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# Worship—the Source and Standard of Theology

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## I Perspectives on the Theology of Worship

People who hear the term ‘Theology of Worship’ may feel like asking: ‘Do theologians really have to make theological problems out of everything, this time, even out of worship? Isn’t worship, in its practical Sunday form, just a simple and basic practice of the Christian faith from which we should exclude all the complex and controversial discussions of experts, and just celebrate joyfully together?’

At first glance, this objection is understandable. But, when we look again more carefully, we can make some very amazing discoveries. Theology is not something that was ‘invented’ somewhere on the desk of a

lonely scholar. Instead, it has its origin in worship. Theology arose from the church assembled around God’s Word, that listens to God, speaks to him, and experiences his presence in her midst. Because Christian worship is not just a celebration of an unclear and undefinable religious feeling, but is shaped by God’s clear and intelligible Word, theology comes about as the reflection on the Word proclaimed beforehand as a result of the celebration of worship. The mystery of faith encountered in worship is celebrated with praise not just in the performance of the liturgy, but it should also be reflected upon, proclaimed, and understood anew.

Moreover, the worship service also proves itself to be the internal core of theology and its critical measuring rod. All important parts of the faith reflected on by theology are the subject of the worship service. What is confessed as faith in the worship service and preached as God’s Word must be seen in relation to theological dogma. According to the apostle Paul, doctrine

should be ‘sound, or healthy’ for the faith (see, for example, 1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9,13; 2:2,8). That means that spiritual life is purified and stimulated by scriptural theology. Doctrine must then be examined as to whether or not it is suitable for worship in the sense of being according to Scripture, whether or not it proves itself to be healing and fruitful in public preaching and whether or not what it says fits into the already given confession of faith and all other parts of worship service formed liturgy, such as worship and praise, prayer and petition, Scripture readings and the benediction.

Therefore, when we share some foundational systematic thoughts on the theology of worship in what follows, we are dealing totally with a matter about which we have been called to be attentive. It is about the inner relationship between theology and worship with a mutual objective. Theology is tested by the reality of worship, whether or not it stays with its centre, namely, with the living God and his church. Conversely, worship, in its concrete historical form, is constantly called to spiritual responsibility through ‘sound doctrine’. This is possible because God serves the church in worship through Word and sacrament.

In this reciprocity, it is evident that all the great themes of the faith that are systematically reflected upon in Christian dogmatics and ethics can be exhibited in the liturgical elements of worship. Liturgical performance proves itself to be a content-structuring principle of theology and vice versa.

## II The Anthropological Basis of Worship

People on the street who have long followed post-Christian ways just shrug their shoulders when they hear the words, ‘worship service’. For them, worship services are very abstract events and relevant only for people who are really religious. They mean nothing to a modern person who lives totally in the realities of this world. The basic question then arises here: Does worship alienate people from the true essence of being a human being because it leads people to God? The Bible says the very opposite. People find their true humanity for the first time when they meet God. We find a reference to this biblical fact already in the unique ambivalence of modern humanity, which stands quite aloof from the Christian worship service, as noted above, yet, on the other hand, shows interest in different religions and esoteric experiences.

### 1. Human Dignity and the Need of God

We find one of the most fundamental theological statements about man on the first pages of the Bible: ‘God created man in his image, in his likeness he created him and created him male and female’ (Gen. 1:27). People have God’s creative work to thank because they come from God’s hand. People who enquire about the essence of humanity are really asking about their origins. The person who looks at the basis of humanity sees the handwriting of God in the same way as when a person sees a water mark on a bank note as a sign of its authenticity. That does not mean

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in any way, however, that people today, i.e., fallen humanity, has a relationship with God by nature, but, rather, as creatures, people bear the image of their creator as a deep longing in them. Without reconnecting with their origins, they are abandoned to a loss of orientation and they have lost their centre.

