



## **The Corporate and Confessional Character of Worship: The Common Service Debate**

MICHAEL B. AUNE

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, The Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California

When Lutherans discuss the worship of the church, they often say that this event is corporate and confessional in some special sense. Presumably this means that it is an activity of the entire congregation, their faithful response of praise, surrender, and thanksgiving to the God-of-Jesus-Christ present and active among them. But then agreement stops and debate begins, especially on matters of how to appropriately, even compellingly, render this claim perceptible to the senses of those who worship.

This was the case a century ago when Lutherans in the eastern United States thought that the best way to make their worship corporate and confessional was by re-establishing contact with their own Reformation liturgical traditions. The resulting Common Service touched off a vigorous, nasty debate which is the subject of this essay.

The Common Service debate is most instructive, even challenging, to contemporary efforts of shaping, celebrating, and understanding the worship of the church as a corporate and confessional event. Yet it has received little or no attention from students of American Lutheran liturgical history. A footnote, a quick quotation out of context, or a paragraph in passing has sufficed.<sup>1</sup> Thus, our primary task is to attend to the liturgical, theological, and cultural issues which were raised in a series of articles in *The Lutheran Quarterly* in 1890 and 1891 written by J. W. Richard and George U. Wenner—articles which comprise what we are calling the Common Service debate. Then we shall consider the instruction and challenge of this debate to our current concerns with better understanding the role and value of historical research, properly relating worship and doc-

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1947) 198; Eugene L. Brand, "The Development of Lutheran Worship 1748-1978," *LCA Partners* 2/1 (February 1980) 20; Hans Boehringer, "Liturgical Minimalism—A Second Look," *Response* 11/3-4 (1971) 89. The revised edition of Reed (1960) does not mention the Common Service debate at all.

trine, and contextualizing a liturgical tradition so that the worship of the church might indeed be a corporate and confessional event. But it is necessary to begin by situating the Common Service debate in its wider context marked by preoccupation with answering the question of how to be Lutheran, American, and of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

### I. THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CONTEXT: SEARCHING FOR CONFESSIONAL AND

### LITURGICAL ROOTS<sup>3</sup>

In the post-Revolutionary War period and on into the early nineteenth century, Lutherans in America became gradually accommodated to the general Protestant scene. What this involved liturgically was a departure from the structure and content of Lutheran worship as it had existed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and which had remained largely in the mold of western Catholic tradition. The influence of “American Evangelicalism,” recently described as “an amalgam of denatured Calvinism, revivalism, and liturgical Zwinglianism,”<sup>4</sup> along with decidedly “low church” preferences imported from Germany, led to greater informality in worship, shortening of the so-called “liturgical” part of the service, and a reduction of the role of the congregation to largely that of spectators.

The ritual and doctrinal choices which Lutherans made during the first half of the nineteenth century reflected new positions in theology and liturgy and also a different perception of the economy of salvation. Increasingly the emphasis was placed upon the individual and subjective dimensions of Christian faith as an unmediated experience of God. Moreover, such faith was to be markedly “spiritual” and could not exist in liturgical forms with their corporate and ceremonial elements. What “liturgy” existed consisted of prayer, song, and preaching. It was basically something with which clergy could do as they pleased.

Sacramental practice and theology also became problematic. Traditional Lutheran understandings of the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper and baptismal regeneration were perceived as sectarian, superstitious, and materialistic—“inappropriate to an enlightened age,” as one historian has recently noted.<sup>5</sup>

These perceptions began to change with the arrival of Lutheran immigrants from Germany and the Scandinavian countries in the 1830s and 1840s. Many of them had been deeply affected by a revival of “confessional self-consciousness.” What this involved was fundamentally an experience of religious renewal, of “the free grace of God in Christ,” which, upon subsequent

<sup>2</sup>Robert J. Goesser, “The Lutheran Experience in America,” *Traditions Transplanted* by William H. Petersen and Robert Goesser (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1981) 6-9.

<sup>3</sup>Much of the following discussion is based upon Michael B. Aune, “Doctrine and Doxology: Toward a Creative Balance in American Lutheran Liturgical Theology and Practice, 1946-1976” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1981) 36-49.

<sup>4</sup>August R. Suelflow and E. Clifford Nelson, “1840-1875: Following the Frontier,” *The Lutherans in North America*, ed. E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 206.

<sup>5</sup>R. Goesser, “The Lutheran Experience in America,” 8.

study and reflection, was seen to be in the spirit of the religious experience and theological insight of the Lutheran Reformation. Moreover, this spiritual and intellectual movement, the *Erweckungsbewegung*, became especially interested in the theological formulations of the Lutheran confessions, the liturgical expressions of the sixteenth century, and types of piety as source and inspiration for being identifiably “Lutheran” in a new land.

When these immigrants joined with other Lutherans who, all along, had refused to break with traditional patterns of faith and practice, there eventually emerged a significant and potent alternative to an Enlightenment and correspondingly “non-liturgical” Protestantism. The result was a theological and liturgical “consciousness raising” that would contribute decisively to a revival of interest in historic patterns of Lutheran worship, particularly those of the Reformation

and post-Reformation periods. Moreover, such liturgical revival and reorientation were seen as providing the way for Lutheran worship in this country to be truly corporate as well as confessional.

Efforts to restore older forms of worship were under way by the middle of the nineteenth century. Special concern was taken to include the main parts of the historical Lutheran service comprised of congregational involvement expressed in responses, canticles, and hymns. After these several beginning efforts, what would later be regarded as a major “breakthrough” toward an American Lutheran liturgy occurred with the *Church Book* of 1868. Here was a clear indication that Lutherans in the eastern United States were seeking to restore historic structural form, historic liturgical principles, ancient liturgical elements, and conservative Lutheran doctrine.

