

# Readings

### Additional readings

The following list is provided as options for:

- facilitator pre-reading, if desired
- participant reading during the **Reading Short Trail**
- a place where participants can be directed for those who wish to engage with more material following the workshop

Bartsch, M. (2001) The Lutheran school as a worshipping community, *Why a Lutheran School?* (pp. 87-88) Adelaide: Lutheran Church of Australia, Board for Lutheran Schools.

BLS (1999) God gathers Christians to worship him, *LIFE Curriculum: Theological Background Notes* (pp. 26-27). Adelaide: Openbook Publishers.

BLS (2001) Session 6 Worship, *Theological Orientation Program for Staff* (TOPS) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (pp. 4-8). Adelaide: BLS.

Christenson, T. (2004) Sacrament, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (pp. 50-52). Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

Dawn, M. (2008) Worship for postmodern times. *Lutheran Theological Journal*, Vol 42 No 2 August 2008 68-76.

Jaensch, A. (2008) Full immersion: a valid approach to worship in Christian schools. *Lutheran Theological Journal*, Vol 42 No 2 August 2008 92-99.

Priebbenow, G. (2008) The practice of worship. *The Lutheran*. Vol 42 No 6 July 2008 206-207.

### *The Lutheran school as a worshipping community*

An extension of the discussion of the role of the Lutheran school in the 'kingdom of the right' relates to the place of worship within the Lutheran school. The issue here is not the worship activities which form an integral part of the school curriculum, which are attended as part of the school program by all students and staff and which the Lutheran Church of Australia 'confesses' as 'central to the life of the people of God in mission to the world of the school' (Appendix C: 3.1). The worship under discussion is rather 'public worship of the faithful, involving the ministry of word and sacrament' (Appendix C: 3.1), the worship activities usually associated with congregations and parishes under the responsibility of a pastor.

This approach promotes the formation of 'school-churches' as a 'major mission strategy' for the Lutheran Church of Australia (Stolz 1995: 10). It attempts to take seriously the situation mentioned in chapter two, that an increasing number of families in Lutheran schools are not regular members of any worshipping community. Since a significant number of these families participate in worship experiences within the school, particularly at the Lutheran primary school level, the question arises of whether the school should attempt to become the worship home of those families rather than have the school try to redirect the families to some other worshipping group which may be unfamiliar to those families. In fact, requiring such families to move from the familiar context of the school to an unfamiliar congregation, may cause them to withdraw from worship altogether.

This situation is not only of concern for Lutheran schools, but is reported by schools of other churches as well as they grapple with the relationship between the school and the neighboring congregation or parish (Dwyer 1993: 21). This can, of course, be seen as a challenge to the work of local congregations and parishes, and particularly as undermining the role of parish clergy.

A number of Lutheran secondary schools, particularly those who have boarding students, have school worship involving word and sacrament led by the school chaplains. There have also been examples of the 'school-church' where a worshipping congregation has developed within the structure of the school under the oversight of a pastor, but has then become a separate entity retaining some affiliation with the school. Such practices would seem to be consistent with Lutheran confessional theology. However, if the main purpose of the Lutheran school is seen in terms of its mission outreach rather than its educational function, then, from a Lutheran confessional viewpoint, the school has lost its right to be seen as school and confusion has occurred in distinguishing the responsibilities of the school according to the perspective of the left and right hand 'kingdoms'.

If the Lutheran Church of Australia wishes to involve its schools in a 'major mission strategy' (Stolz 1995:10), a number of practical issues will need to be addressed to ensure that practices are consistent with Lutheran confessional theology. The respective roles and areas of responsibility of the school principal and the 'school pastor' will need careful delineation if possible conflicts are to be avoided. This relationship will be even more complex than the relationship between chaplains (who are members of staff) and principals in Lutheran secondary schools, where there has already been considerable friction at times. Care will also have to be exercised in distinguishing between the compulsory nature of school worship and the voluntary nature of the worship of the people of God in word and sacrament within the school community. The 'school-church' will also have to ascertain how many of the other functions of a congregation it will assume and how to integrate people who wish to worship but are not members of the school community. Viewing the Lutheran school as a 'school-church' also raises questions of accountability in regard to government financial support for the school educational program. While, with care, consistency with Lutheran confessional theology can be maintained by the Lutheran school in respect to these and related issues, the emphasis on the Lutheran school as an educational institution cannot be lost if the Lutheran school is to retain its function as 'school'.

# GOD GATHERS CHRISTIANS

# TO WORSHIP HIM

## WHAT IS CHRISTIAN WORSHIP?

The word 'worship' is related to 'worth-ship'. Worship deals with the question: What is of worth? In worship God's worth is proclaimed or revealed and God's worth is acknowledged.

**GOD COMES TO US** In the first instance Christian worship is God's revelation of himself by his word and actions. In worship God comes to his people and reveals his worth to them by what he says (the word) and by what he does (the sacraments). The focus of Christian worship is the Lord Jesus Christ because through Jesus God most clearly shows his worth to human beings as the God who loves us, accepts us, forgives us and cares for us.

**WE RESPOND** The second aspect of Christian worship is our response to God's words and actions. We recognise and acknowledge God's worth. Our response indicates what God is worth to us; we show by our words and actions that we believe God is worthy of praise, honour, loving obedience and willing service. We can pray to God for mercy and for all our needs. At the same time we acknowledge our own unworthiness (confession of sins).

We sometimes call our worship 'divine service' because in worship God serves us and this prompts us in turn to serve him. This highlights an essential difference between Christian and non-Christian worship: in non-Christian worship the initiative tends to be with the worshippers who try to establish the connection with their god and demonstrate their own worthiness by the earnestness and intensity of their prayers and other ritual acts (contrast the worship of the prophets of Baal with that of Elijah, 1 Kings 18:16-39; also the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14).

**WORSHIP IN THE BIBLE** The basic pattern of worship outlined above can be seen already in the Old Testament. When people like Noah and Abraham build altars and 'call on the name of the Lord', this follows some

gracious action of God (saving Noah, calling Abraham). In the Old Testament times the special places of worship were places where God had 'appeared' — made himself known. Although the people of God knew that God could not be confined to a building (2 Chronicles 6:18), God nevertheless instructed them to erect first the tabernacle and later the temple as his 'house' where he would graciously come to be with them. The Israelites were also given special times for worship. On the sabbath day they were to put aside their work and remember the mighty work of God as their Creator and Rescuer (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Every day by their sacrifices they were to honour the God who had set them apart to be his own covenant

people. There also special worship festivals which focused on God's merciful deliverance (eg Passover, Day of Atonement).

The New Testament begins with Jesus and his disciples observing

the worship pattern of Israel. However, like the prophets in the Old Testament, Jesus called for worship that was not mere empty ritual but was sincere devotion (Matthew 6:5-13; 15:1-9), 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). As God in human flesh, Jesus himself is the New Testament tabernacle and temple — the 'place' where God's glory is fully revealed (John 1:14; 2:19-21). Jesus promised his followers that he would be present even when only two or three of them came together in his name (Matthew 18:20). Christian worship is not restricted to certain rituals at particular places and times (Colossians 2:16). The sabbath having fulfilled its purpose, Sunday came to be observed as 'the Lord's day'. On this day Christians celebrate God's supreme work of deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ. Luther explains what the third commandment means for Christians:

... we should not despise God's word or refuse to hear it. Instead, we should recognise that God's word is holy and be glad to hear and learn it. (*Luther's Small Catechism*, Openbook edition 1996)

In worship God comes to his people to strengthen them, prepare them to be his servants, and encourage them to love one another and share his gifts.

Theological Foundations of LIFE Curriculum

The 'church year', arranged around the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, helps Christians to celebrate the mighty works of God for the salvation of all people.

For God's people all of life is worship — listening to the word of the Lord and responding in service to him and to other people (see Romans 12).

**FORMS OF WORSHIP** The essentials of Christian worship consist in God coming to people through word and sacrament and people responding through adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. There are various ways of worshipping. Over the years many Christians have valued a set liturgy which they believe maintains the proper focus of worship. The value of good liturgy is that it allows worship to be carried on 'in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Corinthians 14:40), and enables the church to confess its doctrine clearly. The danger some Christians see in set liturgy is that it can easily become mechanical and thoughtless routine.

The Lutheran confessions stress, however, that neither liturgy nor any other form or style of worship is commanded by God. For example:

*We further believe, teach and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority and power to change, reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offence but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church.* Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration Article X, 9.

Christians are free to choose in the area of forms of worship. Decisions about worship forms, however, must be made in genuine concern for the welfare and unity of the body of Christ and in Christian love for all members of the body. In all our worship — whether in our congregations or schools or classrooms or homes — our concern must surely be to use forms that best help us and fellow Christians (young and old) to recognise, express and respond to God's worth revealed in Jesus Christ.

