

Worship and other Practices of Lutheran Congregations

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Introduction

Our Culture is full of various types of worships. Also verities of oriental religion have made their advent in many communities in Africa South of the Sahara. These and many other factors have made it difficult for many Christians to characteristically differentiate “Christian Worship” from other types of worships. In this age where youths have introduced into our churches what nice things they have carried from anything seen as a church, be it the way of Drumming, ways of singing or dancing, it is better to discover and highlight the distinctive marks of what makes worship “Christian worship”.

In Africa the culture of the people has also introduced several ways of worship into religion including Christianity. In this kind of situation the best is to search and come out with what is “Christian Worship” in this paper we will try to:

Define worship

Clarify its concept.

Study the phenomenon of Christian worship

Look at various ways different Christian thinkers speak about Christian Worship.

Look at the language Christians use about worship

Look at what we do in worship.

Look at the areas where culture has impacted our worship

Look at the significance of Christian worship.

What is worship:

The Dictionary defines worship as the activity of showing respect and love for a god, for example by singing or praying. A felling of love and respect for a god (Rundell: 1725).

Douglas defines it as “reverential fear and adoring awe and wonder! He went on to state that’ In O. T. tabernacle and Temple worship ritual was prominent. Apart from the daily morning and evening sacrifices, the celebration of pass-over and the observance of the Day of Atonement would be highlight in the Jewish religious calendar. The ritual act of shedding of blood, presenting incense, pronouncing the priestly blessing etc. would tend to emphasize the ceremonial to the detriment of the spiritual aspects of worship and even tend to introduce a sense of tension or conflict between the two attitudes. But many in Israel would be able to take the public praise and prayers and use them to express their love and gratitude to God in a real act of inward spiritual worship. In the New Testament worship service, consisting for the most part of praise, prayer, reading from the scripture and exposition. In the church at Corinth we heard of “Speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14) the love-feast followed by the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11: 23 – 28) were common feature of Christian worship. But the emphasis throughout would be upon the spirit and the inner love and devotion of the heart (Douglas: 1262) Precht argued that the dictionary definition of worship is not enough to confer to us

the true meaning in the sense of Christian worship and in the understanding of worship by the Evangelical Lutherans.

The dictionary definition of worship makes worship an anthropocentric activity that is measured and normed by what we do, by what we understand God to be. Such a view of worship he stated is antithetical to the Evangelical Lutheran understanding of worship. Evangelical Lutheran worship begins with God giving us His Word. God's Words come to us and we respond in faith and devotion. It is God's action, not ours. He is the mover, the doer. Faith comes as a gift from God, not from our own doing or action. Such an understanding of worship is quite different from the dictionary definition of the word "Worship". It is for that reason that the Evangelical Lutheran Church has shown a preference for the word "Service". In that respect, the chief gathering of Christian on a Sunday morning is called the divine Service. In this Devine Service, God serves us. He gives us His Word and sacrament. It is after we have received the word, the sacrament and it blessings so offered that we respond in our sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to Him. In this respect worship is the theocentric and christocentric, not man centered (Precht: 44 – 56).

Clarification of Concept: According to James F. White, there are three ways to clarify what we mean by "Christian Worship" These are: A study of the phenomenon of Christian Worship secondly, by looking at the various ways different Christian thinkers speak about Christian Worship and studying the language Christians use about worship. (White: 22)

The Phenomenon of Christian Worship: One of the best ways of making up our minds about what we mean by Christian worship is by describing the outward and visible form by which Christians worship. This approach looks at the whole phenomenon of Christian worship as it might appear to a detached or alien observer trying to grasp what it is Christian do when they come together.

My experience of the Africans or Nigerians in particular, a look at the way they worship, you will be readily informed that there is something wonderful that touches their heart. It becomes more wonderful when you see babies gesticulating inside their mothers back as they hear the singing and drumming of the choruses. The way men, women and youth, old and young, sing and dance vigorously betrays their heart felt response to the wonders God has performed in their life. In some Nigerian churches the worshippers pray corporately at the same moments. When it comes to this moment of prayer one may wonder what they are doing. Praying in a very dynamic and powerful voices raised to God, each bringing his or her petitions and thanksgiving to God most high. Sometimes people are tempted to say these people are making a lot of noise before God. Some say they are praying as if God is deaf. However, when you think of the many languages in the world and the many places worshippers come together at the same time to lift up their petitions to God whether corporately or in a representative form and God listen and response to all, you may conclude that no amount of what people call noise can deafen God. What are they doing than clearly demonstrating their faith in God's wonderful promise and blessing on their life. Any observer outside may ask, what are they doing and why are they so serious and anxious to do what they are doing? The answer is they are worshipping their God.

