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A Tribute to the Traditional Lutheran Liturgy

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Why use an order of worship? This question is frequently asked by those in churches that do not use an order of service. Well, using an order of service – a liturgy – is one way to follow God's command to "Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40) And, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." (Psalm 89:7)

The word "liturgy" comes from the Greek λειτουργία "leitourgia," meaning a public service, the public service of God, public worship. The use of a liturgy goes back to very early times, as the *Didache* (about 130 A.D., also known as the "teaching of the twelve apostles"), a short manual on morals and church practice, shows.

Our Lutheran liturgy is a development of the western rite, as are the Reformed liturgies. The earliest roots of all the Christian liturgies are in the worship practices of the Jewish synagogue. We find in use there, all the elements of our own worship. The two essential elements are the Word of God and prayer, as is evident from the following Scriptures: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias." (Luke 4:16-17) "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." (Isaiah 56:7) There were in fact two readings, the first from the Law (Moses) and the second from the Prophets; "But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, 'if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.'" (Acts 13:14-15)

The Christian Church of the New Testament added a few new elements: preaching and praise of Christ by name, the Sacrament of the Altar, reading of Gospels and Epistles, and occasional and regular offerings, as can be seen from the following Bible verses: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42) "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." (Acts 9:20) "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren." (1 Thessalonians 5:27) "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. (Hebrews 13:16) "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (1 Corinthians 16:2)

While God does not prescribe a specific order of worship, He does tell us of the elements of a worship service. Those elements which are divinely commanded are enumerated under six headings as follows, accompanied by Scripture proof texts:

{1} Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

{2} Worship the Lord: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm 29:2) "We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool." (Psalm 132:7)

{3} Sing to the Lord: "Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints." (Psalm 149:1) "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Colossians 3:16)

{4} Reading, exhortation, and doctrine: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." (1 Timothy 4:13) "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:103-105) "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39) "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2)

{5} Prayer to the true God: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2) "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (1 Timothy 2:1-2) "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed. O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." (Psalm 65:1-2)

{6} The Lord's Supper: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

As far as what is absolutely necessary for worship: only the Word of God and prayer, even as every creature of God "is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." (1 Timothy 4:5) The two essentials, the Word of God and prayer – the main elements of Christian worship – may be called the *sacramental* and the *sacrificial*. *Sacramental* means God is giving to us – in the reading and preaching of the Word, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion, God gives us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation: "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21) "Baptism doth also now save us." (1 Peter 3:21) "Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28) *Sacrificial* means that we bring something to God – our thank-offerings which include prayers and praises from our lips and from our heart: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:17) "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord." (Psalm 116:17) "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing." (Psalm 107:21-22) The *sacrificial* side of worship is always in response to the *sacramental* – to the promises and blessings God gives to us in His Word and Sacraments.

Now, we will consider our traditional Lutheran liturgy in some detail in the light of the Holy Bible in order to better appreciate how truly Scriptural it is. We generally begin our worship service by singing a hymn which sets the mood for the service, that is, it focuses our attention on spiritual things.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY GHOST; the congregation responds AMEN, which means yes, yes, so it is. This is called the Trinitarian invocation, meaning that we are calling on the one true God to receive our worship. This invocation says, as it were, that this service shall be entirely in God's name, that we are gathered together in His name {"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)}, that we worship by His authority and not by man's {"I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." (Psalm 138:2)}. So, we are thereby confessing that our worship service will feature the Word of God and will be conducted accordingly.

Our service then continues (TLH, pg.5) with the section titled "The Confession of Sins." BELOVED IN THE LORD! LET US DRAW NEAR WITH A TRUE HEART AND CONFESS OUR SINS UNTO GOD, OUR FATHER, BESEECHING HIM IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST TO GRANT US FORGIVENESS. This is an invitation for the congregation to draw near to "God our Father" with a true heart, not simply paying Him lip-service! We beseech, or plead with Him, in Jesus' name because of what Jesus Christ has done for us in redeeming us! "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?" (Malachi 2:10) "To

us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (1 Corinthians 8:6) "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5)

OUR HELP IS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; the congregation finishes by singing, WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH; in other words, the true God who created all things is our only Helper to whom we must turn. Notice that we say "in the name of the Lord," which includes His Word, because as was said before He has magnified His Word above all His name. The forgiveness of sins and eternal life come only through God's Word. God's Word has power because He is the true God that "made heaven and earth." Our traditional Lutheran liturgy takes the foregoing phrase right from Psalm 124:8 which states: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

I SAID, I WILL CONFESS MY TRANSGRESSIONS UNTO THE LORD; and the reply, AND THOU FORGAVEST THE INIQUITY OF MY SIN. We are thus stating that we believe that before we even open our mouth, God has already graciously forgiven us our sins for Jesus' sake. "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah." (Psalm 32:5) "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Isaiah 65:24)

