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# Corporate Worship's Pedagogy

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**CORPORATE WORSHIP'S PEDAGOGY**

**by**

**CULYNN CURTIS**

**A Thesis Submitted to Dr. Andrew Root of**

**Luther Seminary**

**In Partial Fulfillment of**

**The Requirements for the Degree of**

**MASTER OF DIVINITY, and**

**A Concentration in**

**CHILDREN, YOUTH, & FAMILY MINISTRY**

**ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA**

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## AT LEAST THEY'RE STILL COMING

There has been a trend in the last thirty-five years in which the American church has simply denied Martin Luther's critique of worship.<sup>1</sup> It was Luther who developed the priesthood of all believers. That is, by virtue of his or her baptism, each candidate is ordained for public ministry in either sacred or secular vocation. It was Luther who stripped clergy of power over the laity and translated Holy Scripture into the vernacular, giving all people access to God's story. According to Luther, every Christian access to God through prayer in Jesus' name.<sup>2</sup> not through individual masses that were prayed by clergy. It was Luther who pointed to worship as the location where God met humanity and trained people in the life of faith. Corporate worship is a rehearsal studio for a vibrant life of faith for every individuals and families of all ages.

But a denial of Lutheran theology, leads our churches to give in to the consumerist mentality that permeates every aspect of our culture.<sup>3</sup> Our worship services have turned into performances by the clergy and music teams at the front of the church. While attendees of worship sit in the back and come for the entertainment value. Most people come to worship because the music is great and the preaching makes [them] feel good. Worship becomes spectator sport, and the entire ministry of the church is only as good as the choir, the organist, or the worship band (not to mention the pressure pastors must feel to be overly charismatic to attract people). In an attempt to attract people, we resort to cultural gimmicks of flashy screens, classically trained musicians, rock bands, and/or shopping-network-style pastors.<sup>4</sup> By using these ploys, the church itself has developed a church-shopping phenomenon. Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, rather than offering long expositions of Luther's theology and its connection to the argument (unless otherwise necessary), I will simply reference the Book of Concord, my teachers of Luther and liturgics as well as my own experience and Lutheran formation as if to rally Luther's support for the claims made herein.

<sup>2</sup> Prayer was not restricted to clergy and payment of private masses.

<sup>3</sup> For reflections on consumerist culture, see Andy Root's *The Promise of Despair*, particularly 59-68.

<sup>4</sup> I have had a conversation with a fellow classmate whose concern that she isn't "peppy enough" will make her unfit for the pulpit of any church in this day and age.

congregations run the risk of becoming cults of personality around preachers and worship leaders. In so doing, entire fortresses of ego block the view of Christ, the crucified.<sup>5</sup> I am afraid that the church has left behind its most valuable asset. We have neglected the Diving Liturgy. The church's ancient traditions train, strengthen, and sustain people in the cruciform life of faith are quickly forgotten.

But something about the gimmicks is no longer working. If you have had a conversation with a seminary professor, pastor or other church leader, or even a faithful churchgoer in any recent history, you would think that the church is going to die tomorrow. In October 2012, The Pew Research Center published an article announcing the "Rise of the Nones". They reported, "One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously unaffiliated today."<sup>6</sup>

However, Mark Chaves points out that American religiosity may be more stable than most reports and surveys have let on.<sup>7</sup> He points to the findings of the General Social Survey's results on major religious practices. While weekly attendance in congregations decreased greatly between 1950 and 1990. Since then, "weekly attendance rates have been relatively stable."<sup>8</sup> Upon further reflection, Chaves states: "The 'spiritual but not religious' phenomenon... is well known and growing, but it should not be exaggerated. The vast majority of people—approximately 80 percent—describe themselves as *both* spiritual and religious."<sup>9</sup> And so, he notes that change is occurring in American religiosity, but it is glacial change at any rate.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2.

<sup>6</sup> Luis, Lugo, " 'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*. (October 2012): 7, [www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/) (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Mark Chaves, "The Decline of American Religion?" *ARDA Guiding Paper Series*. (2011): [www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers/Chaves.asp](http://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers/Chaves.asp) (accessed March 20, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 3

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

Therefore, the church might move beyond talking and fretting, and seriously reflect on its action. The church has a great opportunity to turn the ship around.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, what do these findings indicate about our future ministry with youth and families? They may disappear. Yet, careful reflection and listening leads to important discoveries. For example, Terri Martinson Elton explores the development of our current understanding of youth ministry. Youth ministry is the “convergence of three streams” catechesis (the ancient church’s practice of formation), the Sunday School movement, and para-church ministries (i.e. – Bible camp, Young Life, and Youth for Christ).<sup>11</sup> This led many of our churches to do ministries in silos. Ministries for men, women, parents, mature adults, and youth flourished. Yet, the church divided itself. It de-emphasized the lively communal worship and witness that took place in the sanctuary.