The various ways different Christian thinkers speak about Christian worship.

In looking at the various ways different Christian thinkers speak about Christian worship, the purpose may not always be comparative study but it is to stimulate reflections. The best way to grasp the meaning of any term is to observe it in use rather than to give a simple definition. In looking over the shoulders of protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic thinkers to see how they use the term, – non of their varying used of the term exclude others. Frequently they overlap, thus complementing the list. This effort to say what we mean and to mean what we say is a continuing one, subject to revision as

our understanding of Christian worship matures and deepens. Professor Hoon writing from within Methodist tradition emphasizes the Christological centre of Christian worship. Christian worship is bound directly to the events of salvation history, Hoon maintains that the core of Christian worship is God acting to give his life to man and to bring man to partake of that life. In this, Christian worship is God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ and man's response.

Peter Brunner, a Lutheran theologian has a distinct advantage in using the German word for worship, "Gottesdienst" a word that connotes both God's service to humans and human's service to God. In this, Brunner speaks of "duality" of worship. It is the gift of God that evolves man's devotion to God. Brunner quotes Luther, who says of worship, "that nothing else be done in it than that our dear Lord Himself talk to us through His holy word and that we, in turn talk to Him in prayer and song of praise.

Professor Jean Jacques Von Allmen within the reformed tradition makes strong case for understanding Christian worship as the recapitulation of what God has already done. Worship, he says "sums up and confirms ever afresh the process of saving history which has reached its culminating point in the intervention of Christ in human history. All men see worship as the epiphany of the church" which, "because it sums up the history of salvation, enables the church to become itself, to become conscious of itself and to confess what it essentially is".

From Anglo – Catholic tradition, Evelyn Underhill says, worship in all its grades and kinds, is the response of the creature to the eternal and thus, worship is characterized by the worshippers' conception of God and his relation to God.

Somewhat similar ideas are expressed from the orthodox perspective by the late Professor George Florovsky: "Christian worship is the response of man to the Divine call, to the mighty deeds of God, culminating in the redemptive act of Christ. Christian worship is primarily and essentially an act of praise and adoration, which also implies a thankful acknowledgement of God's embracing love and redemptive loving kindness.

These ideas are reinforced by another orthodox Theologian, Nikos A. Nissiotis, who stresses the absolute priority of God and his act, which man can only acknowledge.

In Roman Catholic circles, it has been common to describe worship as "the glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity"

The language Christian use about worship.

Another useful way to clarify what we mean by "Christian worship" is to look at some of the key words the Christian community has chosen to use when speaking about its worship. There are varieties of such words in past and current use. Each word and the language add shade of meaning that compliment the other.

Jacques Von Allmen sees worship as the "epiphany of the church" because it sums up the history of salvation, enables the church to become itself, to become conscious of itself and to confess what it essentially is.

Another widely use word is praise: The dictionary defines it as an expression of strong approval or admiration for someone or something. Praise is to worship God with words or music. When we talk of praise in worship it is human desire through faith to express strong approval to God as creator and sustainer of the human race. It is to express admiration for the creative power of God. It is to appreciate God for what he is doing for them. It is an expression of joy and many a times the word of the praises contains prayers.

Many worshippers use the word thanksgiving: it may come in term of music, like choruses, clapping of hands, dancing, donation of money or rededicating of self to God as an expression of appreciation for what God has done to them.

In my own language it will be “*itoro*” meaning Glory, it will be *Ekom*” meaning thanks. People glorify God for who He is and for what He is doing for them. For my people the word confers a deep sense of regards, respect, joy and even humility to God the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, such adoration that is not express in the veneration of ancestor or any Ibibio cult. People offer their thanksgiving to God in many different ways, such that is not express in the worship of any deity.

In all these words is an exposition of faith in Him who is creator and sustainer of all. It is an expression of joy and happiness for what the Lord has done in their lives. Indeed it is a response to the Lord’s goodness to the people.

What Christian do in worship:

In our context, our worship service is meeting with God. It shows us God’s whole plan of salvation. Worship gives us an opportunity to praise God together with our friends and family as a large family of God.