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the Background Notes raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on the topic of worship?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. More important than teaching children **forms** of worship (eg to understand the liturgy) is to teach children to **worship** (to understand what worship is all about). Comment: What can be done to enrich the worship in your school?
4. How do we handle the problem of children saying that worship is boring? (See *Good Question*, ed B Schwarz, Openbook Publishers, p 132)
5. Should worship be compulsory in a Christian school? Is it appropriate to expect non-Christian children (including children of other religious backgrounds) to participate in Christian worship?

### FOR FURTHER READING

*Our Lutheran Heritage* (What is distinctive about Christian worship particularly from the Lutheran point of view?) by EW Janetzki in *Praise God in His Sanctuary* Vol II.

*A Lutheran Approach to the Theology of Worship* (LCA Commission on Worship) in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions* Vol 2.

*Luther's Large Catechism: The Third Commandment*

*Augsburg Confession* VII, XV, XXVI, 40ff; XXVIII-30 *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article IV, 49

## Core Content

### 1. What is worship?

'In the first instance Christian worship is God's revelation of himself by his Word and actions. In worship God comes to his people and reveals his worth to them by what he says (the Word) and by what he does (the sacraments). The focus of Christian worship is the Lord Jesus Christ because through Jesus God most clearly shows his worth to human beings as the God who loves us, accepts us, forgives and cares for us.

The second aspect of Christian worship is our response to God's words and action' (God calls people to worship him, *LIFE*, BLS, 1998: 4).

The dynamic of Christian worship is God's action and human response. It is a two-way communication, God reveals himself to people and they respond. God gives Christians grace and mercy. They respond in thanks, praise and devotion.

## Core Content

### 2. What is Lutheran worship?

#### (a) Lutheran worship is Lutheran theology in action

Lutheran school worship will reflect Lutheran theology. It will reflect the emphasis on Christ's life, death and resurrection and what this has achieved for all people. It will highlight the central focus of Lutheran theology that is that the theology of the cross, justification by faith alone, law and gospel and the saved and sinful nature of Christians is emphasised. All messages are presented in the context of the Bible and Lutheran theology.

#### (b) Lutheran worship is scriptural

The Bible's message of law and gospel is the basis for Lutheran worship and its application. The biblical focus of worship is shown through the central placement of the Bible on the altar. The Bible is read and the Bible readings are the basis for the liturgy and the message.

In worship, the law and its impossible demands convicts the hearers and the gospel proclaims Christ as Saviour. The law can guide believers in discipleship for life but it must never be taught in isolation. The gospel message should also never be

reduced to moralising such as 'be nice, love one another, do not steal, do not tell lies, honour your parents'.

The gospel of forgiveness and the love of God through Jesus are always to be the chief themes of the message. The aim of the message should be to convict, comfort and challenge in the name of Christ! The gospel is then the source for sanctification; a life devoted to God's will. Threats such as 'be good or you'll go to hell' and bribes 'be good and you'll go to heaven' are false and unbiblical messages. Even though God's word of law is proclaimed in worship, the gospel is the foundation of Lutheran worship and the best motivation for dedicated Christian living.

#### (c) Lutheran worship is liturgical

Liturgy originally meant 'public service'. Liturgy can now often refer to the form, style and orders of some traditional worship. Worshippers see a leader. The leader has a special message. If the leaders are pastors they may have a white robe with a coloured sash around the shoulders. The worship area contains an altar, candles and special reading and preaching places. On the altar stands a cross (usually a crucifix) and an open Bible. All these have significance. A special order or ritual may be used. The Lutheran liturgy follows the division of the traditional church year, its seasons and festivals. These liturgical features are part of the Lutheran culture and help the school community to maintain its focus in worship on Christ and the Gospel.

The worship is similar in style to other traditional groups such as Uniting, Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican. Christian churches draw upon common prayers such as the Lord's Prayer and songs. Some of the elements of worship are even pre-Christian and derived from Judaistic traditions such as the architecture, priests, candles, robes and altar. The common aspects of the liturgy are a symbol of historical union with the universal (catholic) church. All worshippers can be conscious of unity with all Christians.

#### (d) Lutheran worship is ecumenical

School worship is a witness to Christian unity by the community. Lutherans form only a part of the Christian church, and because the Lutheran liturgy has strong relationships to other Christian groups, school worship is an ecumenical experience. ('Ecumenical' refers to the fellowship of all the world's saved.)

As long as the Word is used and the message is consistent with Lutheran theology, students; staff

and guests are welcome to lead and organise the worship experience. They can be encouraged to enrich Lutheran worship with forms and styles from their own tradition so that all may learn and benefit from each other. School pastors may also have a special responsibility to coordinate and supervise worship activities.

The varied faith backgrounds of staff and students means that non-Christians, atheists, and agnostics are among the worshippers. They are encouraged and expected to attend. The school worship will provide an avenue through which they can hear and be challenged with the gospel.

## Core Content

### 3. What is going on in Lutheran worship?

#### (a) Worship is celebrating Christ

Lutheran worship recognises the concept of celebration. It ultimately aims to be positive and joyful before the Lord. In worship Lutherans are conscious of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and of his humble service and achievements. Christ is not used as a 'model' teacher or example of goodness, purity or selflessness. He is the suffering servant who died for the sins of all people, rose from death and is now Lord of all creation. Lutherans resist any attempt to focus on human beings to the exclusion of Christ. Worship is God-centred, not human-centred.

Lutheran worship, therefore, discourages any tendency to see the time as entertainment, a concert, a performance or a program of items. Anything that takes the glory from Christ and places it on a group, teacher or pastor is discouraged. The 'ego' submits in praise, shame and confession to Christ, Lord of all. Self-gratification is not an objective. Christ comes to each person in their weakness, vulnerability, lack of confidence and low self-esteem, and he offers a new and renewed life, total forgiveness and spiritual peace. No one deserves or earns this grace or becomes eligible for it by race, character or attitude.

#### (b) Worship is celebrating life!

Worship is life. Life is worship. In each moment of every day Christians are challenged to present themselves to God in spiritual worship. Christians live to the glory of God in all that they do. Lutherans say that communal worship is to be an expression

of total living. Communal worship strengthens and nourishes Christians for their daily tasks and relationships. The special worship times are the climax of the past days and an inspiration for future days. Christians do not 'switch God on' at worship time and then switch off when it is over. The daily routines of life, the daily tasks at home, and school, at work and in leisure time – all these are for the glory of God. Gritsch wrote that education and worship are the twin pillars of the church. 'They help us return to our baptism, to discern between gospel power and ego power, to strive for peace' (Gritsch, 1991: p.20).

#### (c) Worship is celebrating community

Worship is not a merely individual, personal, private affair. On regular occasions Christians come together to a sanctuary to worship together as one body. This is similar to the whole school gathering in the chapel or a single class turning its attention to a worship activity within the classroom. It is a natural expression of community. God, who can be worshipped anywhere, also chose special times and places for his people to come together.

Habel (1985) says that the community emphasis is a part of the learning experience, and can be seen as countering 'the tendency of many in Australia to view faith as a personal and private matter that is strictly 'between me and God' (Gritsch, 1991: p.10). Christians do not insist that worship is a matter of one's own business. It is the business of the whole community. Through worship the community is connected with the invisible communion of all God's people through time and space. The worship also anticipates the permanent community of heaven it is always eschatological (last times) – 'until I come'.

#### (d) Worship is sacramental celebration

The worshipping community is a sacramental group. It includes people who are baptised, and who attend the sacrament of the altar. Worship is sacramental because it is the worship of those who have been baptised and includes some that have tasted the body and blood of Christ.

Sacraments are central to the life of the Lutheran Church. Lutherans believe that baptism and holy communion were commanded by Christ for each believer. In the New Testament all new believers were baptised and attended holy communion. For Lutherans, the sacraments are the Word of God in visible form (water, bread, wine) and visible action. The Lutheran Church is a sacramental church similar to the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

The sacraments will be celebrated within Lutheran schools from time to time. The ministry of the school does include the expression of God's specific care and so the worship life of a Lutheran school may at times be an extension of the worship of an associated, local congregation and include the celebration of the sacraments. Schools also recognise the diverse faith backgrounds of students and believe the sacrament rituals are best conducted within the worship of the denominational group.

School worship should not be regarded as a simple substitute for worship experiences in the local denominations. The school supports the parents as primary educators in the Christian faith. The school is not a congregation in the full sense. School worship needs to affirm rather than undermine the role of the church outside the school. In the statement *The LCA and its schools* (LCA, 1999) the relationship between school and church in respect to worship is explored:

'The Lutheran Church of Australia confesses that worship of God is central to the life of the people of God in mission to the world of the school. Within the school such worship may be:

- Public worship of the faithful, involving the ministry of Word and Sacraments. This worship is open to all and will be organised to meet the needs of the school and the wider community.
- School or class devotional exercises which are part of the regular program of the whole school and which in different ways involve all students and staff (*LCA and its schools*; LCA, 1999: #3.1).

Worship is also sacramental because it is mysterious. To worship means to honour, respect and glorify the Trinity. Much of God's nature and activity is incomprehensible. So worship contains a strong sense of the sacred, divine and holy. Christians approach worship with awe, joy, privilege, humility and dignity. 'The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him' (Hab 2:20). This acknowledgment of the majesty, holiness and glory of God is emphasised in Lutheran worship. There is a sense of mystery and awe in worship.

## Core Content

### 4. Why do I have to attend?

Attendance at most worship in Lutheran schools is compulsory. There are also optional worship experiences provided by some schools such as a

mid-week holy communion service at the beginning or close of the school day. Students and staff are invited but not required to attend these special worship activities. However the compulsory nature of most school and class worship activities raises questions which need further exploration.

Compulsory worship is questioned on two levels, educationally and theologically. Some question whether it is a valid and effective educational experience when it is made compulsory. Does it engender cynicism and negative attitudes in those who may not be able in good conscience to participate fully? Is it counter-productive? These views gather strength when anecdotal evidence is produced about past students who felt that religion was 'forced' on them in compulsory worship and who therefore subsequently turned away from spiritual activities in later life.

The practice of compulsory worship attendance is also questioned on theological grounds. The claim is that worship should be freely offered. It is a response to the free gift of justification by grace through faith. Is the practice of compulsory attendance a contradiction of the message of 'not by works but by faith', and *sola gratia* – grace alone? 'Worship that is enforced is no longer worship'. The theological issue is an important one and needs to be addressed.

In general, the older the students, the more prominent and acute the question of compulsory worship attendance becomes. Whatever the age of the students, their involvement in worship needs to be handled with respect for the individual's situation and conscience along with an unapologetic restatement of the school's position. Any questions and objections from the students should be handled honestly and sensitively. Staff members who express objections to being required to participate in worship also need to be aware of the school's expectation. Christian staff members are encouraged to be involved in worship and to provide a positive witness to the school community. Staff witness to the importance of worship in the time and significance they give to it.

So what support can be given for the principle of compulsory worship attendance at Lutheran schools?

#### (a) School worship is a community experience

Every class, year level or the whole school is an expression of community. In a community there is a strong expectation of conformity. All are involved. The creation and covenant people join together to honour and glorify the Trinity. School worship is worship in the world and before the world. In that



way it is different from congregational worship. The school is in God's general and specific care, and worship takes place in that context. Staff involvement in worship will also contribute to worship as an expression and experience of community.

There is anecdotal evidence of the positive effects on students and staff of school worship experiences (Bartsch, 1993: p.25). Some students who seriously questioned the wisdom of compulsory worship indicated years later that it was much more important to them than they realised at the time. Some even missed it! Some found it helpful and sustaining.

**(b) School worship is an educational experience**

Teaching and learning occurs in schools. Discovery and exploration are key process aims. The worship experience is provided as part of a comprehensive Christian education. Worship experiences are part of general education in Lutheran schools. In worship students hear the Bible's message as it is read and reflected upon and observe and experience Christian worship.

Worship, however, is an experience that always has a variety of effects on the participants. Some participants may hear and respond positively to the message, some may ignore or reject the message and some may even become negative or hostile.

Students also need opportunity to learn about Christian worship in Christian Studies. Through the exploration and investigation of the history, meaning and forms of Christian worship students can develop their understanding of the importance of worship for Christians and appreciate its significance for the church school.

**(c) School worship is an institutional experience**

'Compulsory worship' is probably an inaccurate phrase as there is a degree of choice involved.

- All families and students have the choice of being enrolled in a Lutheran school. This choice implies an acceptance of the school's requirement for students to attend worship activities.
- Students are not compelled to participate. All students and staff are invited to participate in worship but they are not expected to act against their conscience. It would be unethical and counterproductive to try to force students to pray or sing or make statements of belief. Students who experience respect with their

own faith position may be more likely to show respect for the school's position and practice of worship.

It must be stressed again that the school is not church, in the full sense. It is primarily an agency of the Church to educate, and as such is in the general area of God's care. The school is in the area, broadly, of law. It has rules, regulations and customs with which it chooses to operate. It is a formal educational institution for teaching and learning.

## Core Content

### 5. Issues in worship for the community

**(a) Worship leaders strive for excellence in worship**

Those who prepare and lead worship have a special responsibility to make the messages and worship experience effective and meaningful. Worship leaders are encouraged to strive for excellence. Worship leaders in schools have many expectations demanding their time and energy but school worship needs to be creative, dynamic and meaningful to the community. Worship should be inclusive of the culture and needs of the students and bring the law and gospel to them in sensitive and challenging ways.

**(b) School worship events must be relevant**

School worship coordinators and leaders will seek feedback from the community about the school worship. Staff and students will often have valuable comments, which can be considered for worship practices. The challenge for relevance need not imply compromising the liturgy or the theology. The content must be biblical and theologically correct, but the methods, presentation and application should take into account the daily lives, culture and interests of the students, staff and others who may be present as well. The messages through Word, music, actions and illustrations should not simply communicate information but also motivate people to actively practice the implications and challenges of the message.

**(c) Staff need to promote and display a positive view of school worship**

When staff listen to students who are unhappy about worship they can also challenge students to a meaningful understanding of worship and positive attitude towards it. All staff can exercise a strong, constructive influence by helping students see that one can appreciate and participate in Christian worship without necessarily denying one's own, different spirituality.

**(d) Worship is an opportunity for staff and student leadership training**

Worship also provides a wonderful opportunity for new and committed Christians to put their faith into action and grow in their faith and confidence as God's gifted people.

**(e) Quality resources are needed to match the high value of worship**

Worship is vitally important in Lutheran schools and the budget and resources allocated to it need to reflect its importance. It can be a constant challenge for schools to provide resources that enable a consistently high standard of worship. Money and time allowances are needed in the development of a meaningful worship program. School pastors have a time allowance so they can prepare appropriate experiences. In secondary schools, the music and drama departments are crucial in the promotion of meaningful worship. Christians on staff are encouraged and needed for their contributions to worship in the school. Malcolm Bartsch writes

Worship provides an opportunity for the development of leaders in the school and community. Drama, public speaking, music and reading are all skills that can be used to enhance worship and leadership skills. The title of a devotion book *'My Utmost For His Highest'* reflects the goal of all worship presentations – excellence in worship. Students do not generally enjoy mediocrity, and they will appreciate the effort and preparation which leaders put into worship. All who offer or agree to lead in worship must be given training and support.

'The struggle to retain the importance of worship will always be there and more attention and resources need to be devoted to it. In fact, one might suggest that more attention should be given to this than any other part of the program of the school' (Bartsch, 1993: p.25).

## Conclusion

Worship is the most obvious identification of a school as Lutheran. The fact that in some schools only a minority of staff and students are Lutheran makes it even more important as an expression of identity and ethos. Most importantly, it is a channel for the Holy Spirit to enlighten, sanctify and challenge the learning and believing community.

## 6. Sacrament

Some early followers of Luther were eager to throw away everything associated with the Roman Church. In their fervor for reform they wanted to destroy all that reminded them of the traditional church: the distinction between laity and clergy, vestments and symbols, paintings and statues, and even in some cases church buildings themselves. In spite of being a courageous reformer in many ways, Luther was also conservative and moderate in others. He argued that even where theological argument pointed one way that practical concern for the experience of common people might point in another. So on many issues Luther tried to preserve the patterns that tradition had established.

The Roman Church had maintained there were seven sacraments. Some reformers questioned all of them. Luther used the test of Scripture when it came to examining the issue of the sacraments. What had Christ instituted? What served as a means of grace? Luther argued that using those two tests there should be fewer sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist, the meal in which Christ's body and blood were shared. The traditional Roman understanding of the Eucharist was that the bread and the wine of the meal were literally transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the process of the Mass. Some reformers, by contrast, argued that the language of the words of institution—"This is my body," "This is my blood"—should be understood only symbolically. The Eucharist was, by this reading, simply another occasion to remember Christ's saving grace. Luther argued that Christ's words meant what they said, that Christ was present in the bread and wine. But rather than seeing the Eucharist as the working of a transformation, i.e., what *had been* bread was *now* the body of Christ, Luther saw it as a both/and. For him no magical transformation had taken place. What was bread was still bread and at the same time the body of Christ. It was the real body and blood of Christ, as Luther put it, "in, with, and under" the real bread and wine.

Luther addressed the nature of the sacrament by using the same principle that Christians use in addressing the incarnation. Christ is both truly and fully human and truly and fully God. He is not really one and only apparently the other, as some had argued, nor is he first one and then later the other. The assertion of the incarnation is truly a simultaneous assertion of opposites. Jesus is fully God by being fully human. At this point Christians have been willing to say that logic's principle of noncontradiction must take a back seat. Lutherans would say the same thing about the Eucharist. A paradox or tense conjunction expresses reality more faithfully than any single proposition can.

