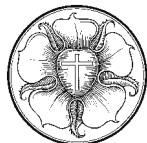


In contrast, modern “praise and worship” music is aimed at a programmed, emotional response which is defined as spirituality. The majority of its authors are of a neo-evangelical mindset, and the songs reflect neo-evangelical theology, especially as it relates to the theology of worship. It usually focuses more on the individual and also what we humans do for God (usually “praising” Him) rather than on what Christ does for us. And even when these songs do not explicitly teach false doctrine, it is usually because they are nearly devoid of doctrine altogether. And most of them, in their doctrinal deficiency and over simplicity, still reflect reformed and neo-evangelical theology in their focus on the majesty of God and their near exclusion of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

### Is It Really Just About Style? God Saves Us!

The question of *how* we worship is not simply a matter of style. It flows from deeper questions of *what* worship is and *why* we worship. It is a matter of doctrine—the doctrine of worship. There truly are two different—and competing—paradigms of worship operating in the Church today. Ultimately, much of modern worship turns the Biblical theology of worship on its head. In the modern, neo-evangelical paradigm, worship is seen primarily (if not totally) as humanity’s work for God. e.g. “*I* praise God;” “*I* worship God;” “*I* glorify God;” “*I* magnify God;” etc. However, the historic liturgies of the Church promote, foster, and teach the **Biblical theology of worship which rightly sees worship as primarily the act of a gracious, giver-God, wherein He delivers His good gifts.** Worship flows from God to us, and then from us to God in praise and thanksgiving. “*O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise*” (Psalm 51:15). God acts first. He looses lips by forgiving sin. He looses lips by giving the words, His Words, by which mouths then shows forth His praise.

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Prepared for LC-MS congregations by participants and supporters of the "Called to Confess" Free Conferences begun in the Northwest District in response to the 2004 Synodical Convention.

## “Divine Service: God Serving Us So We May Serve God”

### The LC-MS: Are We Still Following Jesus?

“*My sheep hear My voice ... and they follow Me.*” (John 10:27, NKJ)

### 4A — MANY TODAY SUGGEST

It does not matter *how* we worship.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?—WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The *how* of worship is important because it reflects the *what* and the *why* of worship. The point, the focus, the nature of historical, liturgical worship is expressed very well in the introduction to Lutheran Worship:

Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. Music is drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver God.

Saying back to him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. Most true and sure is his name, which he put upon us with the water of our Baptism. We are his. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the Divine Service. Where his name is, there he is. Before him we acknowledge that we are sinners, and we plead for forgiveness. His forgiveness is given us, and we, freed and forgiven, acclaim him as our great and gracious God as we apply to ourselves the words he has used to make himself known to us.

The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him. He gives his gifts, and together we receive and extol them.

(Lutheran Worship. St. Louis: Concordia. 1982 p.6.)

This is the point of the historical, liturgical worship which has been handed down to us through the centuries. “We are heirs of an astonishingly rich tradition.” (ibid) And that tradition serves the gospel. Our historical, liturgical worship is for the sake of true spirituality—repentance and faith. In and through our historical, liturgical worship, Christ delivers forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Historical, liturgical worship is centered in Christ and His gifts, and the reverent reception and adoration of them and Him.

## Worship Is Spiritual

Thus, historic, liturgical worship is for the sake of true spirituality. True spirituality is not a function of emotion, but rather a function of the Word of God and Christ’s Sacramental presence. True spirituality is not subjective, but objective. True spirituality cannot be found in a particular style of music, but only in the means of grace.

The proper, highest worship is to acknowledge one’s sins and to seek forgiveness. This means more than just offering confession and forgiveness in the service. Rather, the entire service is one of confession and forgiveness through Word and Sacraments. The Lutheran service is penitential and joyous at the same time.

It must be noted that historic, liturgical worship is neither unemotional nor anti-emotional. The forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation which come through the liturgy certainly elicit emotions of relief, thankfulness, and joy. But historic, liturgical worship is devoid of emotional manipulation and emotion for emotion’s sake. Instead it points to Christ who elicits a true emotional response to His deep and abiding gifts of forgiveness.

In contrast, much of modern worship is specifically designed to elicit a particular emotional response. Many people regard this emotional response as “spiritual” and/or “meaningful.” Spirituality becomes equated with deeply felt emotions. A primary goal of many worship planners is to “pump you up,” to make a person feel more emotional and charged about Christ, and this is thought to be true spirituality. It becomes a pep rally of sorts. Even when this “pep rally” mentality is toned down, the goal is still some form of “uplifting” (i.e. emotional) experience, and excitement supposedly shows one’s commitment to Christ.

## Worship Is Reverent

A worship service before a righteous and holy God should be reverent and done in decency and good order. When the Church is gathered in the Divine Service, Christ is present both in His Word and in Sacrament. Through the public proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, God is in His Holy Temple. The presence of God in His Temple requires a certain level of reverence. Thus, the writer to the Hebrews instructs us “*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so **worship God acceptably with reverence and awe [godly fear], for our ‘God is a consuming fire’***” (Hebrews 12:28-29, emphasis added). Reverent attitudes and behaviors recognize that Christ’s salvific presence gives a certain holiness, a certain set-apart-ness, a certain different-ness, a certain special-ness to the worship space and worship time. And this holiness elicits a necessary reverence and order.

The Lutheran confessors, too, recognized this need. “However, it can readily be judged that nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of **dignity in public worship** and the cultivation of **reverence and devotion** among people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches” (AC [Latin], Articles About Matters in Dispute, 6, emphasis added).

On the other hand, much modern worship is characterized by a lack of reverence. A sense of reverence is actively resisted and often referred to as “stodgy” or “strict.” There is a desire to eliminate the holiness, the set-apartness, and to make everything ordinary and common. The reverent (acknowledging the holiness) is seen as less spiritual or as a barrier to “true spirituality” whereas the common is seen as “more spiritual” (again, i.e. more emotional).

## The Place Of Hymnody

Historic and contemporary Lutheran hymnody focuses on the gifts of God and the Work of Christ. Solid, Lutheran hymnody is specifically designed to teach and admonish. This is in keeping with the divinely-inspired advice of St. Paul: “*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). Once we have taught and admonished one another, once Christ has taught and admonished us, once Christ has delivered his gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation (yes, even through His Word proclaimed in hymns), then we respond with sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving.