

Summary Reflections on Liturgy and Culture

Summary Reflections on Liturgy and Culture

**A summary-response to presentations made at the
International Lutheran Council's
2022 World Conference**

**Theme: “Liturgy and Culture: How Worship Shapes Our Life Together
and Why We Do What We Do.”**

*Kisumu, Kenya
September 13-16, 2022*

The centrality of Jesus Christ present with His people in their time and place through worship—the Divine Service—where the Divine and human God-man, Jesus, the Lord of the Church, calls people to himself and serves them¹—was the foundation of all presentations at the conference relating to the liturgy and its engagement with culture. The Church fundamentally is the gathering of people around the Lord of the Church to encounter Him, hear Him, receive Him, and be blessed by Him for another week ‘out in the world.’ The liturgy involves words and actions by which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is present to the glory of the Father.²

We are primarily the recipients in the liturgy and not the ones who are active. All believers’ actions come in response to Jesus’ initiative towards us. This theological landscape is the consequence of the salvific action of God culminating in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus who comes to His people through words, water, bread, and wine. Such a fundamental truth must never be forgotten as the Word of God is shared especially with those of different languages

and cultures. Christians have always relied on the Holy Spirit to clearly bring Jesus to all nations as they have also relied on those who actually speak the words and conduct worship to work tirelessly to speak the Word of God clearly—so that justification remains the theological and pastoral touchstone of all work done in Jesus’ name.⁴

Sharing the Word of God in different languages and cultures no longer simply means missionaries going to people who are ‘foreign’ to them but includes different philosophical understandings (*e.g.* regarding humanity itself) and changing circumstances (*e.g.* the COVID-19 pandemic, the global responses of governments, the impact on churches, and the accelerated rise of virtual presences). Thus the task of the Church to bring the unchanging Gospel to a changing world intensifies particularly in relation to worship.

Conscious that the Word of God constitutes and our Confessions shape our worship, the Church balances the truth of Jesus’ presence with His people and clearly speaking the Word of God to the world. This is particularly pertinent in liturgical reviews and the production of new rites, new hymnals, and changes to permissive rubrics. The Church has the responsibility to communicate clearly Jesus and not sacrifice Jesus in the process! The Church’s catholicity must be maintained against the deceptions of the new.⁵

The touchstone for any liturgical review remains the clarity by which Holy Communion is conducted and taught. Many liturgical reviews, amendments, and new liturgies fall into merely speaking about Jesus’ presence or His gifts from our experiences in church or our theological perspectives whereas what must continue to be heard is Jesus (His

words) and His performative utterances (what He is doing to and for us). This results in conserving and respecting what we have received liturgically and being ever conscious that what is passed on remains faithful to what we have received.⁶

As language and identity are increasingly fluid today; as the Church is increasingly aware that the world is always opposed to the God who loves her; as God’s Word sadly is always challenged by others who also say ‘Thus says the Lord,’ so the Church can ‘sail such storms’ when the liturgy is faithful to the Lord of the Church who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. In the liturgy, Jesus draws all people to Himself so that they can live life in all its fulness—because an embodied God comes to embodied humanity with embodied grace creating an embodied community and witness—no matter when or where people are found.⁷

-
- 1 Luke 22:27; Mark 10:45
 - 2 Ephesians 2:16-19
 - 3 Romans 8:31-34; Romans 6:3,4; Matthew 26:26-28
 - 4 Acts 2:1-41
 - 5 John 4:23,24; Ephesians 4:4-6
 - 6 Luke 10:16; 1 Corinthians 11:23a
 - 7 2 Timothy 4:1-4; Hebrews 12:1-3; 1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 5:9,10