Though the historical arguments about this issue may seem to contemporary Christians like verbal hair-splitting, the Lutheran affirmation of this both/and has had far-reaching effects in shaping Lutheran thinking. Because of this affirmation Lutherans continue to do several things. (1) They continue to question the absoluteness of apparent opposites: sacred/secular, heaven/earth, the divine/the worldly. So, when asked, "Is it this or is it that?" Lutherans are very likely to answer, "Yes." (2) It has fostered a tendency among Lutherans to find the transcendent in the ordinary, the eternal in the temporal. This can be witnessed to a certain degree in Lutheran architecture, hymnody, art, and literature and in the ways Lutherans understand vocation. (3) It has nurtured in us a kind of earthiness, a reverence for the ordinary that is not so pronounced in more "heaven-bound" forms of Christianity. (4) It has kept us in ecumenical conversation with other sacramental traditions. (5) It has made us suspicious of logical consistency as an end in itself, and willing to explore things that can be affirmed only paradoxically or dialectically.

What is most important to me about sacrament is not to think of it primarily as a separate ceremony but as a way of seeing, a way of regarding all of creation. Sallie McFague expresses something like this as well:

The Christian eye usually does not need any help seeing God. [I'm not so sure of that as she is.] But it does need help seeing the world. . . . My idea of sacrament: holding on hard to the huckleberries, to see all things in God.<sup>20</sup>

Affirmation of incarnation and sacrament is a recognition of God present in the world. Lutherans are not so likely to be supernaturalists [seeing God as above nature] so much as we are sacramentalists—seeing God in nature, in history, in bread and wine and water and word, in the lives of humans, in the life of the church.

## Worship for postmodern times

**Marva J Dawn**

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[Jesus prayed:] 'Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in the truth.' (John 17:17-19)

Frequently on airplanes I meet persons who claim to be very absorbed in 'spirituality' but have no interest in institutional churches and their worship services. 'Churches don't meet my needs', they exclaim and consider the subject ended. Friendly conversation, however, often reveals that they have hidden their genuine needs even from themselves. I think particularly of a gold-bedecked professional gambler sadly departing from a visit with his son in the Midwest, of a fidgety lawyer trying to beat the plane to Anchorage, of a discourteous twenty-something 'needing' fiercely to be entertained, of myself in my own frustrations over various conflicts concerning worship.

How does the church minister to people in postmodern times? When postmodernists think that any meta-narrative<sup>1</sup> is a bid for power, what difference does it make that we Christians believe God's account from creation to culmination is a meta-narrative of grace? How will it affect our thinking about worship services in the third millennium that we believe that the Triune God is the truth? In this article we will paint broad brush strokes to consider the implications of Australian culture's postmodern condition for the church's worship.

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<sup>1</sup> A meta-narrative is a universal, overarching story of truth that is true for all people in all places.

### A specific example

Let us look at one particular case in order to frame the questions we should be asking. A few weeks before Easter one year a Canadian Broadcasting producer in Montreal telephoned me. A few pastors had told her about my book, *Reaching out without dumbing down*, and she questioned the main points of my approach, since she was preparing an Easter afternoon program focusing on what congregations could do to attract Canadians to worship. One generation ago two out of three Canadians participated in worship, but now the ratio is at most one out of three and even fewer in British Columbia and Quebec. As the producer and I conversed about such topics as idolatries that invade churches, wrong turns churches make, confusions about what worship is, and the kinds of questions we should be asking, she kept affirming my ideas. 'That is a good point', she would insist, or 'I see why you say that' or 'that makes a lot of sense'. Consequently, I was utterly astonished when she abruptly inquired, 'and what would you tell churches to do about people like me? I never go to church'. She compared herself to the typical middle-aged, disinterested defector from worship and asked how churches should attract her. How would you have responded?

The key question this conversation raised is *not* what worship should be to draw such people. The real issue is, in a culture which is increasingly non-Christian, post-Christian, or even anti-Christian, what does it mean to be church for the sake of the world when we worship and during the rest of the week?

### The answer some give

Many church leaders these days would simply frame their response to this Canadian producer in terms of the question of appeal. For example, consider these remarks from David Luecke's review of my book, *Reaching out without dumbing down*, in a recent edition of the journal *Worship Innovations*. Luecke is referring to my endorsement of Kenneth A Myer's distinction between gourmet food, traditional home cooking and fast food, as examples of high, folk or pop culture.<sup>2</sup> Luecke writes,

The assumption is that most people would prefer gourmet food if they could get it. That's questionable. It can be hard to digest and the cost in time or money is usually too high ... Home cooking in general seems to be disappearing. That leaves Burger King. The whole worship discussion could be reframed around two alternatives: If you and your congregation had to choose between being a fancy French restaurant or a Burger King, which would you prefer? Most advocates of contemporary worship, including me, would opt for Burger King; in a given week it feeds a lot more people, and the food meets the needs. Which kind of food service do you think Jesus and Paul would choose?

<sup>2</sup> On pages 183–88 of *Reaching out without dumbing down: a theology of worship for the turn-of-the-century culture* (Eerdmans, 1995), I comment favourably on the three-fold distinction that Myers makes, in his *All God's children and blue suede shoes: Christians and popular culture* (Westchester, Illinois, Crossway Books, 1989).

First, we must note that Luecke's term, *contemporary worship*, is usually poorly defined in the various controversies over the subject. In addition, Luecke's comments and questions force us to raise several sets of deeper ones because his inquiries emphasise choice and preferences. Should these be our guidelines? Instead, the scriptures convince me that, in responding to the Canadian broadcaster's challenge, the principle question must be, 'What should the church BE?'

Luecke's review and similar arguments raised in worship discussions do not consider the essential, foundational biblical perspectives on the issues of who we are as God's people in community, what it means to gather together for worship to immerse ourselves in God's splendour to learn how to be church and, consequently, how we reach out to the world. Therefore let us focus on the unbiblical notions illustrated by Luecke's review and ask the following questions of the responses typified in his words.

### Questions we should ask

1. Isn't the gospel sometimes hard to digest? Luecke complains that worship should not be like gourmet food which 'can be hard to digest'—but if it is always easy are we giving its participants the true God? The Triune God is mysterious, infinitely beyond our imagining, eternally wiser than we—a LORD who says, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways' (Isa 55:8). Christ repeatedly says, 'Woe to you!' (eg Luke 6:24–26). That can be very difficult to stomach.
2. Doesn't discipleship cost a lot? Luecke wants to avoid gourmet worship because 'the cost in time and money is usually too high'—but don't we have a Christ who told a rich man to sell all he had, who warned those who wanted to turn back home that they weren't fit for the kingdom? (see Luke 18:18–27 and 9:57–62). If our worship is not costly, how will we teach what discipleship means? The medium must match the message.
3. Which kind of food service did Jesus choose? Since He participated faithfully in worship at the Temple and the local synagogue, in Judaism's ritualised festivals and feasts, we could compare His choices both to home cooking and gourmet food. What kind of 'food service' does Paul signify when he urges us to 'seek the things which are above'? Which food will give us 'a foretaste of the feast to come'? How will our worship give its participants a vision of the heavenly kingdom? We need gourmet cooking to be immersed in God's splendour.
4. We have to ask why the home cooking of tradition in worship is disappearing. Is the heritage that could enfold us in the language of faith practised through the ages no longer important? Why have we lost the traditions that link us to people of faith throughout time and space? Many critiques of the postmodern world lament the control of advertising and an escalating world 'monoculture' which destroy social institutions and cultural folkways. Should churches be contributing to this cultural reduction, this destruction of musical 'home cooking'?

5. Which need, besides the need for speed, does Burger King food meet? If worship is like Burger King, how will we form the habits and practices, customs and manners of being God's people? For example, how will we teach profound meditation, awe-full silence, reflection on meaty doctrines, musical depth, memorisation of extensive texts, steadfast intimacy with the true God, the church's continuity, genuine community, earnest repentance, grieving lament, disciplined cross-bearing, timeless truth, the beauty of holiness, and faithful goodness? Will we learn those if our worship is like Burger King?
6. I don't advocate only one gourmet restaurant, but a plethora of them. I hope that worship could sometimes include Aboriginal as well as soul music, songs from South Africa and Russia, from the fourth century as well as the sixteenth, eighteenth, or twenty-first. Will we learn true diversity at Burger King?
7. No matter which food service worship resembles, we must ask whether it meets *genuine* needs—the needs of our lonely, decentred, hopeless, postmodern world. What is good for us and our neighbours? What will actually contribute to growth in faith? As we eat, are we growing stronger or just fatter?

Of course, the food analogy breaks down if we stretch it too far. But isn't it a serious theological problem to say that worship should be like Burger King because other food is hard to digest and costs too much in time and money? It seems to me that then we are talking merely about marketing and entertainment, instead of discussing worship, formation for discipleship, and liturgy (which means 'the work of the people').