Kenda Creasy Dean tells a beautiful story about how age-specific ministry for young people can backfire.<sup>12</sup> An Episcopal priest she knew had to lead youth group after the church’s youth director suddenly resigned. After staring at each other for quite some time, one of the youth asked, “Father John, can we have communion?” On a weekly basis they prayed, talked a little, and shared the Sacrament. The priest noted: “I suggested some games once, but they wanted to have the Eucharist. So that’s all we do.” And Dean offers a powerful challenge in light of this episode:

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<sup>10</sup> Let me be clear here: I do not want to give the impression that human beings or the institution, no matter how great their intention, power, or impressibility of their programming will save the church. Only God, in the power of the Spirit, can do that as stated in the Lutheran Confessions (AC: V, VII, & VIII). But to the point of my thesis, the church has the opportunity to invite people to a deep spirituality, even religiosity, in which they will encounter the Crucified Christ who is for them and for the sake of the whole world.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Terri Martinson Elton, Classroom lecture presented at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, June 2012. It should be noted that age-appropriate ministries are very important for raising up Christian young people, but we should never sacrifice cross-generational worship to teach or play with kids.

<sup>12</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 138.

It didn't sound to me like these teenagers really *wanted* to go back to the game format... And I couldn't think of a more honest expression of being young and Episcopalian—people weaned on the sacrament—or a more transparent way to address the adolescent need for being deeply known by God and one another... And they kept coming back for more.<sup>13</sup>

Maybe that's the point! Youth yearn for the tried and true practices of the Christian faith, rather than more movies, more games, and more pizza. They are looking for the real things that have sustained the Christian tradition for centuries. They want access to the practices that have shaped others into the cruciform life of this Jesus who loves them, which they've sung about at Sunday School since they could talk.<sup>14</sup>

One last example comes from *The American Conservative*. They featured an article reflecting on the millennial longing for liturgy.

Amidst this exodus, some church leaders have identified another movement as cause for hope: rather than abandoning Christianity, some young people are joining more traditional, liturgical denominations... This trend is deeper than denominational waffling: it's a search for meaning that goes to the heart of our postmodern age.<sup>15</sup>

In the article we are introduced to several young adults who have left "Precious Moments" versions of church for communities organized around sacramental reality. One individual believes "a sacramental hunger lies in the heart of what many millennials feel. 'We are highly

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Dean's *Practicing Passion* invites youth ministry to envision itself through Christian practices, where youth get to practice theology and rituals that will shape their lives long after they've left the youth room (particularly chapter 6).

<sup>15</sup> Gracy Olmstead, "Why Millennials Long for Liturgy" *The American Conservative* (January 14, 2014): <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/why-millennials-long-for-liturgy/> (accessed January 14, 2014).

wired to be experiential,’ he says. In the midst of our consumer culture, young people, ‘ache for sacramentality.’”<sup>16</sup> Liturgy gives meaning to everything.

Corporate worship with its liturgical expression invites all generations to an exploration and experience of meaning-making and bodily practice. David Lose points out, “63 million Americans still regularly attend weekly worship, making what we do on Sunday mornings paramount.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of complaining, whining, and begrudging the constant change around us, what if the church gave thanks? At least they’re still coming. And with such gratitude, what if this sparked the church’s deep reflection on the what, how, and why of its worship practices? This gratitude and reflection offers an opportunity for the church to re-purpose the Divine Liturgy for the sake of training up its 63 million attendees in practicing the life of faith together.

### **FORMING THROUGH TRADITION**

How might corporate worship begin to deeply impact the 63 million people who still attend? How will our Sunday morning worship services shape the attendees’ lives into the kingdom of God? How could liturgy call worshippers to participate in God’s action in the world?<sup>18</sup> James K. A. Smith answers these questions in his project *Cultural Liturgies*.

“Liturgies—whether ‘sacred’ or ‘secular’—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, he writes,

“Liturgy is a ‘hearts and minds’ strategy, a pedagogy that trains us as disciples precisely by

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. David Lose, *Worship & Mission: Midwinter Convocation* presented at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, MN, , January 2014.

<sup>18</sup> What I am about to propose, vis a vis James K. A. Smith, is an understanding of Christianity that goes beyond or begins before our cognitive knowing. And yet, I (along with Smith) recognize the challenges of talking about Christianity without intellectual vocabulary. This is precisely the problem that James Smith reveals in his project *Cultural Liturgies*. It isn’t so much about a teaching or knowing, but a way of being in the world that begins even before we think and know; it is who we are and how we move in the world.