Worship as a meeting with God is, therefore, a very human thing. People find themselves when they go out of themselves and meet God anew. A person is totally true to himself, his deepest longings and wishes, when he arises and says: 'I will go to my father!' (Lk. 15:18). People in the image of God (*imago Dei*), are completely interrelated to God, so worship of God is essential for their life. They find in it the air to breathe. The person who takes worship away from people robs them of an important element of life. It is not, then, the alienation of people from their essential needs, but rather, the fulfilment of such that one experiences in worship. Worship is therefore not a special niche of some strange church subculture, but is a universal expression of fulfilled humanity. It is and remains from the sixth day of Creation on, the dignity of people to need God.

## 2. Worship Performed in Space and Time

Immanuel Kant analysed space and time as the two apparent forms of human existence which are presupposed in relation to our perceptive ability. Whatever takes form in this world bears in itself the structure of space and time. Space and time describe the dimensions in which worship occurs physically and concretely.

### a) The House of God

From the very beginnings of human culture the architecture of buildings built for the purpose of worship has played an important role. Whether they are primitive altars erected in special places or simple houses of prayer, or immense Medieval cathedrals, the place where people together sought the face of God is also always a special room that exudes a special dignity. The church building and the artistic decoration of the sanctuary embodies this longing for God. In the way they set up the house of God, people give expression to the need to lift up their hearts through worship and liturgy and to meet God outside the mundane aspects of life. The basic truth—withstanding that we should 'worship God in spirit and in truth' (Jn. 4:24) which we will discuss later—is that human spirituality does not do away with people's connection to space and time, which is part of creation. Worship takes place in space and time as long as the earth still stands and remains tied to space and time.

Therefore different architectural styles and changing interior designs of houses of worship give expression to different styles of piety. A specific theology of worship finds its physical character echoed in wood and stone, in images and worship utensils—even when the way the room is set up is very simple. From their own experiences and by looking at different houses of worship, everyone can get a clear picture of how the architecture of the building with its individually respective artistic interior design embodies the conditions of the atmosphere of the service. Every pastor knows all too

well how much the conditions imposed by a church building or a church fellowship hall will influence the possibilities of spiritual development of the local church congregation.

### b) Rhythm of Time and the History of Salvation

The time of human life is structured time. It has its rhythm that corresponds to creation, which is confirmed for all epochs in God's covenant with Noah as follows: 'As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease' (Gen. 8:22). Worship takes place in time and also moves with the rhythm of created time. The change of day and night affects the experience of worship, whether it is on a Sunday morning, or afternoons at the hour when Jesus died, or for harvest prayer, or Saturday evening in preparation for a new week, or before an important holiday such as Christmas Eve; whether it is at midnight or at daybreak celebrating Easter, worship is affected by the time of day or night.

The temporal dimension of worship proves to be even clearer in certain holidays that have to do with God's plan of redemption and which give the seasons with their changes a special inner dynamic. The festivals of the ecclesiastical year affect the experience of time in the rhythm of the year and they do this by giving time a perspective related to God's history of salvation. Beginning with the Christmas festal cycle from Advent to Epiphany to the Passion and Easter season and even on to the special topics of the individual Trinity Sundays and concluding with the eschatological perspective at the

end of the ecclesiastical year, time on earth is surrounded by God's history with humanity. This is completed and learned anew every year in the course of the liturgical calendar.

As beings created for space and time, people are invited holistically in this way by the church building and the church calendar to a concrete encounter with God in worship. Building upon these kinds of basic facts of anthropology related to the theology of creation, further aspects of man's ability to worship also become apparent.

## 3. Fundamental Anthropological Elements

Worship always takes a physical form. It is always the concrete person who stands before God, kneels, sits, rises, falls down, etc. Individual voices, movements and gestures allow others to have a part in what is taking place in the inner movement of the person himself. The body is the expression of the soul, which is shaken by God's wrath, moved by his holiness, touched by his love, and surrounded by his grace. All the senses are brought into the worship event: a person hears the Word, listens to the instruments and voices and takes an active part in it. They gaze at pictures and walls, the light of the candles and the form of the building. They are touched by baptismal water and blessing hands. They taste bread and wine. In Catholic and Orthodox worship, they are also engulfed by the fragrance of incense. God, who has created people as a physical (corporeal) counterpart, accepts them in his corporality and in service. Therefore, worship is a very physical, experiential, perceptible reality. This kind of

corporality possesses an aesthetic quality of its own, a beauty by which worship becomes a celebration and people, created and desired as sensory living beings, also experience and worship God's presence with all their senses.

'Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let him rule over the fish of the sea".' (Gen. 1:26). From the Word, the reasonable Logos of God, people were created in God's image. The gift and ability to reason, to hear the Word and to speak it, make people a counterpart of God in a special sense and set them apart from all other creatures. Reason comes from hearing and people should and can hear God's Word and thus take part in reasonable worship (cf. Rom. 12:1). God speaks to people in many ways in worship through his Word, and the man who is moved and renewed by God's Spirit is also able to understand this speech of God. In so far as the person celebrating worship as a sensory being perceives the beauty and glory of God in physical form, so the Word is every bit as much directed to the inner person. Such a person is honoured to understand God's own thoughts as he expresses them in his Word: that is, he allows them from the outside to penetrate his ear. In this way, the thoughts of the person are enlightened, his conscience is spoken to, and his will is set.

But this reasonable person, in this isolated, individual ability to reason, is not yet the image of God, but, rather, he first becomes the being destined and enabled for fellowship on the basis of the Word. The triune God who acts and speaks in creation: 'Let us make man' (Gen. 1:26), this God speaks to the person relationally, that is, also as a being

created for fellowship. Language marks off not only the limits of our thinking, but it is, at the same time, that instrument of communication between the hidden spiritual nature and the visible-corporeal form of the person. Through the word, the person can understand the person, through language one is able to express oneself as a spiritual being.

On the level of human interpersonal relations, this communicative expression of self occurs in an exemplary way between husband and wife. In worship, this occurs as the relationship between the Creator and the creature. In the interplay of conversation, the Word of God and the response of the person prove to be a deep expression of human communicative ability. In the worship encounter, all human desire for fellowship finds its fulfilment. This emphasizes once again, then, that, since the Fall, our original ability to reason and to communicate needs to be fundamentally renewed by the Word and Spirit of God.

#### 4. The Diversity of Worship

A wide diversity of concrete forms of worship results from the physical world and the variety of human cultures, languages, customs, and the styles of architecture, art, and music. This diversity reflects the geographical and ethnic spread of the gospel in the course of the history of missions. In the various cultures that have been reached, the inner unity and continuity of the source of the faith in the Bible has been expressed in various ways in these diverse cultures.

Accordingly, worship music and architecture, liturgical objects and

clothing all look different, for example, in places such as Japan, the United States, black Africa, or northern Europe. This diversity is necessary for the local church members and it is also desirable for the church as a worldwide fellowship; furthermore mutual exchange between them is enriching. Worship is therefore the critical touchstone for successful contextualization of the gospel.

### III Where Heaven and Earth Intersect

Let us now turn our focus and think about the phenomenon of the 'worship service' from a special theological perspective. That is, let us ask how God, the Creator, acts as Redeemer in history and how through his acting to save and his incarnation in Jesus Christ he unites himself with people in the world. In the worship service, God serves people both through his physical coming in the incarnation through the inspiring presence of his Spirit which surrounds, fulfils, and enlightens our horizon of understanding.

#### 1. Israel's Worship Service

The complete and universal self-revelation of God in Christ finds its preparation and, in the literal sense, its exemplary representation in the special election and the covenant history of Israel. With respect to its content, and concretely, in its liturgical elements, the worship service of Israel celebrated in the Old Testament influences and fundamentally defines the form of Christian worship.

One must first be reminded of the drama of the history of God and human-

ity in the context of the Old Testament. The point of departure here is the story of creation with its paradisiacal conditions in which fellowship with God is complete and ever-present. The Lord walks about in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8). There is no differentiation between the profane and the sacred. All of life proves to be worship of God.

However, with the rebellion against God and the break of that original fellowship with God, Adam finds himself outside of Eden on cursed ground in a world of suffering and death. Through this, the earth becomes a very profane place indeed. Thus worship first became impossible despite humanity's continuous need for God. Therefore, it is God's mercy, not to completely give this world up to profanity and secularity, but to reveal himself on this earth in historical acts of his words and actions and thereby to create places and times of worship under the conditions of the fallen world.

By divine election, which is not humanly based, Israel becomes the 'bridgehead' of the worship of God in the profane world. Over against that, the rest of humanity, by reason of purely natural and therefore pagan religiosity, has perverted worship into idolatry, as Paul writes summarily in Romans:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and rep-

tiles (Rom. 1:21-23).

In worshipping and praising the only one and true God, Yahweh, who revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, Israel's worship becomes the original form of worship with respect to the history of salvation. In the history of the revelation of the Old Covenant, the human answer follows God's call each time like an echo in more and more comprehensive forms of worship, which finally experience their ultimate low point and cleansing through the prophets' criticism of worship.

The Bible reader notices a clear line of tradition beginning with the altars of the primeval period and in the age of the patriarchs. This finds its continuation in the epoch of the wilderness wandering with the Tabernacle and the first places of worship in the Promised Land. With the erection of the Solomon's Temple as the central sanctuary, the history of Israel's worship experiences its splendid high point. Finally, worship under the conditions of the Babylonian Exile prepares for the synagogal worship of the Jewish Diaspora, which then becomes the connecting point for Christian mission.

## 2. The Logos Becomes Flesh

The reason and goal of all worship is the complete, eternal and universal fellowship of God with people. This is a reality in the story of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1-2) and, after the long interim of worship on earth during the history of God's redemptive plan, it finds its eschatological completion in the heavenly Jerusalem. John the Revelator prophesies concerning the latter as follows:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away' (Rev. 21:3-4).

With this worship of the triumphant church, the Pauline vision is fulfilled: 'When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28).

Through judgment and grace, the creation, as the new creation in the heavenly Jerusalem, has arrived at a complete worship in which the contradiction between the profane and the sacred is removed. In the completed new creation, all creaturely existence is fulfilled as existence for worship.

But this eternal finality and exclusivity of worship already experiences its anticipatory fulfilment in history through the incarnation of God in Christ. The hem of his garment even touched Israel's worship symbolically, so to speak, in God's words and the revelation of his glory (cf. Isa. 6:1-4). With the incarnation, God's becoming a man in Christ, the original worship in the Garden of Eden is surpassed and, in the incarnation, ultimate worship, which is celebrated in the heavenly Jerusalem, is also anticipated.

In Jesus' becoming flesh and 'dwelling' among us as the eternal Word, as John expresses it (cf. Jn. 1:14), the Kingdom of God begins in space and time. In Christ, meeting God

is no longer arranged by mediators at a sanctuary, but is accessible and able to be experienced directly. God himself lives as a man among men and this is more than the fellowship Adam had with God in the Garden of Eden. The heavenly experience of God physically enters into the historical present. That is why Christ does not just say: 'The Kingdom of God is near' (Mt. 3:2), but he confesses about himself as a person: 'The Kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the Kingdom of God is among you' (Lk. 17:20-21).

Christian worship is based on the event of Christ, that is, on the history of the Incarnation of God. In Christ, it finds its legitimation and form, its content and its goal. The church's Sunday worship is the celebration of the Resurrection and the festivals of the ecclesiastical calendar are feasts of Christ. The Gospel readings and their interpretation in the New Testament in the apostolic letters define the preaching which the church assembled in Jesus' name hears, believes and confesses.

The Christian worship service exhibits in a palpable way the essence of the history of salvation. It is grounded in space and time by historical facts. Its connection to the story of Christ makes this clear: the birth, life, suffering, and death of Jesus as well as his resurrection and ascension mark uniquely unrepeatable events right in the midst of secular history. These events manifest in an unsurpassable way the salvation of God in and through the person of the Son of God.

Yet, simply pointing to the historicity of the Christ events 2000 years ago should not be misunderstood so that,

like other historical facts, it fades away into the dust of history more and more as time passes. If this were the case, Christian worship in general and the great Christian holidays in particular would be only about memorial services, to remember a once glorious past. Instead, worship is recalling Christ's salvation. What occurred on Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension Day is still at work here and now in worship to save and offer salvation directly by following after Christ as worship requires.

It is not purely for pedagogical and psychological reasons that this story of Jesus as represented in the Christian holy days is included by church tradition in the course of the natural year. People as sensory beings in space and time need the repeated realization of the one-time historical salvation, which, as something that has occurred as a factual event, is eternal by reason of its eschatological significance. Moreover, it is exactly this combination of historical uniqueness and eternal validity that characterizes the essence of the history of salvation. The basic difference between the history of salvation and world history becomes manifest in this.

Worship is therefore nothing less and nothing more than the current presence of the history of salvation in space and time. Because worship points to eternal salvation in a mediating fashion, its celebration in time is an anticipation of eternity. Time is touched and changed by eternity because Christian worship celebrates the Lord in whom the absolute paradox occurred: Christ. In him Creator and creature, time and eternity, have melded into a unity which will define

the completion of creation. With it are opened also the pneumatological and the ecclesiological dimensions of worship.

## IV Worship in Spirit and Truth

The question necessarily arises out of what has been said already of how the event of salvation, which seems to recede into history as an historical event, is still recognized as present and experienced, and as something that saves people who are limited by space and time.

### 1. The Power of the Word

The intersection between the biblical history of salvation and the beginning of church history occurs at Pentecost. The Spirit of God, poured out upon all flesh at Pentecost, creates the church through the preached and sacramentally imparted Word. The church is therefore *creatura verbi* (a creature of the Word). The Word constitutes the church and it remains her normative and critical counterpart in the form of the canon, i.e., the Holy Scriptures. This means implicitly that it is not the church that has determined and authorized the canon as an institutionalized doctrinal body. The canon, the origin and standard of all preaching and teaching, has prevailed and authenticated itself as the truth of revelation over against the church, and the place where the Scriptures prevailed was the worship service of the early Christian church.

Through the collection of the gospels and the apostolic writings and their reading in worship, the canon

imposed itself as such upon the local and regional churches. Next to the Old Testament scriptures, the Bible of Jesus, it was active in the church as the founding document of the New Covenant. Its binding form could only be recognized and accepted as the given authority by the church.

### 2. Worship as Means of Salvation

The Scriptures are read and preached in the worship service. The Holy Spirit brings about faith through the sermon wherever and whenever it pleases God (*ubi et quando visum est deo*). Through the Law and the Gospel, the preaching of the Word of God brings God's message close to the heart of the hearer and the Holy Spirit creates faith in the heart. In prayer, song, confession of sin, and in the confession of faith that brings justification, the congregation responds in the worship service to the Word present to her.

This Word that creates faith becomes physically perceptible in a special way in its visible form through the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is where Christ is met in a physical way. In baptism, he calls people to become parts of his body and to become children of God. In the bread and wine he shares himself as a person. Eternal salvation, achieved by the cross and the resurrection, is granted concretely as the forgiveness of sins in the service and promised as the presence of eternal life here and now.

Worship creates therefore space and time for the recalling of salvation by administering in it the visible and invisible Word of God as means of salvation and by communicating it in its

power to create anew.

### 3. Worship Defines the Content of Faith

A Latin phrase that aptly describes what this is all about is: '*lex orandi, lex credendi*', which means: the form of worship liturgy determines the content of faith. Literally translated, this means: The order of how one should pray is the rule of what one should believe. In doing so, we come back again to the fundamental connection of theology and worship which we mentioned at the outset of this article, as well as to the special connection of canon and worship.

Theology is the deeper reflecting and systematizing investigation of the Word administered and confessed in the worship service. With this, the Scriptures are already ahead of the service as the reason for making it possible. It is understood in the service as divine address and reflected upon as a response by theology through comprehending, not speculative reason. Theological reason reflects upon the Word, therefore, that it has heard beforehand in the worship service. In doing so, the liturgical celebration defines the form of faith as regards to content, upon which theology reflects further. This is exactly what is meant by the phrase: '*lex orandi, lex credendi*'.

With regard to the history of doctrine, this is very evident in the wording of the early Christian creeds—the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The question rightly posed by Jews to Christians was why in their services they confessed and worshipped the man Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and God. In the

process of further theological reflection, this critical question led to Christological understanding, the result of which can be summarized as follows: In the person of Jesus Christ, the divine and human nature is connected inseparably and unmixed in an unfathomable unity.

The question of the Trinity follows quite necessarily from this. If Jesus is called upon and worshipped together with the God of Israel, then the problem of the unity of God results. But it was always clear to the church assembled in the name of Jesus that it was not worshipping two different gods. The exclusive worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the central point of the first commandment which may not, by any means, be broken. From the insight in worship that only the one and only God may be worshipped, grew therefore theologically the understanding that, while the Father and the Son represent two different persons, they are still one divine being or essence. With respect to the Holy Spirit, it was also apparent in the same way that, as the Spirit of God, he belonged to the Creator and was not of the same nature as the creatures. The Spirit as *creator* in Creation and in the New Creation is, before time began, the *vivicans* (life giver), from whom all created life arises.

Christian worship is, therefore, necessarily trinitarian because God has revealed himself as the Trinity in the history of salvation. The worship service is the worship of the triune God and recalls the salvation given by him. The Christian worship service is therefore begun and celebrated also in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Among all the church confessions,

the Orthodox churches are mostly deeply and directly aware of this fundamental connection between *lex orandi*, the worship service, and *lex credendi*, i.e., theology. For the Orthodox tradition, theology developed almost exclusively by reflecting on the essence and form of the worship service. However, because of a failure to understand many relevant questions of faith in all their respective challenges, the limits of theological thinking in Orthodoxy were also evident.

#### 4. Physical Spirituality as the Feature of Worship

The familiar words, 'Worship in Spirit and Truth' summarize the pneumatological and ecclesiological insights explained here. This phrase goes back to Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman, where in the discussion about whether worship should take place in Samaria or Jerusalem, Jesus says:

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:19-24).

Jesus' statements can easily be misunderstood in a spiritualistic sense. This would mean that the Christian church would no longer need the external form of worship in space and time and in its concrete corporality. All worship services would then take place in the inner being of the individual. The church would become a *civis Platonica*, a form of the Platonic state, that is, she

would, in the end, consist only of ideas without any 'feet on the ground'. The Greek philosopher Plato tried to form the state according to a purely theoretical ideal and failed with this experiment because of the political realities.

However, the goal of all of God's ways is and remains concrete and involves a physical form in the new creation. Therefore, the external, that is, the Word that is audible and legible is necessary for salvation. This is why the Christian church, right after Pentecost, assembled together in the Temple as well as in their homes for worship to be taught by the apostles there, to pray, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Furthermore, 'in spirit and in truth' also indicates that the Holy Spirit is directly active from God and to God in people through the concrete and physical form of worship. Fellowship with God is based on the inward working of the Spirit, who sets in motion anew and allows the history of salvation to become present as a saving and healing story for each individual person. According to Protestant Lutheran understanding, no other specific rites are needed besides the Word and the sacrament in the meeting of the Church assembled together in the name of Jesus. In addition, the freedom of the individual Christian and the congregation of Christians as a whole is also evident in worship.

This freedom finds its full and unlimited expression in the abundance of spiritual gifts which the members of the body of Christ also bring into the worship service. The gifts of the Word and practical service work together for the edification of the entire church congregation in worship and exemplify

impressively the priesthood of all believers. Paul describes without any inhibition the spiritual diversity of New Testament worship both in its spontaneous and in its defined liturgical elements:

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church' (1 Cor. 14:26).

In the same way admonition is included in the following:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him' (Col. 3:16-17).

It is clear from all of this that worship in itself is the history of salvation taking outward form. It reflects the cultural diversity of humanity and the diversity of spiritual gifts. The unity in this diversity is based on the story of the one Christ who is present through his Spirit in the midst of the church here and now. This worship lives through the creative love of the *proton*, that is, the beginning, and is directed toward the goal of the completing love at the end in which God will be all in all.

#### V From Sunday Worship to Daily Worship

Jesus commands us to 'worship the

Father in spirit and truth'. The spiritual presence of God, the realization of the history of salvation and the immediacy of the personal encounter with God are, therefore, one side of Christian worship. The 'in truth' part is the other side. It points to the dangers to worship from human hypocrisy and insincerity. It is talking about idolatry and false worship of God and, positively expressed, the central question of the spiritual fruits which should grow out of worship. How does worship manifest itself ethically in the world of daily life?

#### 1. Criticism of False Worship

The Bible knows that humanity is fundamentally religious. On the one hand, this is seen positively as a chance to be connected to the preaching of the gospel. On the other hand, though, religiosity also proves to be a hindrance and a danger to true worship. This danger affects in different ways both the pagan and the one who already knows and worships the true God.

The pagan danger is one of perverting worship into idolatry. This occurs when that Creator and creature, and God and the gods are confused or interchanged with one another. We have already mentioned this by referring to the classical criticism of ancient Hellenistic idolatry by Paul in Romans 1:18-32 with its fatal consequences for morality.

Every bit as grievous is the second problem, when worship is misused by apparently pious people for selfish ends. God serves people in worship through his Word and sacrament. But, God wants this service to have an effect in practical life and to produce

fruit. At this difficult point it becomes evident whether a person celebrates true worship or if he is only selfishly enjoying false worship for himself.

Regarding the danger of worship caused by human sin, natural religiosity plays a key role. When religion basically shows a human need, then the satisfaction of this need can turn into the misuse of a purely spiritual aestheticism. In art, aestheticism is understood as a purely superficial, uncommitted enjoyment of works of art which does not allow itself to be challenged and which has no serious consequences for real life. The same is also true in the area of religion. The 'beautiful worship of the Lord', which is rightfully praised in Psalm 27:4, is then enjoyed, purely as a theatrical show, and misused, without any inner commitment.

With respect to the youth scene of today, this means, for example that a person is looking for the exciting spiritual experience and goes from one great worship event to the next. Love for one's neighbour, social justice, devotion to Christ, and serious discipleship fade away behind the facade of worship in all its splendour. Speaking for God, the prophets protested sharply against this, as is evident in these words from Amos:

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of our harps. But let justice roll on like a river,

righteousness like a never-failing stream! (Amos 5:21-24).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues the criticism of the prophets and directs it against the externalized worship of his day, such as, for example, against a hypocritical piety that looks only for the applause of men, but does not seek the approval (good pleasure) of God, when he says:

Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full (Mt. 6:1-2; cf. also Mt. 6:5.16).

And Paul even warns his Gentile Christian congregation in Corinth against selfish misuse of worship, when he writes:

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.... When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! (1 Cor. 11:17,20-22).

## 2. Keeping Sunday Holy

In this short section, we make a brief

reference to the meaning of the day of rest for the celebration of worship in the Christian church. The misuse of worship that we have already mentioned does not, of course, do away with the correct use of it. On the contrary, one of the gifts of paradise left to us by God after the Fall was the day of rest, which God himself, as Creator, set apart at the end of his days of work.

There should be a day of recovery, indeed a day of festive joy, first for mankind in its specially appointed dignity, but also then for all creatures. Martin Luther summarises very nicely in his explanation of the Catechism on the 3rd commandment what this means for the Christian church and her worship, which she celebrates on the first day of the week, that is, on the Day of the Resurrection as the beginning of the new Creation, when he writes: 'We should fear and love God so that we do not disregard the preaching and His Word, but consider it holy, and enjoy hearing and learning.' In this context, two things become clear with respect to the day of rest: The Christian church shares with the Old Testament keeping a day of rest in the week. But, in contrast to Judaism, it is very flexible in determining the concrete day of the week for it.

## 3. Calling Upon the Lord

Worship is, by no means, a harmless trivial matter, not even politically. In the battle against idols and the ideological claims to power by men and systems, the worship service becomes itself a battleground. The person who speaks the basic early Christian confession '*Kyrios Jesus*' (Jesus is Lord), is thereby calling into question the total

claim to domination of foreign gods and human potentates. The early Christian churches in the Roman Empire, despite all their loyalty to the Roman Emperor as citizens, refused him every form of worship, even to the point of giving up their own lives.

