In Nomine Iesu

Toward a Theology of Worship That Is "Personal and Contextual" Model Theological Conference on Worship Rev. Dr. Dien Ashley Taylor January 12, 2010

(Note: References are not included for quotations from the Holy Scriptures, hymn locations and the like.)

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable unto you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Privileged as our religious imaginations are scintillated for the sake of the extension of the Kingdom of God, let us come, by His grace, to appreciate how worship of the one true God is both personal and contextual. Let us also come to realize how worship is both personal and communal and how it is also both contextual and catholic. Maintaining the tension on the tuning pins of this grand cosmic conga drum will allow for an evangelical and missional drum beat for our walking together as a synod, recognizing that although we walk on the same Way—who is Christ—and to the same way—who is Christ—by the same way who is Christ—and through the same way—who is Christ—that we do not walk in the exact same manner but yet may still walk together. Like a family, with some members who use walkers and canes, others who are in baby strollers, others who are hopping while holding Daddy's hand and others who are sprinting ahead only to turn around and wait for the rest to catch up, the beautiful menagerie of God's people walking together in Christ on the road to Emmaus do so in faith as Christ opens up the Scriptures to us and makes Himself known to us in the breaking of the bread, causing us to run back to the City of Peace, announce His resurrection and proclaim His salvation as the day of His glorious return draws all the more near.

The multivalenced skin on that tympani is stretched just like the arms of our Lord were on His holy cross as He offered up His life for our salvation; through that pain, His death-defying words to a thief next to Him were part of the gloriously personal and contextual worship event that all who claim to be "chief of sinners" experience in the shadow of the life-giving tree when the words of holy absolution are pronounced and believed. Stretched in our own minds, hearts and

bodies, the tension of understanding the Torah and reimagining the Torah places us directly in the missional and prophetic train of the One whose Name we adore and extol, whose internalization of the Torah permitted Him and His followers to eat grain on the Sabbath and to forego the sanitizing Purell for their lunch-seeking hands, whose innocent death and triumphant resurrection purchased for us eternal salvation and restored all creation. When a mallet strikes that snare, like the spear that entered Christ's sacred side that brought forth sacramental blood and water for our total personal identification with Him and His contextually incarnational identification with us, the doxological drum still sounds forgiveness, freedom and fraternity as all who have been touched by Him seek the same thing from Him—

"Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom Jesus, remember me, when you come into your Kingdom."

Personal and contextual, this tension of life and death, saint and sinner, tragedy and triumph characterizes the terpsichorean aesthetic of the Church's potential and kinetic energy in the dynamic movement that has typified the essence of the Church of the Augustana from her inception. True, some are a little lighter on their feet in this dance than others. True, some are more demonstrative of their rhythmic roots. Some prefer to march in step and still others prefer to "lean back, lean back" or genuflect, but the genuine confession of that saving Name from people of every race and tongue and every folk and nation allows, by God's extravagant grace, for many people to come unto Him who came unto us first, who comes unto us in the Means of Grace and who will come again unto us at the resurrection of all flesh—Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be praise, honor and glory forever. Amen?

It shall not be our desire today, then, to pit types and styles against each other or to prematurely isolate others by shorthanded and often underhanded lazy labeling of ourselves and others. We in this Concordia Center keep the concordia of our confession at the center as we rejoice that the one sign of the holy cross has been made on our foreheads and hearts by the one Lord who calls us to one faith in one baptism and reconciles us to one Father of us all. Today's conversations will help us to better appreciate the prophetic and parabolic importance of divinely-designed diversity within the Body of Christ as a personal and contextual expression of the various threads of the one tapestry of God's creatively amazing grace. As labels paralyze people in pointless poking and repartee, we have been gathered here today to reimagine our Emmaus walk in the heuristic of God's gracious coming to us in the Means of Grace to forgive us, renew us and lead us so that we may delight in His will and walk in His ways to

the glory of His holy name, and to do so as best we can in our fallen condition and in our doubts, biases and personal preferences, desperately desiring to hear our Conductor's tuning fork as we turn the pins on the cosmic conga drum and dance in the divine doxology to the one salvation song of all creation. A goal that we have, then, is to provide a healthy diet in worship in the congregations of our beloved Synod so that the feast of good things may be enjoyed by all as "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again" remains the mystery of our faith expressed by sinful jars of clay who have been chosen as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's peculiar people called out of darkness into His marvelous light. And as that Epiphany light shines on still, then, we courageously explore a theology toward worship that is personal and contextual.

First, that theology of worship has personal dimensions. That theology is grounded in God's Holy and precious Word. It is confessed in our Lutheran Confessions. It is characterized by faith that believes in God and accepts blessings from Him as true worship, receiving that which He so freely offers us in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace so that fruits may be evident in our lives. The spoken and sacramental Word aspects of the personal dimension of worship is that Christ Himself comes to each of us through the Means of Grace in order to forgive our sin, redeem us from death and the devil, give us life and salvation, rebuke us, transform us and direct us. The Word is heard personally in the ear, through the eye, on the hands and in the mouth as God's grace is delivered to us individually. Holy Baptism is administered by name—"Yo te baptizo, Juan Luis, en el Nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espiritu Santo." Holy Absolution is pronounced directly to the penitent sinner—"I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The Lord's Supper is administered to us "to eat and to drink," not for someone else to eat and drink for us.

This is the profound "for you" which has been a theme for the Church throughout the ages, articulated and championed especially by the Church of the Augsburg Confession. If the goods are not "for you," then what good are they? Even though worship is not meant for personal entertainment, as if everything should be conveniently given by means of an "I-pod" or found on the cover of "Self" magazine, God extravagantly chooses to deliver Himself to us personally in the Means of Grace as the Gospel is proclaimed and heard for the sake of faith. Our Lord is personally invested in each of us personally. He knew us and formed us in our mother's wombs. He responds personally both to the cries of Jeremiah and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He responds personally to you, satisfying all your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus. As we confess in the

Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, Christ Jesus redeemed <u>me</u>, a lost and condemned creature...so that <u>I</u> may thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true. Amen?

In prayer and liturgy, then, this personal dimension of worship is expressed. The beauty of this, though, is that the individual's Spirit-given, Word-grounded prayer becomes everyone's prayer as it has been inspired by God, using the words He has given us. Moses' song of triumph, David's psalms of lament and confession, and Jonah's big fish admission of submission all become the prayer of God's people. We pray with Moses, with David, with Jonah and yet the prayer remains a personal prayer, contextualized yet individualized in our own spiritual journey as the Church sings, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" who has done great things for me... "He touched me and made me whole."

The prayer of Jesus becomes our prayer—He teaches us to pray, "Our Father." He prays for us to be one as He speaks with His Father. He shows us that the personal dimension of His prayer becomes our prayer as we become what we receive in the Holy Eucharist. We share His prayer for unity, harmony and concord. We share His desire for oneness with each other and with our Father. It is a personal plea of Christ that becomes our personal plea as well. He who sought His Father on His own in Gethsemane moves us by His Spirit to seek our Father as we go to our closet rooms, close the door and pray to our Father in secret. This secret, though, is not that the prayer as being personal is all the sudden "privately personal" or a secret in itself. It is a personal prayer shaped by the Means of Grace in the celebration and realization of the Spirit-given faith of the Christian assembly.

"Lord, I lift your name on high"
so "Lord, thee I love with all my heart"
"Lord, I want to sing your praises"
so...."I pray Thee, ne'er from me depart, with tender mercy cheer me."

"I sing for joy at the work of your hands, forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand Nothing compares to the promise I have in you."

"Hence, all earthly treasure! Jesus is my pleasure, Jesus in my choice. Hence, all empty glory! Naught to me thy story told with tempting voice Pain or loss, or shame or cross, shall not from my Savior move me Since He deigns to love me."

"Goodness and mercy all my life will surely follow me And in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be."

The beauty, then, is that the personal prayer of one becomes the personal prayer of all. First person singular pronouns—in both the nominative and objective cases—become more than additive in qualitative effect; their collective impact is multiplicative, dynamic, transformative, and electric. For the personal Word Made Flesh comes into individual persons so that individual persons may together be one body. This is how the personal dimension of worship is also communal.