<sup>19</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 25. For Smith and for me, liturgy is not only the pattern of our worship, but also particular practices (i.e. baptism, communion or secular practices like grocery shopping that teach consumerism) and particular narratives (i.e. Scripture or other “sacred texts” like math books, or English text books which can supplant the Bible) that shape and influence our imaginations.

putting our bodies through a regimen of repeated practices.”<sup>20</sup> According to Smith, liturgies are the formidable rhythms that shape our imagination or worldview. Liturgy, with its action and words, harmonizes the non-cognitive nature and cognitive structures of what it means to be human and in the world.

Smith is challenging rationalist Christianity. Thanks to Descartes<sup>21</sup>, Protestantism developed “an overly cognitive picture of the human person and thus tends to foster an overly intellectualist account of what it means to be or become a Christian.”<sup>22</sup> Christianity became a “talking-head version of Christianity; a ‘bobble head’ Christianity”<sup>23</sup> that denied the embodiment of human beings and the kinesthetic nature of learning. To adopt this style of Christianity is to deny the totality of what it means to be human. Many forms of Christian education and faith formation programs see humans as vats to fill with information. What’s even worse? This tradition centers on the God who put on a human body (i.e – the incarnation of God). Furthermore, to write off the body and the senses is to deny the very nature of being human. If Christianity is only about intellectualism, youth, people with cognitive disabilities, and even adults are not able to fully participate due to the inability to explain or comprehend the mysteries of God.

First and foremost, Christianity is a religion developed around practicing tried and true practices.<sup>24</sup> No one can deny the centrality of doing in Christian worship and the formation of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Descartes’ mantra “I think, therefore I am” has governed much of how Christianity has functioned since the second generation of the Reformation. It is only in recent years that some scholars and church leaders have seen the importance of ritualism and reclaimed the ancient practices of Christianity.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 42; this should not be understood as bad mouthing academia or intellectualism. Instead, Smith recognizes the limitations of an overly intellectual Christianity and invites us to a broader acceptance of our embodied experience.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>24</sup> A point that many Lutherans (and other Protestants) get a little uneasy about. But we must reframe ritual and repetition. These are not the empty movements and phrases of earning our salvation. No! Instead, they are the material and embodied routines through which the Spirit shapes us into the peculiar people of God.

disciples: gathering, bathing, singing, praying, eating, dancing, and going.<sup>25</sup> Yet, Smith contrasts the overly cognitive nature of Christianity with the ritualistic culture of the mall. Indeed, Christians believe and know certain things. Yet, his analysis paints a vivid picture that reads eerily similar to the rubrics of the corporate worship.<sup>26</sup> Like the Jerusalem Temple or a large medieval cathedral, Smith recognizes that the mall teaches people by ritual and liturgical patterns.

In his second book, Smith moderates a conversation between two philosophers and Christianity. Through their shared reflection, Smith outlines the importance of practice and how ritual, rite, and repetition shape the pre-cognitive nature of human functioning.<sup>27</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that the body has a simple way of “knowing”. Junior high typing class is an example of this phenomenon. At first, what seems difficult and awkward slowly becomes second nature, to the point that students no longer need to look at a keyboard.<sup>28</sup> He reminds us that human beings have a “hybridity” that allows the mind and body to work deeply together.<sup>29</sup> “Our being-in-the-world is *between* instinct and intellect.”<sup>30</sup> Humans build habits which are carried in our bodies. They shape our way of being in the world. Both our bodily practices and

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<sup>25</sup> This was the purpose of the Catechumenate. Candidates for baptism and the Christian faith were instructed through didactic and kinesthetic experiences. Catechumen instruction included mystagogical pedagogy, a time to reflect on the mysteries of God that are revealed through Christian practices.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 19-25; For a taste of Smith’s reflection: “This architectural mode of enclosure and enfolding offers a feeling of sanctuary, retreat, and escape... This is a gospel whose power is *beauty*, which speaks to our deepest desires... invited to enter into the act of worship more properly... We are greeted by a welcoming acolyte who offers to shepherd us through the experience... behind the altar is the priest who presides over the consummating transaction. And this is a religion of transaction, of exchange and communion.”

<sup>27</sup> The breadth and depth of Smith’s reflection cannot be detailed in its entirety for the scope of this project. But this summary breaks open our reflection on the embodied experience of humans in the world. “So we are not primarily *homo rationale* or *homo faber* or *homo economicus*; we are not even generically *homo religiosus*. We are more concretely *homo liturgicus*... embodied, practicing creatures whose love/desire is aimed at something ultimate.” (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 40).

<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty calls this “perception” but means the same thing as Smith’s “imagination” mentioned above. Another great example of this was learning to write in cursive, or now the more predominant: text message. What used to be a very complicated thing because a second nature, and we are able to thumb out 140 words per minute.

<sup>29</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 44; “It is the ‘habitual body’ that ‘knows’ with a ‘preconscious knowledge.’ It is the locus for a way of life.”

our cranial understanding help us make sense of the world through which “we live and move and have our being.”<sup>31</sup>

In the same manner, Smith invites Bourdieu to this conversation. Bourdieu challenges us to think about the “native way” of being in the world. He states that natives are those “practitioners ‘unselfconsciously’ embedded in a community of practices.”<sup>32</sup> Natives simply do, without thought or reflection. The same is true for Christianity:

Before we articulate a worldview, we worship. Before we put into words the lineaments of an ontology or an epistemology, we pray for God’s healing and illumination. Before we theorize the nature of God, we sing his praises. Before we express moral principles, we receive forgiveness. Before we codify doctrine of Christ’s two natures, we receive the body of Christ in the Eucharist. Before we think, we pray. That’s the kind of animals we are.<sup>33</sup>

This reflection leads Smith to embrace liturgics as the formidable pedagogy that fully develops the imagination—that in-between pre-cognitive functioning and ability to make sense of the world. Through this philosophical reflection, Smith unlocks the deep connection between liturgy, learning, and formation. The biblical stories and bodily rituals in the corporate worship of the Church form disciples of Jesus. It is the pedagogy of proclamation and practice that transforms doers into knowers. The Divine Liturgy, developed around the biblical narrative and embodied movements, is what forms the imagination and sets the hearts of the practitioners, young and old, toward the chief desire: namely the kingdom of God and the promises of Jesus.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Acts 17:28, ESV.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 77.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> This is how I became a Christian. I did not understand every word or the reason behind certain movement in the liturgy. Yet, through the stories heard and bodily doing of the stories, non-cognitively I took these things into myself and embraced them as the sacred things.

This becomes incredibly important for ministry with children, youth, young adults, and whole communities. We must respect human development: Youth may not be able to fully explain or offer clear definitions of theological concepts.<sup>35</sup> Yet, rational or cognitive understanding is not the end-all-be-all of Christianity. This is why Bourdieu points us to rites and ritual. “Rites [are] the instance par excellence of practices that resist conceptualization...rites affect what they do. A rite is ‘a per-formative practice that strives to bring about what it acts or says.’”<sup>36</sup> All people become Christians through the richness of practice and have access to experience holy things that even our words and concepts fail to fully express. Youth may not have a fully developed mental capacity or theological chops, but they do have bodies. They are willing to use their bodies completely: They fully experience the totality of living and participate in practices that shape their imaginations through the stories they tell.<sup>37</sup>

Christian practice, then, must tend carefully to its story and ritual. Also, practitioners and leaders must be aware of the many other liturgical practices that surround people of all ages these days. It is more probable that people, particularly youth, will take on the consumerist models of secular liturgy, simply because they are around them more often. Never mind the fact that magazines, media, and social networking aim consumerism towards young people. If children, youth, and families are formed by the many liturgies that make up our weekly “being-in-the-

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<sup>35</sup> Even most adults cannot do it, or are afraid to voice their understandings of theology, in fear that they might get it wrong!

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 91. Although James Smith provides philosophical language for such phenomenon, it was the Lutheran confessors who noted the power of Word and rite together: “At the same time, by the Word and by the rite, God moves hearts to believe and conceive faith...But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike the heart, so the rite itself strikes the eye, in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same.” Ap 13:5, in *BC*, 184.

<sup>37</sup> This is exactly the reflections of Kenda Creasy Dean, in her book *Practicing Passion*. She names and longs to properly “form” and shape teenagers’ use of their bodies so they desire the kingdom of God (in the core of their being) through the ancient and communal practices of the Christian church.

world”, then David Lose is exactly right: what we do on Sunday mornings is paramount and should become our supreme concern as preachers, teachers, and worship leaders.<sup>38</sup>

The church is called to reform our young people and their families from the mis-formation of the culture and its ritual practices. The church invites children, youth, and their families into ritual practices of ultimate concern. The church believes that God in Christ and Scripture answer the existential questions of reality. Therefore, the church must shape our liturgies and rituals so that they form identity, “inculcate particular visions of the good life, and do so in a way that means to trump other ritual formations.”<sup>39</sup> The church’s liturgy become “pedagogies of ultimate desire.”<sup>40</sup> Christian worship and the ancient practices of the church offer a counter-formation to the world’s many liturgies. The Divine Liturgy’s telling and doing offers respite where secular liturgies leave us robbed, empty, and suffocating for something truly real.<sup>41</sup>

### **THE DIVINE LITURGY: PEDAGOGY FOR MAKING CHRISTIANS**

According to Scripture, God makes his chosen people through ritual practices that narrate the story of his provision, redemption, and ongoing consolation.<sup>42</sup> In Exodus 11, God institutes the Passover. By God’s command, the people eat lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

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<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, in most cases, we have access to the lives of our parishioners usually one hour a week. This will make it very difficult for the Church’s liturgy to shape the lives of people because so many other rituals will be practiced (and more repetitively) over the course of a week. This is why we should encourage family devotions and prayers, but that topic must be for a completely other project.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> In a sense, I suppose this language is quite strong, but gets at Smith’s understanding of the world’s secular liturgies and their powers to mis-form God’s people. Unlike the Reformed tradition, which tried to separate from the culture (i.e. – Calvin’s Geneva), Luther sees the Divine Liturgy sending us more deeply into the world (to show love for the world and the people God made) and reinterpret the mis-formed liturgies (by throwing off sin and fleshliness) and adopting the sacred meaning within our mundane liturgies.