We continue by confessing our sins (TLH, pg.6), ALMIGHTY GOD, OUR MAKER AND REDEEMER, WE POOR SINNERS CONFESS UNTO THEE THAT WE ARE BY NATURE SINFUL AND UNCLEAN AND THAT WE HAVE SINNED AGAINST THEE BY THOUGHT, WORD, AND DEED. WHEREFORE WE FLEE FOR REFUGE TO THINE INFINITE MERCY, SEEKING AND IMPLORING THY GRACE FOR THE SAKE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. O MOST MERCIFUL GOD, WHO HAST GIVEN THINE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON TO DIE FOR US, HAVE MERCY UPON US AND FOR HIS SAKE GRANT US REMISSION OF ALL OUR SINS; AND BY THY HOLY SPIRIT INCREASE IN US TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF THEE AND OF THY WILL AND TRUE OBEDIENCE TO THY WORD, TO THE END THAT BY THY GRACE WE MAY COME TO EVERLASTING LIFE; THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, OUR LORD. AMEN.

First, we confess our original and actual sins, and then we state that we are in total need of God's grace for Christ's sake. Secondly, we confess that we believe that Christ Jesus – the only begotten Son of the living God – has died for us, and we pray that for His sake God would forgive us our sins, and we pray that the Holy Ghost may grant us sanctification, that we would "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18) Oh, Jesus Christ is He, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:14) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." (1 John 1:9-10)

Then comes the announcement of the fact of God's forgiving grace: ALMIGHTY GOD, OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, HATH HAD MERCY UPON US AND HATH GIVEN HIS ONLY SON TO DIE FOR US AND FOR HIS

SAKE FORGIVETH US ALL OUR SINS. TO THEM THAT BELIEVE ON HIS NAME HE GIVETH POWER TO BECOME THE SONS OF GOD AND HATH PROMISED THEM HIS HOLY SPIRIT. HE THAT BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED SHALL BE SAVED. GRANT THIS, LORD, UNTO US ALL. AMEN. This states that God has already had mercy on us and given His Son (who we earlier confessed as His only begotten Son) to die for us, and that it is for Christ's sake alone that we have been forgiven, not for anything that we have done. Hence, because of Jesus' atoning work we are forgiven our sins, and by God-given faith we personally receive the forgiveness of sins and are truly "sons of God" – adopted children of God by His power and grace. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." (Galatians 4:4-7) "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26) "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) Notice that the following words direct from Holy Writ were included in our Liturgy in the announcement of the fact of God's forgiving grace: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16)

In the Communion liturgy (TLH, pg.16) the confession of sins is slightly different in that it is a more personal confession, O ALMIGHTY GOD, MERCIFUL FATHER, I, A POOR MISERABLE SINNER ...; and, absolution is pronounced by the pastor as a steward of the mysteries of God. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Corinthians 4:1) "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18)

Looking back to the TLH, pg.6, we continue with the "Introit" which comes from the Latin "introitus" meaning entrance, this being the entrance to the service proper with an opening Psalm or sentences. The Introit is the first of the "Propers" – the moveable or variable parts of the service that change each Sunday. Every introit consists of three parts: an Antiphon (a brief sentence with the thought for the day, usually a Scripture passage); a Psalm (a brief passage from the Psalms in which the joy of the heart finds expression over what the Antiphon has announced); and, the Gloria Patri (glory be to the Father, based on Matthew 28:19 and known as the lesser doxology). The Gloria Patri is a brief but clear confession of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, its present form being used since the time of the Arian controversy (the Arians did not believe Christ to be God from eternity. Arianism originated around 300 A.D.).

The "Kyrie" (TLH, pg.7) comes next. The word "Kyrie" is a Greek word, *Κυριε*, meaning "Lord" and is found in Matthew 20:30 where the blind men said to Jesus, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David." It is interesting to note that we use other non-English words in our worship also; for example: amen, hallelujah, and hosanna are Hebrew words – this usage not only takes us back to the original languages of the Bible, but also reflects the unity of the Christian Church of all times and places. In our

liturgy the mysteries of the faith are transmitted in the three tongues of the superscription on the cross of Calvary: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. The Kyrie is not a confession of sin, but is rather a plea for God's help and strength. We here call the Father "Lord," the Son "Christ," and the Holy Ghost "Lord"; we call again on the Triune God.

