, confession, dedication, thanksgiving, praise, petition, and intercession. At the same time they should build up the corporate life of the whole worshipping community, rather than some individual or sectional interest (1 Cor 12:7; 14:12,23).
- f. Christian worship and good order go together (1 Cor 14:33,40; AC XV; XXVI,40; XXVIII,53).

## 7. THE MANNER OF WORSHIP

- a. Worship of God involves the whole self, created and redeemed by God for eternal life (Rom 12:1; Heb 10:22; LC I,73).
- b. Through the means of grace in worship, Christ sanctifies the whole person: the body and the mind with the senses, thoughts, and emotions. He does this so that his people can receive him completely and respond to him more fully (Rom 12:1; Eph 6:26–27; 1 Thess 5:23).
- c. Since each person is affected differently by God's varied grace, the formal arrangement of worship should help the word of God to speak to all kinds of people.

It should also help worshippers to give expression to a wide range of responses to the gospel within the framework of the liturgy. In the Lutheran tradition worship has therefore been governed by both the freedom of faith and the law of love (1 Cor 14; Eph 5:21).

- The forms for public worship regulate the corporate activity of the congregation. However, the church should not insist on any particular pattern of spirituality or mode of subjective response to the gospel, as if it alone were valid or normative.
- Subjective experiences and responses do not shape the liturgy of the congregation. Liturgy is shaped by the Lord's directives on the essentials of worship (compare section 6a above).
- d. The fine arts can evoke and express a wide range of responses to God's varied grace, and thus find their fulfilment in the praise of the Triune God (see, for example, Eph 5:18–20).

- e. The whole of the Christian life is to be worship of God. By God's mercy we live in God's presence and acknowledge him in all circumstances (Rom 12:1–7; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17; LC I,85).

## 8. THE SCOPE OF WORSHIP

- a. Divine worship is both heavenly and earthly in scope (Heb 12:22–24).
- b. The angels worship the Triune God in heaven. They adore him face to face and praise his holiness (Isa 6:3; Heb 1:14; Rev 4:8–11; 5:8–12).
- c. The communion of saints is part of the heavenly choir. In Christ the faithful departed, set free from death, join the angels in their adoration (Heb 12:22–23; Rev 7:9–17). In Christ the faithful on earth, though burdened by sin and dependent on the means of grace for their pilgrimage, already participate in the praises of the heavenly choir (Heb 12:22–24; Rev 14:1–5; 19:6–8).
- d. In obedience to the Triune God, non-human creation praises God's goodness and power. Right now creation does this imperfectly under the burden of decay, but finally it will do so in perfection at the renewal of creation (Psalm 96:10–13; 98:7–9; 148:3–10; Rom 8:19–22; Phil 2:9–11; Rev 5:13).
- e. In and through Christ, God plans to reunite the whole of this fractured creation, so that it reaches its divinely-intended goal and destiny in worship of the Triune God (Eph 1:9–10; Col 1:19–20).
- f. Through its proclamation of God's grace and its prayers for all kinds and conditions of people, the church engages in the priestly service of the gospel to and for the world, so that all nations and people may come to worship their true Lord (Rom 15:7–12; 1 Tim 2:1–6).
- g. By confessing the lordship of Christ, the church exercises its prophetic voice. It speaks out against the political structures and powers which usurp his lordship. By offering petitions, intercessions, and thanksgiving for all those who wield political power, the church exercises its priestly role and so helps those in authority to fulfil their proper responsibilities within the divinely given limits of their power (Matt 28:18–20; Rom 13:1–7; 1 Tim 2:1–2).

## 9. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

- a. The Triune God wants all people to worship and enjoy him forever (Eph 1:5–6, 11–12).
- b. In its worship the church begins to do in time what it will do in eternity.
- c. The church, as a divine institution, exists through and for divine worship (AC VII). In worship the Triune God creates and sustains the faith of his people. Through worship God establishes and builds up the church as a community on earth whose citizenship is in heaven (Gal 4:26; Phil 3:20; AC XXVIII,8,9). By worship God calls his people to participate in his divine life and in his saving work on earth (1 Pet 2:9; 2 Pet 1:3–4; Rev 1:5–6; 5:10).
- d. The church, as a human institution, is essentially a worshipping community (AC VII; Apol VII, VIII, 5ff). Worship is the chief ritual activity of the church; it constitutes and identifies the church as a social entity. Worship embodies and communicates those values and beliefs which underlie the existence of the church, and it shapes the corporate character, the way of thinking, and the lifestyle of those who participate in it.

## KEY TO REFERENCES FROM THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

AC = Augsburg Confession

Roman capital = Article;

Numeral = page section

*For example: AC II,6 = Augsburg Confession Article II, page section 6.*

Apol= Apology to the Augsburg Confession

Roman capital = Article;

Numeral = page section

S Art= Smalcald Articles

Roman Capital = Part

Num = Subject &amp; page section

*For example: S Art II.2,26 = Smalcald Article Part II, subject 2, page section 26.*

LC = The Large Catechism

Roman capital = Part;

Numeral = page section

SC = The Small Catechism

Roman capital = Part;

Numeral = page section

FC = Formula of Concord

Roman Capital = Article;

Numeral = page section

Ep = Epitome

SD = Solid Declaration