Liturgy is the means by which God’s people worship Him and communicate the Gospel message to each other. The historic Lutheran Liturgy seeks to do just that. In addition to communicating the Gospel, the Lutheran Liturgy serves as a channel for the worshippers’ response in songs, prayers, and praises. Only when the worshippers understand and appreciate the Liturgy of this church, will he or she be able to participate in it meaningfully and derive full benefit from it. We can divide our liturgy into four parts:

The introduction

Our preparation

The application

The Sacraments

The introduction: The introduction some times begins with the prelude. Before the service actually begins, the organist and the choir play and sing the prelude. The word prelude comes from two Latin words meaning “to play before” something. The music sets the mood for the service. When we hear quiet music, we want to settle down and be quiet too. The prelude prepares the worshippers for what is to come. The choir and the minister join in possession and is followed by the invocation.

Our preparation: Our preparation in worship is very necessary since we are coming to meet with God. We are approaching a holy and an awesome God. The Lutheran Liturgy designs the process of preparation by way of taking worshippers through confession of sin and the absolution. When we think of the significance of confession of our sins in preparation to meet with our God then we will realize that before we can worship God in the right spirit, we must realize that we are sinful, that we have disobeyed God’s commandments, and that we have wronged God. We are unworthy to be God’s children, and yet we have His mercy and forgiveness. We are absolved, we are forgiven. In the absolution, the Pastor announces God’s grace to us and in Christ’s name forgive all our sins.

The entire mood of the worship changes. We realize again that we are God's dear children. We once more feel his glorious presence, what a glorious feeling! Our soul seem to go up up up to Him who loves us so. Now is the time when the Pastor goes into the altar. Now is the time when we shall hear the fresh, inviting, wonderful word of God for the day.

The applications: The third part of our worship service begins with the Latin word "Introit", meaning "a going in" or "entrance". It tells us that we are about to enter the main part of the service. This is effected by the Pastor going up to the altar. The mood of each Sunday's service is suggested by the reading or chanting of the introit. This theme is then carried through the service and repeated with each reading from the scriptures.

This aspect is followed by the preaching of the word. The sermon is the way God's word is brought home to us; we are shown how this word applies to our daily living. The Pastor explains to us what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. He assists us to believe in God's forgiveness of our sins.

The sacraments: Both the sacrament of baptism and the Lord's Supper constitute this part of worship service. The sacrament of Baptism brings all thought and minds into the very question of being born again, a new birth into the family of God's people. The total washing away and forgiveness of our sins and the assurance of the power of regeneration and renewal through the process of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. The preface to the Holy Communion introduces us to this high part of the whole service – The Holy Communion. The preface helps us put our faith into complete thoughts and words and helps us realize how great and wonderful God is. You notice that from the preface to the benediction, the music and Liturgy take you into your dearest thought of God and then set you back down greatly upon earth, with peace in your heart. It is like climbing a mountain. You climb over so hopefully to the top, take an overview around the top of the mountain, and then you come down to the valley again with the wonderful view still in your memory. This is followed by the benediction. The final and beautiful part of the service.

The word Benediction comes from the two Latin words "bene" meaning "good" and "dictus" meaning "speak" "speak some good upon", or "bless", the people. The Benediction is a blessing.

Cultural impact on Christian worship: The entire people of the world belong to different cultural areas. The Jewish people had their culture, the gentiles had their culture. Today we have European culture and we also have African culture. This European or African culture is subdivided into different tribes and languages. Man is inseparable from his culture as fish is inseparable from water. Christianity came to Africa and is practice in spirit and in truth.

However, Christianity cannot totally eradicate the African culture. Christianity has done it best in purifying the culture of all it destructive and distasteful elements, it has also enlighten the people and appreciate the good aspect of culture. It plays the roll of defense on the good aspect of culture. It is now a matter of common knowledge that our culture is battling desperately against foreign-inspired cultural cancer, such as bribery and graft, bureaucracy and nepotism and the injustice of confidential report, denial of merited official promotions, authoritarianism and arrogance in power, power-mania, maramonism or the worship of money and lack of compassion for the common man. The main issue in this aspect is that African culture is infiltrating into Christian worship.

The area mostly affected are: the music of the church, the songs and dance.