The Confessing Church in the Third Reich in Nazi Germany clearly rejected the ideology of National Socialism (Nazi ideology) with its clear condemnations in the Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934 in the following statement:

We condemn the false doctrine as if the Church could and must recognize as the source of her proclamation other events and powers, personalities and truths as God's revelation apart from and alongside this one Word of God.... We condemn (reject) the false doctrine that there are areas of our lives in which we do not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other masters, areas in which we do not need justification and sanctification through Him.<sup>1</sup>

During the difficult times of suppression by the Communist government of East German, Evangelist Theo Lehmann very aptly expressed this attitude of worship in his song 'Wer Gott folgt riskiert seine Träume' (Following God Means Risking Your Dreams) with the following lyrics:

Und lehrt eure Kinder das eine,  
dass über Gott keiner mehr steht,  
dass auch der Größte klein  
begeben muss, wenn Gott kommt

1 A. Burgsmüller (Ed.), *Die Barmer Theologische Erklärung* (Neukirchner Verlag: Neukirchen, Germany, 1983), 34f.



und alles vergeht.

(And teach your children this one thing: Nobody is above God. Even the greatest person must give in when God comes and everything perishes.<sup>2</sup>)

#### 4. Worship of the 'Chambermaid'

It is especially noteworthy that, in the comprehensive systematic doctrinal treatise, the Epistle to the Romans, Paul, after all the basic teaching on sin, justification, and the history of salvation, once again makes clear in chapter 12 that this knowledge is in no way simply theoretical, but that it means far-reaching changes in lifestyle. He does this by presenting to them a new worship in everyday life:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2).

Worship should permeate all existence and transform everything. It is not about consumerism or cheap religious edification, but about renewal of everyday life. In this world with its sinful patterns and ways of life, the

church should become an important counterculture that rises above it in a beneficial way. Worship should become a way of life and the hallmark of Christians in their professional and daily occupation.

Martin Luther also took a clear-sighted view of this important section in Romans. He questioned the whole professional ethics of the Middle Ages with its ideals from monasticism in the retreat to life in the monastery and he ordered it anew. It is not a special spiritual class with its particular vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience which is true discipleship of Jesus, but, rather, making something of one's life in the daily occupation. It is not the life behind cloistered walls, secluded from the world, but, rather profession and family, society and public life are the practical fields in which the Christian should show his faith through love of his neighbour. Luther expressed this insight concerning everyday worship, which he poignantly referred to as: 'the chambermaid'. This is exactly what it is.

### VI The Eschatological Horizon of Worship

Worship on earth is surrounded by the cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1). It mirrors the heavenly reality of the eternal worship of God, which has neither beginning nor end, but, rather, occurs beyond space and time as *nunc aeternum*, as eternal presence. In its theophanies, the Bible gives insight into this celestial worship with the *Trishagion* (three times holy), which the seraphim sing: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full

of his glory' (Isa. 6:3).

This wide horizon of the eternal worship of God which the righteous will have a part of in the end is seen in new visions again and again in the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, as follows:

And he said: 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:14b-17).

Understanding worship as the epitome of heavenly reality emphasizes once again impressively the fact that worship on earth is participation of mortal men in the eternity and glory of God. Horror concerning one's own sin before God, however, necessarily precedes all exaltation, joy, and worship of man as is expressed in the following:

'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty' (Isa. 6:5).

The gesture of humbly bowing down before the throne of God and of the Lamb is attested in Revelation as an important characteristic of eternal worship, as follows:

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:8-9; cf. also Rev. 7:11-12).

Neither angels nor patriarchs, neither apostles nor martyrs nor any other perfected righteous person will grow beyond this attitude of humility and reverence in worship. Yet, still each one who has a part in this celestial worship, will, above all, experience the unending joy of God's eternal love and will be filled with his grace, which leads again to worship.

<sup>2</sup> Printed in the German contemporary Christian songbook, *Feiert Jesus* (Holzgerlingen Germany, 1995), song no. 201, stanza 5.