<sup>42</sup> There are multiple narratives within the Bible where God connects his word with a rituals. For example, Exodus 19-20, Nehemiah 8, Matthew 5-8, and Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 point to God’s invitation to liturgical observance of His Word. One might also read Exodus 14, 2 Kings 5, Matthew 3:13-17, John 9, Acts 8:26-40, and Romans 6 as an invitation to wash in the waters of baptism and healing at God’s commands. For now, we will focus solely on the sacrament of the Lord’s Table.

The meal is the stage for retelling the Exodus story.<sup>43</sup> Every year, the people of Israel honored God by eating this meal and telling the story of God's deliverance from Egypt.<sup>44</sup>

Luke's Gospel informs us that God incarnate also shared this meal with his disciples.<sup>45</sup> Jesus used the occasion to re-form ritual with a new story. This meal became an identity marker for those whom God delivered to the kingdom of God through Jesus' death on the cross, similar to the blood of the lamb at Passover.<sup>46</sup> Were this not enough, Jesus used the story and the meal to reveal himself as the living and resurrected Messiah on Easter night: "They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?' ...he was known to them in the breaking of the bread."<sup>47</sup>

And ever since, the Church has been gathering weekly to hear the Word of God and share in the meal of the Lord's Supper.<sup>48</sup> Through the (re)proclamation of Christ's words and a bodily eating and drinking of bread and wine, Christ and his death are remembered and proclaimed until he comes.<sup>49</sup> God uses his story and bodily action to shape humanity into his chosen people.

God continues to add story to embodied movement through the Church. The Church catholic of every time and place provides the rubrics. These tried and true liturgies have shown the Spirit's work in shaping radical disciples of Jesus Christ.<sup>50</sup> But do not be confused! These are not the vain strivings of a people who are seeking to earn their way into heaven. Everything

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<sup>43</sup> Exodus 12:8, 26-27; 13:8-10.

<sup>44</sup> Even today, Jews and Christians alike observe this ritual meal by hosting a Seder meal.

<sup>45</sup> Luke 22:7-16.

<sup>46</sup> Luke 22:16, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Luke 24:27, 30-32, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 2:42-48; 20:7-11; *Didache*, chapter 14; Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, chapter LXV-LXVII.

<sup>49</sup> Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11: 23-29; LBW p. 70; SC VI: 2 & 3, 343.

<sup>50</sup> This has become known as the *ordo*, the church's ordered or patterned collection of practices through which the Spirit forms, shapes, and habituates us into God's people. Fred Edie suggests that the *ordo* includes book, bath, table, and time, as the title of his book suggests. Fred P. Edie, *Book, Bath, Table, & Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry*. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007). Although I do not disagree, a more universal expression of the *ordo* is as follows: Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending.

about worship is God's action.<sup>51</sup> Worship is the Risen Christ's weekly encounter with his disciples. As the *Lutheran Service Book* states: "Our Lord is the Lord who serves."<sup>52</sup> Worship helps even us to become Christians. Therefore, worship is for the glory of God and service to the neighbor.<sup>53</sup> And so the church uses ritual action in an attempt to express God's deep encounter with us.

The Divine Liturgy takes shape in a gathering, word, meal, and sending. "The Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens the whole Christian church on earth."<sup>54</sup> Once we've arrived, God tells the story. In written Word, spoken proclamation, and the singing of hymns and spiritual songs, the Father reminds his beloved children of his gracious promises. These centuries-old promises are connected with the stories of our daily lives. The same is true for the meal. Invited by the Lord Jesus Christ, we see a foretaste of the feast to come.<sup>55</sup> And then, having put sin and evil to flight, we rise and go—renewed and refreshed—to love the world God made. "The Lord's service calls forth our service."<sup>56</sup> In each of these movements, the liturgy preaches God's intended kingdom that has both arrived and is yet to come. In each segment of the Divine Liturgy, God makes assertions about the kingdom and re-forms his people, their being and doing in the world accordingly. In the paragraphs that follow, I spell out some of the Lutheran theological claims that the Divine Liturgy make about God's kingdom, and how the story of God and embodied practices teach us the full effect of a Kingdom already arrived and not yet come.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Dr. Dirk Lange, Classroom lecture presented at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, Spring 2012. Luther used the German: *Gottesdienst*, literally translated, "God's service, action, or work" on behalf of humanity.

