



able Talk

College Hill Lutheran Church

Right Worship

The Question(s):

Why do we follow such a strict order of service? Some people make the argument that it is too repetitive, robotic and there is not much interaction with God. What is your response to that? Is there anything wrong with the way that other churches may worship? For example, Baptists...

My Response:

Great questions! To answer, it is absolutely necessary to understand that the way we worship reflects the way we believe as the ancient axiom says, “lex credendi, lex orandi” (The law of believing founds the law of worshipping). If you want to know what a church believes, watch how she worships.

Why do we follow such a strict order of service?

The simple answer to this first question is that we “follow such a strict order of service” because it reflects what we believe. Now, someone might attend College Hill and say, “This church service is so strict (in regard to structure) that it must believe that salvation comes by strictness.” But let it be known in all the land that such a person who says this is badly mistaken. The “strict” nature of our service might be a reference to the fact that the liturgy is *orderly and reverent*. For instance, someone attending College Hill will not say, “This church is *disorderly and irreverent*.” Neither will they say that the service is chaotic or spontaneous. This is because Scripture clearly teaches that worship should be orderly as St. Paul tells the church in Corinth, “All things should be done *decently and in order*” (1 Cor. 14:40).

Let it also be known that *everything* that is done in the service reflects our belief and the clear Scriptural doctrine (teaching) that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3; etc.). Therefore Christian worship is Christ-centered and not man-centered. We believe that Christians gather to *receive God’s gifts* of forgiveness and life that were won for us by Christ on the cross. We preach “Christ crucified” as St. Paul says. This is why we call it “Divine Service.” It is *God’s service to us*. Only after we have heard Christ’s Word of forgiveness do we then respond with thanksgiving. The rhythm of our worship is from God to us and then from us to God. God doesn’t need us, we need God (Ps. 50:12-15).

We don’t put a praise band in the front of the church up on a stage in the center, rather, we place the altar at the center, the pulpit, the lectern, and such things as the baptismal font and the pastor who stands *in the stead of Christ* to speak Christ’s Word and to administer the *sacraments* (Greek- μυστηρίων “mysteries”- c.f. 1 Cor. 4:1) that Christ instituted (The Sacrament of the Altar- 1 Cor. 11:23-26; the Sacrament of Holy Baptism- St. Matthew 28:19-20, and Absolution- John 20:19-23). We cover the pastor with vestments (robes) to cover the man, so that we do not see the mere man, but the *preaching office* that Christ has instituted and given to His Church so that we might hear Him as Jesus told those whom He sent “The one who hears you

hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (St. Luke 10:16). Jesus is at the center.

Perhaps the appearance of “strictness” in our worship at College Hill Lutheran Church also reflects the fact that Christian (a.k.a. Lutheran) worship is *liturgical* (Greek- λειτουργία which is translated “public service” or “divine service”). Burnell Eckardt answers a similar question in his little book *Why? A Layman’s Guide to the Liturgy*. The question he asks is “Why is Christian worship liturgical?” He answers:

Liturgical worship is worship according to a set and traditional format drawn from the Sacred Scriptures. The words of the Holy Liturgy are words which have been handed down to us through generations of Christianity. While there are variations in those forms and in which words of liturgy are used where, *the basis of Christian liturgy is consistently the use of a standard structure drawn from the wells of Sacred Scripture.*

This is, first of all, a safeguard against false worship. For where the Word of God is wanting, there the devil rushes in with his lies. If the structure of Christian worship were left to the whim of the preacher or anyone else, then it would only be a matter of time before those whims would turn away from the sound words of Scripture, since there is nothing good in our flesh. Everything depends on the Word of God. Therefore it is right that our worship be continuously staid upon a sound structure which upholds the Word.

Secondly, liturgical worship is, simply put, using God’s own words to speak to God. God gives us His Word, and we speak it back to Him. This is liturgical worship. The Psalms, which have always had a prominent place in the worship of Christians, are *both* words of God and words of prayer. He gives us the very words with which to pray to Him. Liturgical worship is the employment of these words. We pray using the words He has given us to pray, and in this way we rejoice in them.

Third, liturgical worship is giving honor where honor is due. The Church of all times has worshiped in this manner. When we do the same we show our respect for the Christian tradition of all times, and we worship indeed with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

(Why? A Layman’s Guide to the Liturgy by Burnell F. Eckardt Jr.; p. 7)

In this answer from Eckardt, we also have the answer to the concern mentioned above that in the Lutheran liturgy there is “not much interaction with God.” Contrary to what our postmodern experiences have taught us, *the way that God interacts with us is through His Word!* and NOT our feelings. Feelings are here and gone, but the Word of God remains forever! Falsely do people say that “God was in this place” when they simply were moved emotionally by the beat of soft rock music or by the sheer number of people worshipping together, or some other emotional experience. God interacts with His people through His Word. How do we know about Him? By hearing His Word. How do we know who Jesus is? By hearing His Word. How to I receive faith? By hearing His Word. How does God speak to us? By His Word. How does Christ give Himself to us? Through Holy Baptism and His Supper, which are what they are because of the Word. Do you want interaction? There it is. Thus, if we wish to interact with God, we should go to the place where He promises to be—in His Word and in His sacraments. We find Christ where His Word is and His Word is the foundation of the liturgy- God’s service to us.

Is there anything wrong with the way that other churches may worship? For example, Baptists . . .

Since the doctrine of justification is the chief article of the Christian faith—namely that we are declared not-guilty because of Christ’s atoning work—all Christian worship of necessity should reflect this. As I mentioned earlier, the way a church worships reflects what they believe. Anything that is done in opposition to the clear teaching of Scripture therefore is wrong worship. If it is man-centered instead of Christ-centered, it is idolatry.

What do Baptists believe? Is their worship Christ-centered or man-centered? Is their worship built upon the Word of God or upon emotionalism? Do they preach Christ crucified or works righteousness? Where is their altar? Whom do they baptize? etc.



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Thursday of Oculi- Lent 3