These seven sets of questions and comments demonstrate thoroughly how wrong the direction is if churches merely ask how worship can appeal to people. Congregations and denominations are not declining for lack of attractive or 'contemporary' worship, but churches are failing for lack of theological questioning and training, of hospitality, and of displaying a way of life worthy of being pursued. I am not an elitist about worship style, for I emphasise the plurality of gifts in various styles. But I am adamant with respect to asking better questions about what it means to be a Christian and to be church together, about how people are formed by the narratives of the Bible to follow Christ, and about pursuing the way of discipleship, which costs us all of our time and money and sometimes is very hard to digest.

### **Wrong turns in the face of modernity and the postmodern condition**

In the face of postmodern society's loss of meta-narrative and negation of meaning, its despair, emptiness and *ennui*, its deficit in moral consensus or commitment, its hopelessness and *anomie*, its rejection of authority and of any truth claims—all destructive effects generated by postmodernity—what is the church to be and do?

These are the societal illnesses for which congregations and their leaders must be concerned and not merely the downward trends in worship attendance in Australia. Responding *merely to the symptoms and not the illnesses*, some congregations have

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taken drastic turns in recent years without adequate thinking about the theological, ecclesiological, and missional implications. Though the following list is far too cursory, it summarises some of the moves that should be questioned:

- In the face of the relativising of truth, some pastors and musicians are offering less truth instead of more, becoming therapeutic instead of theological. No wonder people are bored with 'church'—and the preachers are bored. Don't you find yourself much more interested if you have too much to say? If we recognise that Christianity always has too much to say—for God is always full of surprises—then we perceive the need for more content and not less, especially with the biblical illiteracy that characterises my land and yours.
- With society's proliferation of amusements and diversions, some worship leaders sacrifice content for entertainment and confuse worship with evangelism and evangelism with marketing. Instead, our worship forms should reflect our life in Christ, the way of Jesus. We can't draw people to the kingdom with entertainment, only to jolt them into the truth that the Christian life is the way of the cross. The process by which one is born from above should give a foretaste of faith's lifelong struggle for maturity, God's goal for the whole Christian community.
- As society increasingly becomes more openly pluralistic and less supportive of Christianity specifically, some congregations blur their unique identity as God's people, instead of accentuating it with loving commitment. To say it doesn't really matter if you are a Christian, as long as you are sincere, is to be ashamed of the gospel and the scandal of our particularity. Could I go to an airport, get on any plane, and hope that I wind up in Adelaide, Australia, as long as I'm sincere? Certainly it is true that in a pluralistic society Christians err if we are imperialistic about our particularity, and coercive instead of hospitable. But our faith is in a Triune God of good news, and the truth of God's grace accomplished and demonstrated in Christ remains unique and uniquely to be shared.
- As the culture becomes increasingly rootless, some denominations and individual parishes are giving up their heritage as communities with long histories and global connections. Many people in our society are struggling to find who they are and where they belong. A movie description provides an apt illustration. The summary said that a single mother, an architect, meets an every-other-weekend dad who is a journalist, and all they have in common is the same kind of mobile phone. How will they fall in love? Think of this story from their offsprings' perspective, and realise how pervasive in society such situations are. The children have been denied a completion to the storyline of their original two parents. Is a mobile phone enough to heal the rupture for them?
- Children in my husband's former fifth-grade classes with multiple parents demonstrate that nothing can ever totally heal the rupture. How can children without the security of completely faithful parents be able to trust who they are? In the face of such discontinuity and abandonment, to give up the roots of our faith that go all the way back to Sarah and Abraham, is a very harmful thing to do. We thereby



give up our ties to our forebears in the Jewish and Christian heritage, our history of God's interventions, our connections to the global community of believers.

- In the face of the culture's loss of moral authority, some churches become tolerant to the point of ceasing to be formed by scriptural narratives. Why should we allow society's relativising of morals to cause us to reject the clear instructions and moral patterns of the Triune God in the scriptures? In the name of a false compassion, genuine love is replaced with conformity to a culture detached from any ethical centre.
- In response to the increasing clamour for choice, some congregations foster consumerism according to 'felt needs' instead of embracing what is truly needful. Correlatively, churches are turned into a democracy in which doctrine and practice are decided by majority preferences. One result of the notion that Christ's body is characterised by choice is bitter battles over taste. Another result is that in our current therapeutic society, everyone thinks he or she 'needs' emotional coddling, whereas God has repeatedly taught us that Christians can *know* better. Especially in the face of suffering we learn that the will is stronger than our emotions and that faith can trust a God who might even be momentarily hidden. Ministering merely to felt needs and choices cheats worshipers of the truths and maturity they need to engage their wills over their emotions.

### Hear clearly what I am saying

Please do not think, on the basis of the foregoing list, that I am advocating a wooden traditionalism. Jaroslav Pelikan's distinction is forever apt: *traditionalism* is the dead faith of the living, whereas *tradition* is the living faith of the dead. In the worship controversies between 'traditionalists' and 'contemporaryists' I am opposed to both polarities and want the *best* from both sides, since the church's treasure house is filled with both new and old. Since our congregations are linked to all God's people throughout space and time, we need both continuity with our heritage and constant reformation using faithful new forms and words and musical styles.

Also, I am not advocating biblicism or biblical idolatry. When I call for more truth and not less, I yearn for that truth to be presented without oppression or violence, with genuine care for the listeners, in vital forms, with the honest and humble recognition that we know truth only partially.

Most important, do not think I'm not interested in evangelism. I am, but I am also really worried about some misconceptions thriving these days. Evangelism arises out of intense concern for ministering to our neighbours in this postmodern world. In fact, let us return now to the Canadian producer who asked, 'What will you tell churches to do about me? I don't go to church'. 'First of all, I would like to be your friend', I replied, and she reacted with stunned silence. I told her that our conversation had revealed that we had much in common, that we could become great friends. 'We would have wonderful, probing conversations', I said. She immediately inquired, 'and would those conversations turn to the topic of faith in Christ?' 'Invariably', I acknowledged, 'because Jesus Christ is the centre of my life'. 'And', she then broke in, 'your life would show me that faith makes a difference?' 'Yes, I pray so', I responded. 'And then I would hope that you might want to come with me to worship the Triune God.'

### **What we need is the truth**

What we need in worship is the truth—the whole truth, nothing less than the truth. Truth gives us good guidelines for the witness of our lives and in our worship services.

The truth that the church has to offer people caught in the postmodern condition must be shared in all its wholeness. To those who criticise Christianity because it has been—and sometimes now is—violent and oppressive, we respond by repentantly admitting that they are right. Beyond accepting the blame for Christians' failures in history, we recognise the whole truth that we remain corrupt and fallible. Scripture teaches us thoroughly that our nature is helplessly sinful, hopelessly lost. That truth forces us to acknowledge that we cannot know the truth entirely, that our eyes are blinded by sin, that our understanding of God is only partial. But that does not negate God's truth nor our recognition of Christ, who is himself the way, the truth and the life.

Against the postmodern rejection of meta-narrative, we Christians humbly suggest the non-oppressive, all-inclusive story of a Triune God who creates, redeems, and unifies as manifestations of perfect love and grace for the whole world. The Christian meta-narrative is the account of a promising God who always keeps His promises—a truth manifested in the Old Testament history of Israel and most clearly seen in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, who died and rose again in fulfillment of God's promises. We believe that this meta-narrative will reach its ultimate fulfillment when Jesus comes again to bring God's promised gracious reign to fruition—and thus the meta-narrative of God's kingdom already initiated gives us all that we most deeply need of hope, purpose, and fulfillment in this present life.

This God of eternal mystery condescends to reveal Himself to us—a process to which He invites us by drawing us to worship him. That is why our worship needs to be structured as richly and deeply as possible, so that we never lose sight of the fact that God is the one who enables us to come to worship and the infinite centre who thus receives our praise.

Furthermore, our worship must contain nothing but the truth. Music, songs, scripture lessons, sermons, liturgical forms, architecture, and other accoutrements of art and gesture and ambience are all means by which God invites, reveals, and forms us. Shallow—I did not say *simple*—worship materials will not reveal God's truth. Instead, they will both shape shallow theology and form us superficially. Songs with cheap or sentimental lyrics or banal music belie God's coherence and integrity. Sermons that draw attention to the preacher's eloquence or merely to the illusory needs of the listeners deprive the congregation of the formative power of scriptural narratives for meeting our genuine needs for repentant insight, constant forgiveness, authentic security, unconditional love, absolute healing, faithful presence, fruitful freedom, compelling motivation and coherent guidance for daily life, and eternal hope.

One worship service can never give us the whole truth, but worship must never give us untruth or less than truth. Our finite minds cannot begin to grasp all that there is to learn about God, but every time the community gathers, corporate worship contributes to our total store of truth. Only by God's grace and in the context of prayer and the whole Christian community can worship leaders prepare services that present as much truth as possible.

Against postmodernity's rejection of the past and of authority, in the church we realise that we are greatly helped in our planning by the wisdom gathered throughout the church's existence, by history's sorting of the good from the less-than-good in hymns and liturgies and interpretations. Now it is our responsibility to sort through what is new in order to choose what is true—keeping God as the subject/object of our worship, nurturing the truthful character of individual believers, and forming the Christian community to be outreaching with the truth that we know.