<sup>52</sup> *LSB*, Introduction, viii.

<sup>53</sup> Dr. Dirk Lange, Classroom lecture presented at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, Fall 2012. Lutherans may even hear hints of Luther's two-kingdoms theology. The right kingdom, concerning spiritual matters, shapes Christians by use of the Divine Liturgy, and sends them back into the world, to serve civil society, the left kingdom.

<sup>54</sup> *SC II*: Third Article, in *BC*, 330.

<sup>55</sup> *LBW*, offertory response "Let the Vineyards be Fruitful, Lord", 66.

<sup>56</sup> *LSB*, Introduction, viii.

<sup>57</sup> We will revisit these claims and put them to practice for youth and family ministry in the next and final section.

The Spirit gathers together the people of God. In this gathering, we experience belonging. The Spirit has summoned these individuals of all ages and families at every stage in life; it is not accident. Through alarm clocks or the caress of a mother's gentle touch, the Spirit calls the people of God to roost like a hen gathers her chicks.<sup>58</sup> Although dispersed for the week, the body of Christ is re-created and re-membered into the visible community of God's chosen people. We are received as people who belong here, for this is the Body of Christ and we are members one of another.<sup>59</sup> Through this community, disciples and seekers are greeted with the hospitality of God because God's people know that angels appear as strangers unaware.<sup>60</sup>

In this gathered assembly, God begins to claim individuals for himself. "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people."<sup>61</sup> In Holy Baptism, God delivers us from sin and death, uniting us with Christ and safely keeping us in the ark of the Church. This one-time event is proclaimed week after week with a corporate confession and declaration of forgiveness. All of us, clergy and laity, disciples and seekers, male and female, young and old: We come screwed up, messed up, and banged up by our life in the world. To weary souls, God announces that we all belong here, "because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but Christ has died for us."<sup>62</sup>

Gathered together, the body of Christ opens its ancient book. Through this Word, the Church learns its story. In a world quickly trying to rid itself of metanarratives, the people of God simply cannot put this book down. Liturgy portions are taken straight from Scripture, and we even learn to pray through this Word.<sup>63</sup> Week after week, God opens our ears and hearts

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<sup>58</sup> Psalm 91:4; Matthew 23:37.

<sup>59</sup> Romans 12:4-5, ESV

<sup>60</sup> Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Peter 2:10, ESV.

<sup>62</sup> Romans 3:23, 5:8.

<sup>63</sup> A few examples include the apostolic greeting: 2 Corinthians 13:14; two versions of the hymn of praise, "Gloria": Luke 2:14; and "Worthy is Christ": Revelation 5:9-10. Gospel Verse: John 6:68. The liturgy (taken

through the story. God is shaping us through His story, and invites us to see ourselves in the ordinary people and lives documented therein. Through God's story, we make sense of the world's story and our own story. We hear the stories of our ancestors and they become our stories. Also, one of the most embodied practices of the church is the gift of singing. Engaging almost every muscle, our breath, vocal chords, ears, and minds, we sing the story of God. Our singing embodies the story in us: reverberating inside of us and implanting this story with melody. Reading, telling, and singing God's story of care, deliverance, and advocacy shape the church. Through the Triune God's story, we hear that we are God's beloved children and faith-filled disciples.

The hospitality and sense of belonging first experienced in the gathering are once again experienced at the table of the Lord. It is rather unique, but our Messiah becomes both the host and the meal. The incarnational presence of God is truly tangible in the smell, touch, and taste of the elements. Here the God we have seen on the faces of our sisters and brothers and heard in the story is incarnated in wheat and wine. At this table, we come face to face with the death of Christ. The embodied bread and wine, broken and poured out, are consumed. We proclaim the Lord's death here. Our life, salvation, and forgiveness of sins are given every time we share this meal.<sup>64</sup>

And it is this action that we learn what true justice looks like. Everyone who comes to the table receives an adequate amount. There is always enough. Furthermore, the words "for you" are ambiguous.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, this is a personal promise.<sup>66</sup> But also, it a declaration for the

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straight from Scripture) enacted on earth prepares us for the liturgy of the Eschaton. Also, the church's prayers utilize Biblical imagery and the psalm tradition. For example, if God delivered the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and led them through the Red Sea, so also we pray that God would deliver us from the slavery of sin and lead us through the soul-cleansing waters of Holy Baptism.

<sup>64</sup> SC VI: 3 & 4, in *BC*, 343.