Music: In Nigeria as well as in Africa, traditional music is ritualistic and non-ritualistic. The way the drums are played when music is for masquerade is quits different from when it is for recreational purposes. If you are a Nigerian that is acquainted with traditional ritualistic music you

will readily hear and distinguish when traditional method of drumming is inculcated in Christian music.

Traditional song: In Nigerian traditional songs are also classified into two categories namely ritualistic and non-ritualistic songs. The traditional tones and texts of the song which are incantations are conventionally handed down from generation to generation. With the influence of Christianity and acculturation this category of songs has lost its popularity. But a closer look at the choruses of Christian worship the influence of this category of songs is manifest.

Brain C. Castle sees this song by T. B. Pollock and revised by compiler of A and M as a mixture of traditional concept of hell.

From the awful place of doom
where in rayless outer gloom,
Dead souls lie as in tomb,
save us Holy Jesu.

From the unknown agonies
As the soul that helpless lies
From the worm that never dies
Save us, Holy Jesu.

From the lust that non can tame,
From the fierce mysterious flame,
From the everlasting shame,
Save us, Holy Jesu.

“Here we can see a mixture of the traditional concepts of hell. The first verse is reminiscent of Jewish concept of shoel and the last two verses drawn on the understanding of Ghenna” (Brain: 73)

This is an indication that some infiltration of traditional meaning comes into Christian hymns.

Dance: Dance like songs are also ritualistic and non-ritualistic. When a dance is ritualistic it means being spirit – regarding address to ancestral gods, highly religious and esoteric. The Africans we all can testify are a dancing people; they dance in worship service and express their faith in God’s love. But our concern is that the traditional way of dancing is fast coming into Christian worship. Whether we like it or not it shall continue to infiltrate because it is a situation of an elimination by substitution, you remove people from the influence of traditional music, song and dance, they now come into Christianity, and they now try to express their faith through their cultural way of music, song and dance. Indeed, they now continue or modify their former way of dancing in their new place of worship.

One very important thing that I can not understand is the adding of music to prayer. I have asked our youths many times, why play music while prayer is going on? Do you intend to encourage God through music to listen to the prayers or what are your intentions! My understanding is that some secret cults use soft music to move the spirit of their worshippers to go out on astral. But in Christian worship God's Spirit comes upon worshippers. If this is true, can music help God's Spirit to come upon the worshippers?

Secondly, tarry-night, fasting and assignment is fastly penetrating the orthodox missionary churches and our church, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria is no exception. Another practice is what they call speaking in tongue and words of wisdom. These practices were found in the prophet movement churches or prayer houses but now the practices are found in Lutheran Churches. Recently some Pastors of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria were suspended for being involved in these practices.

Tarry Night: This is a method whereby members tarry in the church and pray over night. The King James Version use this word in Matt. 26: 38 "Then said he unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. Tarry ye here, and watch with me". (Ref. Mark 14: 34) there is no problem about night prayers if they are done with good intention anybody that have the strength can tarry (Luke 11: 5 – 10).

Fasting: This is a normal church practice which is voluntary. People are not forced to fast. The aim is to have an opportunity to confess sins and thus draw closer to God in Spirit. The occasion for fasting is an occasion for prayers but one can pray without fasting and God will still hear the prayers. However, where fasting is used as weapon to force God to hear and answer prayers no matter whether the prayer is offered with wicked intent is unacceptable.

Assignment: This is a situation where prayer is offered with some prescribe materials. It may be the sand swept from the church, it may be olive oil, it may be coconut water, some time leaves of some special plant, it may be incense. The prayer may be offered by the road junction, eggs may be used, and some cantation may be made. You request to know what is assignment the answer is assignment. You ask Biblical bases they will tell you Jesus Spite on the ground made mud are rub it on the blind man's eyes and asked him to go and was in Siloam (John 9: 6 – 7) That Hezekiah's boil was treated with leaves (II Kings 20: 2). To them, assignment is prayer with some materials as Jesus used the mud to healed.

This assignment to me has a background in spiritism and in African Religion. The Ibibio oracular will tell you your problem through oracle and will also tell you what to do to solve the problem. It is similar thing that the people do in prayer. They tell you your problem through what they call prophecy and then tell you what to do to overcome the problem. The Evangelical Lutheran Church reject it in its totality the infiltration of this prophetic movement into our church.

My questions are:

The Holy Spirit we know is God, can God tell lies? This is because some of what these prophet ministers speak in the name of the Holy Spirit are lies.

What is the essence of adding music to prayer?