Our experience of our Lord is communal and not simply personal as if personal devolves into the merely "individualistic." Worship is communal as two or three are gathered in His Name, as the additive and multiplicative potency and poignancy of resurrection power permeates the assembly of those who confess—those who same say—the Name of the Risen Christ. The oral and sacramental Word action happens in communal experiences as the Word is preached and taught, as absolving words are delivered by one and believed by another, as water is applied to one by another while the assembly confesses the common faith, as a meal of forgiveness is fed to some by others, as hymns and chants and songs are lifted up with one voice to the one God and Father of us all, and as daily lives are characterized by vocations exhibited by people who wait, watch and work for peace and justice as harbingers of the coming Christ, with malice toward none and with charity to all, having become what they have received—the Body of Christ in and for the life of the world.

It is then, in creed and chant and hymn and song, whether sung in the prayer closet or in the choir loft, whether in the hallway or the byway, whether in the sanctuary or in the all-purpose room, that the profound "for you" is multiplied into the cosmic creedal statement "for us and for our salvation." "For me," then, simply does not mean "only for me." The personal is not private as we bear one another's burdens in the Lord nor as His grace is experienced—there is nothing neatly private about Christ's lavishly gifting Himself to us "pressed down, shaken together and running over!" "For me" is profoundly confessed by saying "for us and for our salvation," as heads bow in grateful thanksgiving for the incarnation of the Almighty in the second person of the Holy Trinity in the Blessed Virgin's womb, laid in Bethlehem's manger and realized in the "us" for whom that same God-man came whom He affectionately calls His Bride. It is in that eschatological consummation that even the rocks and rills and woods and templed hills, the roaring rivers and the mighty trees that had been fallen upon when the forbidden

fruit was plucked in Paradise are finally restored so that they clap their hands...and, echoing the words of an old Jamaican proverb, "One hand can't clap...one hand can't clap alone." Hands clap when they clap together.

It is in prayer and liturgy, then, that the profound "for us" takes individualistic individuals out of their own false comfort zones of self and places them "safe and secure from all alarms" into the everlasting arms of the true Body of Christ who has become what that Body confesses as Christ is in us, the hope of Glory. We clap with the cosmos. We rejoice with all creation. We remain in holy awe. For, as Elizabeth Barret Browning reminds us, in a way that is not here meant to be received animistically but parabolically:

Earth is crammed with heaven

And every common bush afire with God;

But only he who sees takes off His shoes.

The rest sit around and pluck blackberries." (or I-phones, if they prefer) In the majesty and mystery of this God present in the Means of Grace, then, individuals experience together a grace that is greater than all our fears, a love that will not let us go, the truth on which our faith depends, the faith of our fathers living still, the multiplicative and magnanimous method to God's Pentecostal gladness embodied in confessional mission and missional confession:

"We all believe in one true God...."

So "Give us lips to sing Thy glory, tongues Thy mercy to proclaim Throats that shout the hope that fills us mouths to speak Thy holy Name Alleluia. Alleluia. May the light which Thou dost send. Fill our songs with Alleluias, Alleluias without end."

In the liturgy, then, as Christ's Body receives and shares Christ's Body, there is a mutual consolation of the saints, a sharing together of the personal that is communal, an antithesis to the individualistic that becomes grievously solitary. Here in the clatter of offering plates, the fumbling of candy rappers, the stumbling of sometimes dour-faced parishioners returning to their pews after having received the living God, the personal touch of Christ becomes communal, reminding us of the propensity for density in the dynamic expression of Christ's mission. As the Samaritan woman's proclamation made clear, "He told me everything I ever did," the community becomes personally involved and invested not only in that which is personal but that which is personable made personal in the Person who personifies grace for us—Jesus Christ our Lord to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen?

No doubt, this happens in the context of time and place. And for that reason, in the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born to redeem those under the law so that we may become the righteousness of God. His holy incarnation, His innocent, bitter suffering and death, His glorious resurrection and ascension and His—Hallelujah—coming again in glory all happen in time, in a context. From the House of Bread to the City of Peace, Jesus' redeeming work happened in a time and in a place. He preached on a mount, healed in people's homes, taught in synagogues, walked on streets and on water, prayed in a garden, ate in an upper room, died on a cross and served breakfast on a beach. His work happened in context just like the divine revelation was made known through prophets and apostles in contexts. Ezekiel prophesied to a particular people with a cosmic call to repentance. Moses held the 10 Commandment tablets for a particular people through whom the whole world would be blessed. St. Paul wrote to specific churches with particular issues; his message was directed to particular people with global import. In that sense, the contextual Christ's entry into the world has cosmic import and effect.