<sup>65</sup> Dr. Dirk Lange, Classroom lecture presented at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, Fall 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Dr. Steven Paulson, Classroom lecture presented at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, Spring 2011.

plural “you.” It is as if God says, “This meal is to strengthen you so that you can love, care for, support, and suffer with the world this week.” We learn to share the joys and burdens of all.<sup>67</sup> This is true justice—not something done of our own human will. We are fed, nourished, and strengthened to keep up the courageous work of invoking and enacting the kingdom of God in our midst, which comes by his doing and our faith in the Son.<sup>68</sup>

With the meal still on our breath<sup>69</sup>, and the blessing of God on our head, we ourselves (like the meal we have just received) are broken and poured out as Christ’s body in the world. Having experienced “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit”,<sup>70</sup> we go to share that same love with a world that needs a huge healing, a justice as simple as sharing life with someone, and to live lives in the shape of a cross. Some traditions call the meal the Eucharist, a thanksgiving. But the real Eucharist begins after we have been fed. Having been strengthened by the meal of Christ’s own self, we are ready to live lives of gratitude to God and service to neighbor.

Corporate worship is where I became a Christian. At a young age, the Spirit captivated my imagination with the kingdom of God through weekly worship. The value of Christian community, the gift of God’s mercy, the power of God’s Word, the freedom of prayer, and the rich treasure of tradition were all given to, observed by, and learned in me through weekly participation in corporate worship. Was I just an unusual child to notice these things? (Yes; absolutely! But also, no; James Smith expects nothing less of “ritualized story” called the Divine Liturgy). The liturgy becomes an enacted drama of God’s story, and worshippers become participants in the drama. “These ritual symbolic gestures re-present the stories of God’s saving

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<sup>67</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:26.

<sup>68</sup> *SC III*: 2 & 3, in *BC*, 333-334.

<sup>69</sup> The Rev. Paul Hoffman, “Sending.” *Worship & Mission: Midwinter Convocation* presented at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, MN, January 2014.

<sup>70</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14

action and re-member worshippers into that action.”<sup>71</sup> The Liturgy is the pedagogy that shapes individuals and entire communities into the peculiar people of God.<sup>72</sup>

### **WORSHIP: THE REHEARSAL STUDIO FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH & LIFE**

One final word about this worship: It is a rehearsal studio. Choirs and music ensembles do not throw together a flawless performance. Rather, they prepare the music for weeks and months. Worship is like that preparation. That is to say, worship is always in rehearsal. It is a non-performance. But also, it is not a mere routine or execution of the rite.<sup>73</sup> Instead, to say that corporate worship is a rehearsal studio is to always practice holy things imperfectly. We will never get it completely right; in fact, it is always failing and always falling short of the glory of God. And yet, God can use this story proclaimed and rituals embodied, so that we will be ready for the performances. Yes, plural; two of them. First, after weekly rehearsal, we are in performance mode in the world. The members of the Body of Christ, scattered to the four winds, execute what we learned in the Divine Liturgy so that the kingdom of God may be manifest in the world. This transforms our earthly patterns into holy ones, so that God be found there and his story might be told there. Second, if this were not enough, it is also a practice for the coming performance of “what will be.” That is, we will all bow before the throne of God and give thanks for his continual faithfulness toward us. Yes! Worship is always a rehearsal studio, where the liturgy transforms average people into the servants of God and bearers of the image of his Son for the world.<sup>74</sup>

How does the Church enact an ongoing rehearsal for the 63 million adults and children who wander into worship each week? How will the church share the holy things of God

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<sup>71</sup> Fred P. Edie, *Book, Bath, Table, & Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry*. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 22.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 31, 34.

<sup>73</sup> “**ex opera operatum**”

<sup>74</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:49.

authentically? More specifically, how will Protestantism reclaim the reforms that made worship accessible to people in the first place? We often think this requires charismatic leaders, praise bands, and tech-savvy projection. But Fred Edie takes us to task on this point: “We tend to ask, ‘How can we make worship more appealing to our youth<sup>75</sup>?’ rather than ‘How can we ensure that youth will encounter the fullness of the living God in worship?’”<sup>76</sup>

Cross-generational participation and leadership in corporate worship enhance a sense of belonging for children, youth, young adults, and families.<sup>77</sup> Youth are capable of welcoming the stranger, but only if they are first welcomed. Everyone who claims to be a child of God should be allowed, not only access, but practice time in the rehearsal studio of the Kingdom. The claim that worship offers belonging is only possible when we blur the lines between performers and spectators. Not only do they come to rehearsal, but they participate by standing and sitting, folding fingers and singing. Children can even break bread and read the Scriptures. What better way to feel a sense of belonging than to distribute the things of God to fellow members of the Body of Christ? The church must become a place where all barriers and boundaries—clergy and laity, disciples and seekers, male and female, young and old—are well prepared for the performance of bearing the sacred things of God to the world.

Our liturgies are always telling the story of God, the story of the church, and the story of children, youth, and families. Therefore, worship planning requires careful attention. The trap of liturgy is to embrace secular messages and rituals, and too often these liturgies provide a different imagination. Corporate worship will always be imperfect as mentioned above. However, it should never be done flippantly. The Divine Liturgy is not only the story of God, but it is the story of our ancestors. It is the precious heirloom of the family of God. It is not

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<sup>75</sup> or those “nones” who are not looking to affiliate with any church.