### **Equipping the saints for ministry**

If worship stays well focused on God as its centre, participants will become better equipped to be God's witnesses to their worlds. To introduce our families and neighbours and co-workers to the Trinity and to God's gifts for them, we need an ever-growing understanding of His promises, His character, His interventions in the world, His truth that underlies our realities. Out of a character formed by the biblical narratives, by their faithful interpretation, and by resulting sound doctrine will flow love that responds to God's love. Such a character will manifest forgiveness that recognises the potency of the Father's grace, actions that follow the model of Jesus, encouragement and compassion empowered by the Paraclete.

Of course, strong Christian character cannot be formed if the worship hour is the only time the church has to nurture it, but worship's subtle influence on character dare not be misdirected. If we sing only narcissistic ditties, we will develop a faith that depends on feelings and that is inward-curved, instead of outward-turned.

Worship as truth and thereby formative of character must be a major issue for our churches because the immense needs of our world require persons nurtured by depth and faithfulness, rather than by what is flimsy, if not flippant. It is essential that worship carefully equip the saints with faith's truths so that they can witness to, and serve, their neighbours. The church needs both preachers and musicians with great faithfulness to give worship participants what they need instead of what they think they need, to offer that which is needful instead of catering to neediness. Ultimately—though probably not at first—this meat will be much more satisfying than the pabulum of a schmoozy emotionalism.

2 Timothy 3:14–17 invites us to be trained in the holy scriptures—to know them and be formed by them and not just 'believe' as if that were a leap in the dark, to have habits and not selfish preferences. We need that kind of training much more than our parents did, since the society no longer supports it and since so many cultural forces alien to the gospel impinge on our lives and urge our conformity. Yet many congregations these days present only 'adult forums' and sermons which merely 'share opinions' on various issues rather than offering deep explication of scripture to lay the basis for genuine Christian thinking, thorough teaching of the biblical narratives in order to form us to react as God's people with kingdom values to the problems and social concerns of our everyday lives. Why does so much of the new and old music used in many congregations lack theological depth, biblical images, motivation to be about God's purposes of witnessing, justice building, and peace making in the world? What kind of people are our worship services forming?

### **A vision**

During His earthly life Jesus prayed for us—those who would believe through his disciples' witness—that we would be sanctified in the truth and then sent out into the world to bear testimony to it (John 17:17–21). That is a wonderful description of worship: that by the Father's gracious invitation, Christ's intercession and the Spirit's enabling, we are welcomed to learn of, and be in union with, the Trinity through the biblical narratives passed on by faithful witnesses. Gathered in the community of saints, we are formed by the truth taught in worship's music and word to be church so that out of our Christian character will flow the witness of our words and deeds for the sake of the world.

The postmodern world surrounding us yearns for stability, morality, security, fidelity, faith, hope and love. These deep needs can only be met through the one who is the truth. Let us make sure that the worship services we plan and guide present that truth in all its clarity and beauty and goodness.

## **Full immersion: a valid approach to worship in Christian schools?**

**Andrew Jaensch**

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Advocates of the immersion approach to language learning point to its effectiveness with young learners in particular. Immersion uses the target language—say, French—as a teaching instrument for all subjects on the school curriculum, as well as for extracurricular activities. A related approach called partial immersion commits a portion—usually about half—of school time to employing the target language.

While the immersion approach is not as effective as some other methods in developing grammatical accuracy, its proponents suggest that being thrown in at the deep end forces the learners to develop their skills to the point where it is almost impossible not to become fluent in the language. Not only that, learners become adept in using the language in more authentic ways.

Could it be, then, that immersion—understood loosely—is the best approach to worship in Christian schools? In other words, is it legitimate, even advisable, to 'subject' the school community to the experience of Christian worship, whether or not all are Christians? Perhaps such an immersion experience will allow them to 'pick up' at least some cognitive understanding of Christian worship, maybe an affective appreciation of it, and in some students or staff Christian faith may be created and/or nurtured.

There is a need here to clarify what we mean by 'worship'. A broad range of terms for worship is used in the New Testament. Brunner boils down the experience to this: 'worship means to be assembled in the name of Jesus' (18). Defining worship more precisely and systematically, the Lutheran writer Timothy Maschke (19–20) describes it as the kind of faith-based activity which occurs the world over on Sundays and which includes the dimensions of

- Encounter: Worship is a profound encounter with God and his manifold gifts to his people (19).
- Expression: Worship is also an expression of our faith or a response to what God has done for us in Christ (22).

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- Education: As education, worship teaches the faith and nurtures the faithful because it is Word-oriented (24).
- Evangelism: Whatever we do in worship expresses our faith so that others may see (25).

Worship in Christian schools is associated with a wide range of events, including whole school chapels, small group devotions, end-of-year services, staff devotions and Eucharistic celebrations, to name just a few. This article focuses on large group worship events which students and staff are required to attend. Unless otherwise indicated, the Christian *schools* under consideration here have diverse student and staff populations. They include Christians of various persuasions, theists, agnostics, atheists and adherents of non-Christian traditions.

The idea of worship in schools as immersion is not a new one. Some history of church schooling will help to spell this out. At the time of the Lutheran Reformation in Europe there were many schools for boys—some also for girls—that were run by the church or by the church on behalf of the state. In many cases these were music schools, since many of them had been set up to provide music for worship in associated churches. These grammar schools had a focus on training a choir for the performance of the divine service in large city churches, while others were more strictly grammar schools that trained young people for work in the church and in public life. Many were also boarding schools.

At these schools all students were baptised members of the church, as were virtually all the citizens of the countries of Europe at that time. As far as worship was concerned, it was the tradition at these schools to hold matins and vespers daily. Later, princes established their own schools to train people for service to church and society. For example, the hymn writer Paul Gerhardt attended a Lutheran school in order to get a classical theological education. Such schools took students beyond what we would call today year twelve. These schools had their origin in the Middle Ages. They were often established in monasteries that had closed but were kept for church use as hospitals, schools and the like.

In keeping with the monastic history of the buildings, education in these schools was somewhat monastic in style. Some retained the seven hours of the daily office. These were matins and lauds, counted as one, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers and compline. The worship day began at 1.00 am in summer and concluded at 8.00 pm. Most limited worship to matins and vespers, to allow time for the education program. The emphasis in this approach was the immersing of students in Christian worship. It operated on the assumption that all students were baptised Christians and with the conviction—conscious or otherwise—that the way to learn the faith was just to do it through worship.

Of course, our purpose here is not to evaluate past practices but to consider their validity for Christian schools at the beginning of the twenty first century. So, considering the changed nature of so many Christian school communities from totally Christian to highly

pluralistic, can immersion be seriously considered as theologically, philosophically and educationally valid practice for the kinds of Christian schools described above?

In what follows, a case will be made for the value of immersing the members of a school community in the experience of Christian worship, even if it is alien to many. Supporting the case made here is the common experience of people spending time in cultures other than their own—including students on a visit to another country—who often speak with joy and gratitude of the fact that they were welcomed into a particular family or school. An element of this experience has been that these visitors were permitted to observe and even take part in aspects of that community's rituals and ceremonies. Perhaps there is a parallel here to the situation of non-Christians attending Christian worship.

There is also a strong attraction within Generation X and Y for ritual and its associated mystery. Such an attraction is nothing new, just more pronounced in these generations than previous generations. Learning by experience and doing through ritual is significant in all generations, but it is especially so for young children. This leads to the conclusion that there is special value in providing worship experiences for this age group which involve them in the action in as many ways as possible. As a consequence the young students will be helped to grasp Christian realities more fully, and the opportunity for development of the child's faith will be enhanced. Apparently, not only the very young benefit from such an approach. He was officially Anglican but former British Prime Minister Tony Blair regularly attended Catholic mass with his wife Cherie. Following his recent conversion to Catholicism, his former press secretary remarked in an interview on ABC Radio National that 'if you pray the mystery of the mass, you believe it too'. In response to the question, 'How do you learn mystery?' Paprocki and Williamson say you don't.

You enter into, encounter, and experience it... How, then, do you teach or communicate mystery to another? Again, you don't. The most you can do is proclaim your own experience, which is not easy to do in words alone, invite others to enter into it, and then accompany them on the pathway that leads to and then through their own experience of mystery. Just ask any catechist who has worked with adults preparing for baptism. (1)

As an illustration of this the authors (2) describe the experience of American Civil War veteran John Dunbar as portrayed in the film *Dances with wolves*. He is assigned to an abandoned fort where he is serving alone. Recuperating after a severe injury and after trying to end his life, Dunbar is invited by the local Sioux tribe to participate in the bison hunt and the sacred rituals which follow, finds himself drawn into the 'mystery' and becomes a changed man.