The "Gloria in Excelsis," also known as the greater doxology, comes next (TLH, pg.7). This hymn of adoration, which means "glory to God in the highest," praises and worships God the Father for His glory, confesses Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of the Father, praising the Son for the work He has done and that He alone is holy, He alone is Lord, His holiness is natural and essential (not given or derived like the holiness of the angels), the Holy Ghost with Christ are most high in the glory of God the Father. The three divine Persons are yet one and the same divine essence, one God. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isaiah 6:3) At this point in the liturgy, the mystery of the Holy Trinity has been confessed several times. Interestingly, the "Gloria in Excelsis" is drawn from several Scripture quotes; for example: Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." And, John 1:29, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." And, Colossians 3:1, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." And, Psalm 7:17, "I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high." And, 2 Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

The "Salutation" (TLH, pg.9) comes next, THE LORD BE WITH YOU. AND WITH THY SPIRIT. A mutual greeting taken from the Bible; for example: "And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee." (Ruth 2:4)

The "Collect for the Day" comes next, which is a brief, simple, general prayer. In no case should the people in the congregation simply turn off their minds and allow the pastor (or liturgist) to pray "for" them; this is why the congregation sings "Amen," thereby saying, "yes, this is our prayer."

The lessons follow next (TLH, pg.10) – the Epistle, the Gospel, and sometimes an Old Testament reading. The Epistle generally represents the Law and therefore precedes the Gospel. In Old Testament times there was obviously no New Testament to read from; in fact, right up until John the Baptist only the Law and the Prophets were read, until Christ changed things; "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." (Luke 16:16) "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." (Matthew 11:13) We generally follow systems of lessons called "pericopes" which tends to keep the pastor from preaching only on his "favored subjects" and instead gives the congregation a very balanced diet of God's Word. Early Church fathers first developed a pericope system around the 4th century for the reason stated above; but, it is a useful tradition, not a command. Glory and praise to Christ the Lord is sung before and after the Gospel reading because the Words and works of Jesus are what we hear in the Gospel lesson.

We state and confess our Holy Christian faith in simple words in the "Apostle's Creed" (TLH, pg. 12). On Communion service days, we confess the "Nicene Creed" (TLH, pg. 22) which is slightly more explicit; and, on Trinity Sunday we confess the more thorough "Athanasian Creed" (TLH, pg. 53). All three creeds confess the Triune God. The sermon hymn follows, which serves to prepare the minds of those present to receive the thoughts of the sermon.

We then proceed with the "Sermon" which is the high-point of the entire service – here the Word of God is preached as the Apostle Paul told Timothy: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5) Indeed, sound Biblical preaching is required! "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:11) "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words everyone from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:28-32) "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20)

After the sermon, the congregation rises and sings the "Offertory" (TLH, pg.12), in which, having received the Word, we offer ourselves to God, praying to Him and then giving an offering of money for the work of the Lord – the promulgation of God's truth and its continuance among us, the Gospel of Christ in particular. The "Offertory" is actually taken directly from Psalm 51:10-12, which reads, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit." The word *offertory* comes from the Latin word "offertorium" meaning the place to which offerings were brought. Note that in the "Offertory" we sing a prayer in which the importance and work of the Holy Ghost is stressed, because without the Holy Ghost we would despair – we need the Holy Ghost to renew us! "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." (1 Corinthians 12:3) A collection of monies is taken in accord with God's Word, which states, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

After the Offertory and the gathering of the contributions "Prayers" are offered to the Lord. "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." (1 Timothy 2:8) The "General Prayer" or other suitable prayer(s) are prayed, followed by the greatest of all prayers, "The Lord's Prayer." "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." (Matthew 6:9-13)

After the Lord's Prayer a hymn is sung, then follows a "Collect" – a short prayer for the Word or the Church (TLH, pg. 14). Another hymn is sung, then the worship service is concluded with the Aaronic "Benediction," THE LORD BLESS THEE AND KEEP THEE. THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON THEE AND BE GRACIOUS UNTO THEE. THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON THEE AND GIVE THEE PEACE. The congregation responds with a triple "Amen." The *Benediction* is taken directly from Numbers 6:24-26, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Note the three parts; one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost, featuring the work of each. The Father blesses us in every way and preserves us from harm and danger. The Son's chief work is to make God's face shine upon us, that is, by turning the frown of His wrath against sin into a smile of delight; Jesus does this by interceding for us and pointing to His own atoning work on the cross; He is also gracious to us, forgiving sin. The particular work of the Holy Ghost is to lift up God's countenance – His shining face turned toward us – upon us, so that we can see it in the Means of Grace, and giving us peace (Hebrew: peace, soundness, completeness) by giving us saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and keeping and strengthening us therein. Therefore, the congregation sings "Amen, Amen, Amen." Yea, yea, yea, all these things are so!

Let us value our traditional Lutheran liturgy for the treasure that it is, for it is truly Scriptural and is a way to reverently honor and worship the one true God in a decent and orderly manner.

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