<sup>76</sup> Fred Edie, *Book, Bath, Table, & Time*, 18.

<sup>77</sup> Not to mention, it enhances our other ministries, as people of all ages learn basic skills for leadership.

locked away in a china hutch. Instead, it is taken out and held and used, and always with care. Therefore, preachers must tend carefully to the interpretation of God's story and the stories of individuals and families. They should even bother to speak to young people's experience. It is the role of preachers, teachers, and worship planners to assist people in connecting the dots between God's story and their own stories.

There is a reason that people have favorite hymns, psalms and parables.<sup>78</sup> The church should honor those. During the Lenten season, one congregation invited modern-day disciples<sup>79</sup> to "bear witness"<sup>80</sup> to the work of God in their own lives. It allowed everyone who attended to hear God's story interpreted through the lives and stories of fellow congregants. According to James Smith, the church does not need more rational instruction. Instead, we need to allow more space for storytelling. Our worship services (and all of our other ministries) must become the epicenters where God's prolific power and the monotony of our human experiences collide. The Spirit's dynamic and transformative conversion of souls is only possible when the story of God lays claim on the hearts, lives, and minds of people. In so doing, they cannot separate their personal story from God's narrative.

The story is told of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, who was preaching on Easter Vigil. New converts to the faith had just been baptized. He was preparing to serve them Communion for the first time. He looked at them and said:

The bread is Christ's body, the cup is Christ's blood. If you, therefore, are Christ's body and members, it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord's Table! It is your own

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<sup>78</sup> Our preaching should manifest story-telling, rather than ethics. To a certain extent, we should point to ethical living and application of the text to our lives. However, the Word is powerful enough to do what it says, and people begin to live out the convictions of what they have witnessed, heard, and experienced in their own encounter with Jesus.

<sup>79</sup> members from within the congregation, both old timers and new comers and even two youth.

<sup>80</sup> John 21:24.

mystery that you are receiving! Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your Amen may ring true! Be what you see, and receive what you are.<sup>81</sup>

The table at church is just one of many tables that we will gather around during the week. What if ministry with children, youth, and their families was a ministry of breaking bread together? Imagine a confirmation curriculum around preparing a meal for one another and then discussing Scripture while we were at table together.<sup>82</sup> The body of Christ manifested at tables where meals have been made with love and care. Then, the body of Christ is present at many tables, not confined to the one in the sanctuary. One is more inclined to respond to an invitation to a meal around a table, rather than an information-overload session. The church's table, where we receive Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and the nourishment to serve our neighbor could be extended down the aisle, out the door, up the stairs, and into the dining rooms of our own homes.

The last move of the liturgy might seem like the least sacramental. But this could not be farther from the truth. Embraced by the sacraments of God, we are sent forth to be the sacrament in the world. Having been fed with broken bread and wine outpoured, we are sent from the table of our Brother. We share his love with every person and begin re-creating the world in accordance with the experience we just embodied at the service. And if that were not enough, the Triune God sends us on our way. The cross, which we received on our forehead, still remains. This cross, given in our baptism is what propels us into the world. The clergy are not the only ordained ministers. Instead, by virtue of our baptism, all people—students, siblings, parents, plumbers, homemakers, teachers, accountants, and architects—have all been ordained to

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<sup>81</sup> Dr. Christian Scharen, Classroom lecture presented at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, Spring 2012.

<sup>82</sup> And a real meal, not just cardboard pizzas. In this meal preparation, we could teach our kids what it means to care for their bodies and for one another. We would practice belonging as well. This is not only a further ritual of the incarnation, but also teaching stewardship of our bodies as well as stewardship of the earth's resources.

the multiplicity of ministries in the world. Through the service of these ministers, the world is invited into the kingdom-forming habits revealed in the Divine Liturgy.

This is where the embodied liturgy of life begins. God sends us quickly, again with a blessing upon our heads. We do not delay. Having been shaped by the pedagogical work of God; now the work of the people can start.<sup>83</sup> We are sent out into the world strengthened by the story and the meal. The rehearsal is over and now we perform as one ensemble the beautiful music of the Kingdom of God. God's magnum opus begun at Eden, which slipped into a minor key and was almost silenced, now transposes back and fully crescendos. The trumpet is calling: Christ is on his way, and we can only hope so. But in the meantime, week in and week out we will be formed and reformed by God's ongoing activity in the Divine Liturgy. So that having rehearsed, we will join our voices with "cherubim and seraphim, with the church on earth, and all the hosts of heaven" and join in the hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the God who made us, redeemed us, and who will keep us forever.

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<sup>83</sup> Which is the theological definition of "liturgy" in the first place.

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