The responses to God's grace, then, are also in context. Miriam's "carry-on" Exodus luggage included a tambourine which she was able to play once God's people were brought through the Red Sea waters with their feet still bone dry. Sackcloth, though not always available in stores nowadays, was readily available for days of repentance. Palm branches were at hand in the Holy Land, so they were yanked, waved and strewn as Jesus entered Jerusalem. Worship, then, has been contextual, whether in a tent, in a temple, on the water, in a catacomb, in a church, in a cathedral, on an underground railroad or on a highway to heaven. The preaching, the music, the dress, the visual arts and the expressions have been informed by, interpreted by and influenced by the context as personal and yet communal responses to the Almighty--who comes in various contexts as the One who changes not and who abides with us, graciously revealing Himself to us in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory in the Church and throughout the world forever and ever. Amen?

Jesus did not ignore the context. If a mustard seed were there, He preached about it. If bread and fish were available, He multiplied them. If a woman caught in adultery were dragged before Him by others, He spoke to all of them. If Caesar needed to be paid, He sent fishermen fishing for a coin. If surrounded by Jews, He preached to them; if surrounded by Gentiles, He taught them. If on rough water, He calmed the sea. His apostles did not ignore the context, either. If with people from many nations, the Holy Spirit moved them to speak in their

respective languages the veritable and vernacular truth of the Gospel. To the Jews they became Jews and to the Greeks they became Greeks so that they who were not under the law could win those under the law.

Whether one rattles a tambourine with Miriam, blasts a ram's horn, dances with David, glides horse hair over a G string with Johann Sebastian Bach or stomps with Kirk Franklin and the Family, the Christian contextual response to our Lord's extravagant grace is still a connection to the cosmic doxology of the trees, rivers, creeping creatures and stars in their courses to the glorious and thunderous voice of the Lord that flashes forth flames of fire, breaks the cedars of Lebanon and strips the forests bare. Whether the paintings are on chapel ceilings or are carried amidst wafting incense and candles, whether preserved in kaleidoscopic glass in cathedrals or projected on screens in auditoriums or even cellular phones, the desire of the faithful is to be a star for sages, directing others to adore the one true God. True, different contexts can seem to communicate and elicit different responses about the appropriateness of different "signs," yet those decisions are often made in context themselves as the praying, Word-fed, Spiritfilled community aims to be directed by God by confessing the one true faith, humbly seeking Him and genuinely being open to His corrective rebuke, His prophetic critique and His divine discipline.

It is true that confession shapes context and context shapes confession, but these are both part of the ongoing tuning of this still-yet-to-be-fully-perfected tympani. Our struggle---and our ongoing conversation—deals with how liturgical context is shaped by both liturgy and by context. From a catechetical perspective, some liturgical choices may be informed by the catechetical context while other choices inform a catechetical context. That relates to how Christ, creed and culture intersect...and where they do not. In our sin, we often misunderstand culture and do not often realize how fallen our culture and we actually are. At the same time, we may not see the beauty in the contexts into which our Lord has placed us because we are limited in our understanding of God's expansive will. Thanks be to God that He reveals Himself in His Word so that we may see our culture and context as they are, warts and all. Let us continue to diligently to seek Him where He is found and where He promises to be as we make sense of our various contexts, receiving the Word of God informed not by "my" but by "our" confession of faith.

For example, music can be from a context and can also inform a context. The same is true for attire, dress and vestments, for kinesthetic expressions like dances and processions and for visual expressions of the Gospel like banners,

windows, sculptures and the like. There are contextual understandings and expressions of the one Christ just as there are contextual understandings and expressions of the one creed of His people. How may one determine what is "acceptable" and edifying, then, if context and culture both intersect with the expression of the salvation story? "Through the Word," would be a quick response, but even that carries with it questions about how that Word is understood and interpreted by a community. Consensus on the catechetical and liturgical context, then, and how that context is both understood, shaped, reimagined, redeemed, rejected or remade, and this is achieved by the Holy Spirit's work through the Means of Grace as Holy People are led to make humble, holy decisions while remaining open to the continuous, caring critique of those who also labor in the love of an ever-limping Israel, wrestling with God as He comes into our sinful contexts and redeems those contexts for His redemptive purpose.