I have observed this phenomenon in the context of sacramental celebrations within school worship. In my previous school I regularly observed the attraction of the Eucharistic mystery for many student boarders who were neither Lutherans nor consciously committed Christians. These young people had to attend Sunday Eucharistic services, yet they were drawn to go forward and receive Holy Communion. I made it a point whenever I knew about this to speak pastorally with the students involved. Occasionally I have come across a student who did it 'for a dare' or out of idle curiosity, but in the vast majority of cases they expressed a genuine yearning for the mysterious 'something' in the sacrament. Most of these students have also been able to articulate, however simply, what this 'something' was for them. Especially remarkable is that all this occurred in spite of the fact that the students were 'forced' to attend worship.

The subject of 'mystery' within the context of worship immersion takes us unavoidably into the area of ritual. Ritual is gaining more attention as postmodernism takes effect and people become more open to realities beyond the empirical. Ritual is central to liturgical Christian worship. Apart from the sign of the cross there is the passing of the peace, the holding up of the host in the sacrament, the placing of the minister's hand on the head of the person being baptised or confirmed, to name just a few ritual actions. Even Christian denominational traditions which eschew liturgy and ritual find it impossible to avoid it altogether.

In what ways can and does ritual contribute to the effectiveness of the immersion experience in school worship? A personal experience may help to provide an answer. In late 2007 I was doing some supply teaching in the school where I had been pastor for nine years until the end of 2006. On a brief visit to a Year 2 class, a boy asked me if I could do the 'within me' with them again. At first I had no idea what he was talking about, but with repeated attempts at 'translation' the penny dropped. He was asking me to pray the version of St Patrick's Prayer, with actions, I had used regularly in Junior School chapels during my time at the school. So, I dusted off the cobwebs of my brain, and we did it there in the Year 2 classroom.

Christ be with me (hands to chest)

Christ before me (palms extended in front of chest)

Christ behind me... (You get the idea)

There is considerable anecdotal evidence that by being immersed in worship, significant numbers of students and staff learn, cognitively, affectively, spiritually. This evidence is not sufficient, of course. More serious and thorough consideration needs to be given to the philosophical issues involved in Christian school worship. Marius J Felderhof from the University of Birmingham has responded convincingly to Professor John Hull's position on school worship, published in 1975. Hull's book, *School worship: an obituary*, was written against the backdrop of the reality in the United Kingdom.



Since the 1944 Education Act a daily act of worship has been a legal requirement in all state schools. In that legislation it had to be the whole school assembling at the start of the day. Despite the legal right of withdrawal from assembly, this statute was controversial from the beginning, but the rapid changes in British society since the Second World War—especially secularisation and immigration—soon brought massive pressures to bear on schools as they tried to keep the law. The typical format of the school assembly changed under the influence of these pressures from a watered-down church service in the 1950s to the whole variety of pick-and-mix cocktails from the 1960s onwards. The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) tried to provide a more realistic legal framework for collective worship. It sought to satisfy the desire to maintain the Christian heritage of Britain by retaining the legal requirement for daily collective worship and specified that it should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'. (Cheetham: 3,4)

In certain key respects, questions about school worship in government-run schools in Britain are remarkably similar to those faced by most Christian schools in Australia. Both systems contain very culturally and religiously diverse populations of students and staff, so both school systems must question the appropriateness of requiring the attendance of everyone at acts of worship which are essentially Christian in nature. This is the core question which Hull addresses in his work.

He contends that 'because of the pluralistic nature of the school communities and of the community at large to which the school is responsible, and because of the nature of the education process compared with the nature of worship, and so on, worship in the county school is an anomaly' (104).

Central to Hull's position is his distinction between 'general' education and 'specific' education. He describes 'general' education as 'that entire relationship between the generations in which the total culture of a society is passed on and renewed. In this broadest sense, everything we are that has not been genetically inherited, our language, our outlook, all that has been learned, is the product of education' (4).

On the other hand, for Hull, 'specific' education has six defining features.

1. It seeks to pass on knowledge of the principles of a subject (53).
2. It is interested in the person rather than the content (54).
3. It welcomes controversy (55).
4. It seeks to engage the active support of the pupil, to elicit his (sic) willing co-operation and to enhance his autonomy, and is deliberately critical of its own content (56).
5. It must be ethical in the way it treats people, which prevents it from violating the individual's own personal growth (56).
6. And finally, its authority is intrinsic to the person. Extrinsic controls over learning are only compatible with specific education if their intention is to make themselves unnecessary as soon as possible (58).

Hull's position, which is dependent on this distinction between general and specific education, is succinctly summarised by Felderhof as follows:

1. All activities in school are—or ought to be—either 'specifically' educational or 'broadly' educational.
2. Worship intrinsically subverts education in its specific sense.
3. Therefore worship cannot be a part of schooling devoted to specific education.
4. In general, there are many activities that are broadly educational, of which worship may be one.
5. In British schools only those broadly educational activities are appropriate to it which are subordinate to, and ultimately serve the objectives of, education in its more specific sense.
6. However, worship cannot be one of the broadly educational activities that are subordinate to, and ultimately serve the objectives of, 'specific' education because it intrinsically subverts specific education.
7. Therefore, it is always inappropriate to worship in school. (223)

Of particular interest here is the fact that Hull dedicates a chapter to the same issue as it applies to *church* schools. He suggests that, where a school population is made up entirely of children of, say, Catholics, worship and education may be compatible, though not necessarily advisable. Even in this Christian school context, though, worship must not be conducted in such a way that it deprives the hearer of reason (105). In stressing further that the goals of specific education not be violated, Hull goes on to say:

Pupils and their parents in church schools have a right to expect that the authorities in the school will provide a chapel and a chaplain and other aids for coming to know and live and worship as Christians. But because of the mixed nature of most church schools and because of the educational role of all of them, nurture must be offered, not enforced. It must be available but it must not be compulsory. (110)

In response to Hull, Felderhof says that it is indeed philosophically valid to include worship in schools. If the school is serious about teaching religion then it must include worship because it is not possible to understand a religion without experience of that religion's worship. Worship is of the very essence of a religion 'as its motivation, substance and goal' (219).

Felderhof says that Hull's second premise (above) is fundamentally flawed. He points out that there is an evident compatibility between many quite different human activities, such as walking and talking. In schools as well, such disparate actions as disciplining and entertaining, caring and competing, can happily coexist. Felderhof (222) asserts that Hull needs to show that worship *subverts* the goals of education, in the same way that 'drowning' and 'breathing' are incompatible.

He goes on to suggest that, only if education is committed wholly and solely to specific education, can worship be regarded as subverting it. But Hull himself includes 'training' and 'instruction' within his description of broadly educational activities and clearly the world of schooling embraces these. Felderhof points out Hull's admission that, since 'worship is amenable to training and instruction and one might train and instruct through worship, then in this sphere at least there seems to be no reason for excluding worship from the schooling process ... under the broader heading of general education' (223).

Felderhof then contends that 'education that aspires to share with the young the complexity of human life will also wish to give access to the religious life. On the condition that, *prima facie*, religious life appears to have some intrinsic merit, there would be some ground for sharing its practice in school' (226). Writers like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Phillip Adams will dispute this, but assumptions are constantly being made in schooling about the merits, for example, of business studies. Why should religion be singled out for special attention? Felderhof continues with the claim that, as a consequence of the previous point, worship in school is educationally important because it is central to religious life, and for the development of the understanding of something—in this case, religion—one must master its practice (227).

In the second part of his critique, Felderhof addresses Hull's claim that 'literal worship'—as distinct from activities like personal reflection not directed at a deity—and a questioning attitude are incompatible. But which Christian could honestly claim, as Hull does, that for us 'worship always takes place on the far side of that kind of critical and self-conscious reflection' (36), as if certainty of doctrine is the *sine qua non* of worship. Felderhof (22) points out two flaws in Hull's reasoning at this point.

1. If the unconditional willingness to question everything rules out every commitment as such, how can education be self-critical?
2. Does the devotion found in worship prevent self-critical questioning? If so, what is one to do with the questioning of Job, or with the Psalmist who, in the context of worship, exclaims, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Psalm 22.1), or what is one to do with St Anselm's Proslogion, where the sense of belief in God is tested within the context of meditational prayer?

Whatever the nature of the faith of those present, 'literal' worship can still take place. That is, people can still be 'assembled in the name of Jesus' (Brunner), and what takes place can still involve encounter, expression, education and evangelism (Maschke).

Felderhof concludes his critique of Hull's position using Socrates, 'sometimes taken as the paradigm of all educators', as a test case. Space does not permit a detailed summary of Felderhof on this. In summary, though, he shows (22–24) how both education and religion were bound up in the trial that led to Socrates' execution. The charge against him was that his questioning approach to education had brought about the corruption of the young. Moreover, he was also accused of impiety for his rejection of the established religion. Yet his defence address at his trial concluded with an appeal

to the judgement of God. Felderhof comments (23) that Socrates' 'educational practice of radical questioning, his integrity, his unconditional commitment and his piety all seemed to be interrelated and interdependent'.

Hull claims that 'there is a tension between worship and education. This tension may be summarised by saying that worship is committed to its content and is passionate and adoring, while education is detached from its content and is inquiring and reflective' (62). But I have substantial anecdotal evidence from my own experience and the experience of others, both young and old, of education and worship not only co-existing but also nurturing the other. Essential for this happy coexistence is thoughtful explanation of the reasons that worship is included in the life of the school. Also vital is the use of sensitive, non-presumptuous language in worship which does not compromise the intelligence or the conscience of those present, especially as children turn into adolescents and adults.

Felderhof acknowledges that 'whether (worship in schools) is practicable, socially desirable and politically reasonable in an increasingly secular and religiously plural society is quite another matter' (219). Nevertheless, he makes a strong case for the legitimacy of worship in schools and, I would add, the legitimacy of immersing the whole church school community in worship because it is cognitively, affectively and spiritually helpful within the overall educational process.

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by Greg Priebbenow



*A series of articles examining six practices that help disciples of Christ develop a faith that works in real life*

# the practice of worship

As part of the 1998 Australian Community Survey, infrequent and non-attenders were asked to state their reasons for not attending church. Forty-two percent said church services were boring or unfulfilling. Thirty-four percent said they saw no need to go to church.

Thirty-one percent said they preferred to be doing other things. In other words, nearly a third considered

worship to be, relatively speaking, a waste of time.

From a human point of view worship might seem to accomplish very little. Words, songs and rituals do not amount to much in a world focused on efficiency and optimal time usage. Neither is worship particularly

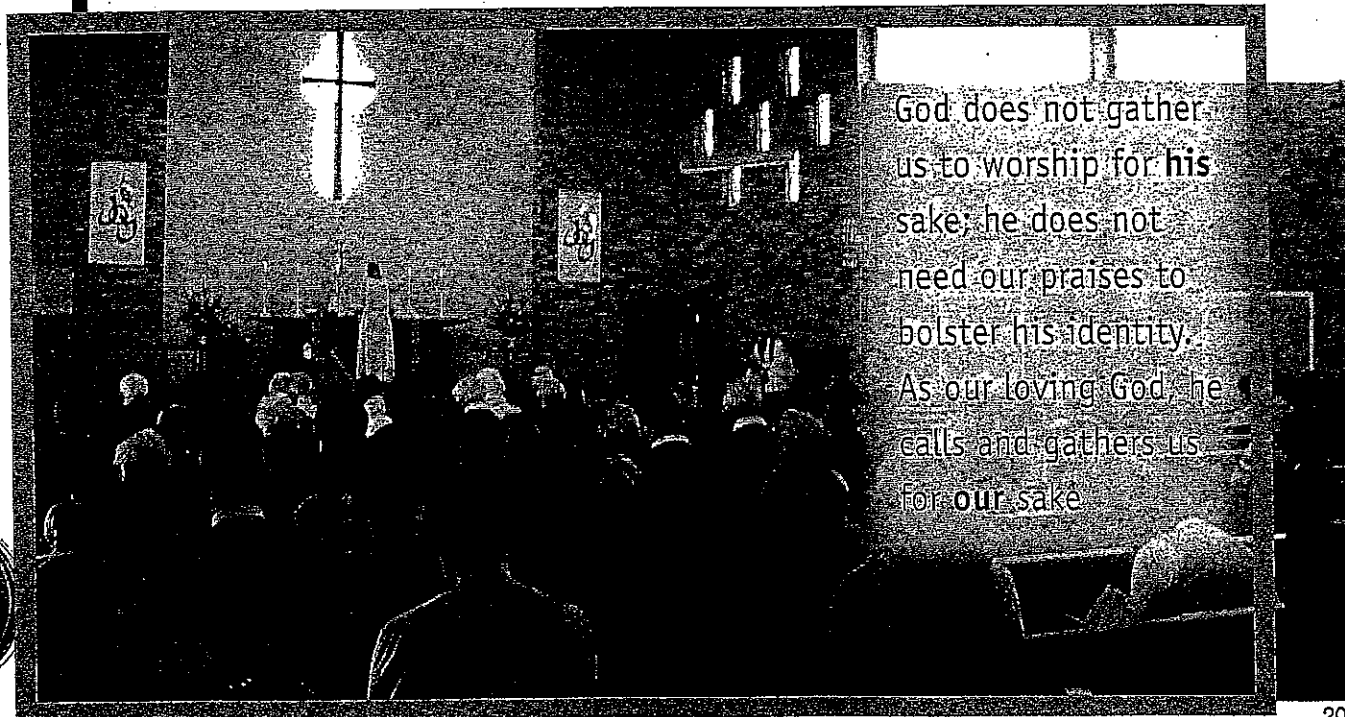
entertaining in comparison to the many alternative ways of spending an hour or two on a Sunday. So why do Christians worship? What is the point? And why is it a practice that is worth making a regular part of one's life? In his book *Real Faith for Real Life*, Michael Foss gives four reasons.

**We worship in order to receive God's life-giving and sustaining gifts.**

While many people think of worship as something we offer to God, it is God who is the true creator, actor and giver in worship. God does not gather us to worship for his sake; he does not need our praises to bolster his identity. As our loving God he calls and gathers us for our sake, to bring us into relationship with him and to sustain our life in him.

As we hear his word preached, God creates faith in us, builds our trust in him and ministers to us in the pains and struggles of life. Through the

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God does not gather us to worship for his sake; he does not need our praises to bolster his identity. As our loving God, he calls and gathers us for our sake.

gospel of the absolution God announces that we are free from sin so that we might have an open relationship with him. Through the 'family meal' of holy communion, we are enlivened by the life of Christ, present and active in us. A life of faith that does not involve a commitment to regular worship is usually undernourished. In worship, God comes to bless us with what we need to live fully into our identity as his people.

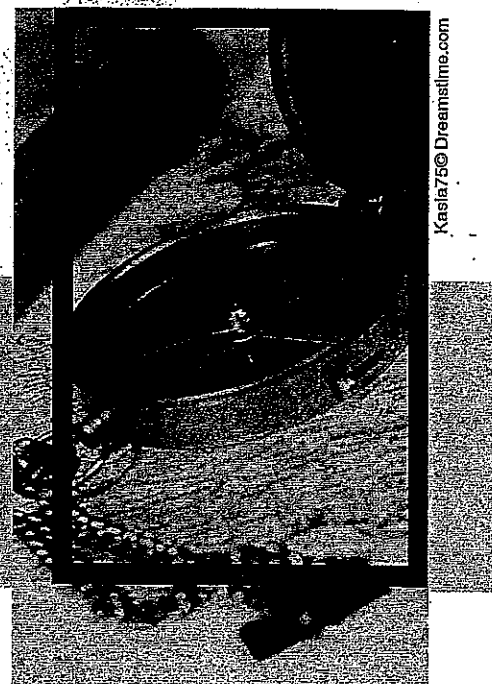
**We worship to fulfil our essential purpose.** When God created the heavens and the earth his final act of creation was the seventh day. This day, set aside for humans to rest from their labours and simply be with God, was the pinnacle of his handiwork. It was not humans that were the zenith of his creation, but life in relationship with God. We humans were not created as our own end but to live beyond ourselves in relationship with our creator. Foss says that 'the human soul that does not worship shrinks into itself. That which was created to house eternity, that part of us that longs to be embraced by forever, shrinks to the

confines of its own desires ... Without worship we confuse the temporary satisfactions of pleasure for the eternal joy of God's gift of purpose for our lives.'

God gives worship to us as a weekly compass to reorient our lives towards that which is good and true

### **We worship for the sake of others.**

Many people conceive of worship as an individual activity for the sake of personal needs. Worship is then evaluated according to what one 'gets out of it'. This perspective of worship reflects the overriding mentality of our consumeristic society. Worship is understood as a service-delivery mechanism designed to satisfy the spiritual yearnings of attenders. But worship, like the faith it encapsulates, is essentially a community thing. We worship together with others and for the sake of others. By simply being present at worship we are a sign and encouragement to others in their faith. Through our prayers and caring interactions we bring God's power to bear in the lives of others. When our



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focus in coming to worship is not on 'getting' but on 'giving', our hearts reflect the giving nature of God and we are more likely to recognise him at work. In the life of faith the 'getting' is often in the 'giving'. As Jesus said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). So, come to worship ready for God to use you in the life of another.

**We worship to remain oriented towards the person and call of Christ.** In any given week there are many stresses, pressures and distractions that can shift our focus away from following Christ and pursuing his purposes. God gives worship to us as a weekly compass to reorient our lives towards that which is good and true. The longer a sea captain neglects the compass, the further the boat will drift off course. Regular worship keeps us attuned to God's voice and gives us ongoing strength for the 'race of faith'.

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for

## **reflection**

- What gifts of God have you received in worship? How have these changed or formed you?
- What are your reasons for worshipping? In what ways do you worship for the sake of others?
- Is worship a weekly compass for you? Why or why not?