A popular "out" in these ever-dangling dialogues—which often become monologues—is the adiaphora argument. But adiaphora is not a "free for all." Decisions of these sorts should not be made solely from the laptop arm chair but in sanctified conversation with the sisters and brothers—and not only those cyber friends who have been "accepted" or "confirmed" as friends in our individual Facebooks because we agree with them or they agree with us, but with the many saints whose names are in the Father's FaceBook of Life so that the parabolic tension of our theology is both proleptically and prophetically strengthened. In other words, we learn little when we do not ask, so it is only when we dare to join the adventurous Nic at night that we learn from Christ what it means to be "born from above." Our freedom, then, is not a swipe card for swiping and switching things "in the name of context" but our Christ-purchased freedom is fuel for us to remain both noble and nimble in our royal responsiveness and our priestly responsibility to pray for faith to be expressed from truly believing hearts in ways that ultimately proclaim the glories of Christ Jesus, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen?

The faith that is believed is believed by believing hearts, then. It is shaped in worship contextually...and rightfully so. It is one faith that may be informed by different contexts. But before observations are made, it should be clear that some songs, for example, work in some places while other songs do not; they are best understood and sung in particular contexts. Songs shape context and can also be understood in context; the context fills in the blanks that the poetry of the lyrics may be lacking. That contributes to the challenge of their use. This is true of the African American spiritual, "Let Us Break Bread Together on our Knees,"

where saints fall on their knees with "my face to the rising sun"—the liturgical east—crying out to mercy from the God of all mercy. On the surface, the song does not contain the specific words of the Small Catechism section on the Sacrament of the Altar. The context in which the song is sung, though, can be one that comprehends the reality of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar and the eschatological dimensions of the Eucharistic reality of faith that receives the gifts of God. In that context, then, the song can be helpful, sung by those who are no longer slaves but liberated children of the Most High God.

The same may be said of some ceremonies, art forms, liturgical actions, postures, dress and the like. The sermon illustrations employed by a preacher to bean farmers in Iowa will often differ from those employed by a preacher to rice farmers in Hanoi. Even our Lord varied His style and approach, depending on the context and the multiple intelligences and sensitivities of the people with whom He interacted—sometimes He spoke a word, sometimes He conversed at length, sometimes He made mud from spit and dirt and sometimes He told them to go and show themselves to the priests, yet each time He healed them as the one Lord of all. In the same way, the Liturgy for the Baptism of our Lord in many suburban Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregations this past weekend would look and sound quite different than an Ethiopian Timkat observance or a "wading in the waters" for baptisms in the sultry fields of Mississippi as I "lay down my burdens down by the riverside, studying war no more" or in a seminary chapel gathering where "To Jordan Came the Christ our Lord" is bellowed by bold bass voices and accompanied by a pipe organ, yet they are all celebrations of the Baptism of our Lord. Whether Nairobi or Nepal, Nurenburg or New York City, there is one Lord, one faith and one baptism but that is expressed contextually, whether communicated with timpani, steel drums, conga drums, snare drums or even the "hum drums from the doldrums." Issues in some places simply will not be issues in other places, an issue underscored in the historical development of the 1580 Book of Concord. The key, though, is for the Body of Christ not to be unnecessarily idiosyncratically contextual for contextualization's sake, irrespective of our inherent catholicity.

That is because a theology of worship that is contextual is also catholic. It is respecting of all times and places. It recognizes that both God's work and our work do not happen without global effects. When the cosmic conga is struck, the echo resounds and resonates *ad infinitum* throughout the recesses of space. The catholic faith is expressed by the Church catholic, embodying the beauty and mystery of the expression of that which is part of the Trinitarian dance. As the individual cries out in pain, the Church cries out as a damsel in distress—personal

meeting communal—so that the expression of that plea and the place of that plea are understood both in context and in the catholic or universal totality of existence. This is because the one Christ who comes personally comes communally since the one Christ comes in the context of life being inherently catholic, with nothing being beyond His rule of peace, freedom, justice, truth and love.

The anti-Roman Catholic feelings of many in our nation and throughout the world have led many to denounce even the use of the word, "catholic," and anything that looks, smells, tastes or sounds like anything within that tradition. Lutherans who value "the Word" should not be in the practice of abandoning the word "catholic" when the tradition of the Church of the Augsburg Confession has been to teach all people about the true universality of the faith that we believe, teach and confess—a truly catholic tradition intended for universal and ecumenical consequence.

There have been, however, unfortunate misunderstandings of catholicity that have led people to believe that things should be the same everywhere when, in reality, the third through the seventh ecumenical councils were built on the first two councils which show the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed as a description of the borders of the faith as opposed to a prescription for the boredom of the faith. In that sense, adiaphora is still not a "free for all" nor is blatant individualism encouraged by some type of unmediated Holy Spirit who moves some people to do crazy things that are out of step with the one divine drum's downbeat. A consensus on the catechetical and liturgical context, then, happens as churchly people come together as Church by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, pray God's Word for direction, hear and share God's Word and then proclaim God's Word to a specific situation with response-ability as the Church herself becomes a prophetic word of life for the world.

Faith that is believed is believed by believing hearts, then, and it is shaped in worship that is catholic—our Lord's merciful encounter with us to bring us into Himself and restore us and all creation, expressed by a faith that is greater than all of us are. The faith of the Church and the Church's faith are both shaped catholically and rightfully so, since this engenders the prophetic critique and parabolic potential of the multiplicative potency of the dynamic Bride of Christ who adjusts her wedding veil and fixes her drooping slip while joyfully being led down the water-filled aisle to the altar where the Bridegroom who purchased her robe of righteousness for her does not give her away but gives her Himself. That faith is grounded in the Word of God—heard, read, seen, tasted and felt. It does

not mean that the faith is expressed the same way, as if to be irrespective of context. It does mean, though, that the melody is personal without being too individualistic, contextual without being too obscure and inaccessible, living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, and certainly not faithless and dead.

Will faith receive these gifts, not always packaged in the same kind of bread yet being one bread, not always with water of the same temperature but the same life-filled and life-giving water, not always heard with the same tone but still with one voice? As the Church receives these gifts, she avoids the idolatry that makes even her worship into a false god, making sure that reverence does not get confused with obstinacy nor casualness confused with flippancy. She maintains the tonal tension of the immanent and the transcendent as she directs the broken-hearted to "lift up their hearts to the Lord" and waddle in the waltz, tiptoe in the tango, jump in the jig and move in the moonwalk of the immanent yet transcendent, the here yet still coming back, the above us yet below us, the around us yet in us most mighty and merciful Lord of all creation.

This leads us all to seek opportunities for repentance and dialogue, to be sure, since we, like St. Thomas, may not know the way ourselves but rejoice that "I AM" is the way who chooses to know us—personally yet communally, contextually yet catholically. It is then when we realize that we have a lot to learn, that even though the conversation about our conversion is far from over as we dance on the edge of mystery, vainly offering ourselves, our gifts, and our broken and contrite hearts to the One who has offered Himself for us and to us. It is personally and contextually, communally and catholically, that we come to realize and recognize that the sacramental life of the Church ends not when we rise from the communion rail but her sacramental life persists as the mission of Christ continues in us daily, as we become expressions of grace, prophetic voices in the wilderness, living witnesses of the living Christ, daily dying and rising, constantly directing others to the only balm in Gilead that soothes sin-sick souls. Even on that Day when sacraments shall cease, worship will not as we are gathered with the new heaven and the new earth in eternal praise in the marriage feast of the Lamb. As "I AM" comes to us by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, we are shown that we are not the final judge on what is good and what is not for worship but that Divine Service is divine since it is our Lord who comes graciously to us through His Means of Grace personally and communally, contextually and catholically for me, for us, here and now and for the entire cosmos. (Based on the Introduction to Lutheran Worship by Dr. Norman Nagel) It is He who speaks and we who listen, as His Word bestows what it says, as faith that is born from what is said acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise, as music and all the arts and sciences of all times and places, of many contexts and peoples, are drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver God—Father, + Son and Holy Spirit—to whom be glory forever and ever. (Amen)

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