The stage had been set for the Common Service which would contain the same liturgical forms for the public worship of God in all the English-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Churches of the United States. Completed in 1888, the Common Service was regarded as “the most complete and balanced text for worship in English that was available to date for Lutheran congregations.”<sup>6</sup> Those involved in its preparation perceived it as representing “the common consent of the pure Lutheran liturgies of the sixteenth century.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, since these liturgies had been framed during “the youth and formative period of our Evangelical Church,”<sup>8</sup> they were appropriately and undoubtedly corporate because of their accent on expressing the devotions of countless millions of believers, and emphatically confessional with their upholding of the essentials of Christian worship.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>William G. Rusch, “A Background Paper for a Theological Review of Materials Produced by the ILCW” (January 1977) 7.

<sup>7</sup>General Council resolution of 1879; cited in Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 253.

<sup>8</sup>“Preface to the Common Service, 1888”: Cited in *Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the United Lutheran in America, 1917) 306.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 308.

## II. THE COMMON SERVICE DEBATE: WHAT MAKES WORSHIP CORPORATE AND CONFESSIONAL?

In spite of the claims made for the corporate and confessional character of the Common Service, not everyone was convinced. There was bitter opposition in some quarters, especially from those whose patterns of worship had exhibited greater freedom and independence from what was being increasingly regarded as historic Lutheran precedent. It was thought that worship could still be corporate and confessional, and hence “Lutheran,” without necessarily employing a complex form and an elaborate ceremonial. What mattered was the clear enunciation of the fundamental Lutheran emphasis on sin and grace, and the more simply and directly this could be done, the better.<sup>10</sup>

The Common Service debate began when J. W. Richard, professor of Homiletics and Ecclesiastical Theology at Gettysburg Seminary, published an eight-page article in *The Lutheran Quarterly* of January 1890. Usually dismissed as an attack on the Common Service (which it indeed was!),<sup>11</sup> it is still a most instructive and challenging article because it prefigures contemporary discussions of what is involved in the cultural adaptation of a liturgical tradition.

Richard argued that theological, historical, and pastoral investigation must inform the task of being faithful to such a tradition and of enfleshing it in the present.

In his initial article entitled “The Liturgical Question,” Richard challenged the assumptions and principles which had guided the preparation of the Common Service. His judgment was that a very cardinal factor had not been adequately addressed, namely, “the law of adaptation.”<sup>12</sup> Rather than attending to how worship calls and incites to faith in such a way that believers “find themselves at home in it and hold it fast,” the Common Service committee had been too preoccupied with lists and structures, of trying to establish what a “normal Lutheran service” was or should be. As a result, what was overlooked was that different liturgies had been composed for different countries. Though varying in structure and arrangement, these liturgies, according to Richard, exemplified a commitment to principles first enunciated by Luther. These included moderate conservatism, tendency toward simplicity, emphasis upon the preaching and teaching of the Word, and the importance of Christian liberty in the ordering of the church’s worship. Moreover, in Richard’s mind, what was truly at stake was that this event be “edifying,” in the language of the people, and in a form which they could easily apprehend.

To make his case for the necessity of adaptation, Richard reviewed both the development of Luther’s liturgical principles and a wider Christian history

<sup>10</sup>Cf. G. Everett Arden, “The Interrelationships Between Cultus and Theology in the History of the Lutheran Church in America” (unpublished Ph.D. diss.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1944) 11. Arden cites the example of a Philadelphia Lutheran church, “strictly confessional,” whose services were very “informal.” Moreover, “the sanctuary of the church itself is bereft of the usual liturgical appointments, including the altar, and the conduct of the services freely violates almost every canon of liturgical propriety.” “Formality” and “informality,” however, are not the easy distinctions that we once thought. Cf. J. T. Irvine, “Formality and Informality in Communicative Events,” *American Anthropologist* 81(1979) 773-790.

<sup>11</sup>L. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (1947 ed.) 198.

<sup>12</sup>J. W. Richard, “The Liturgical Question,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (1890) 113, 120-126.

and concern that the church’s ways of worship had been constructed “with special reference to the wants and conditions of those Christians who were expected to use them.”<sup>13</sup> For Richard, recognition of what he termed “ecclesiastical environment” was crucial. He wrote,

Whilst the Christian faith as a revelation from God, is one, and remains unchanged under all skies, the mode of administering the contents of that faith cannot be made uniform without extinguishing the freedom of the Christian man.<sup>14</sup>

It was on this basis of what we would today term a concern with “hermeneutical appropriation” or liturgical adaptation that Richard attacked the assumptions and principles guiding the construction of the Common Service. Or, more simply, the Common Service committee had basically said that there was no such thing as history. In fact, they had expressly avoided it! Richard noted,

...here is a Ritual [i.e., the Common Service] to which it is *officially* said that it was not constructed with reference to our needs and wants. It proposes to take the

liturgy of the Lutheran Church of Germany, as it was three hundred years ago, and to transfer it *bodily* into America. It *ex professo* takes *no account* of changed times and different circumstances. It says, if not in words, yet in reality, that what was good enough for the fathers is good enough for the children, that there is no such a thing as growth, that the Holy Spirit has not taught anything new in worship within the last three hundred years, which it is now our duty as well as our privilege to employ in our devotions.<sup>15</sup>

The most glaring example of failing to take history into account and, as a consequence, not being able to recognize the necessity of adaptation, was the “consensus rule” that guided the Common Service committee’s decisions. The implication was that if there are “pure Lutheran liturgies,” then there are also “impure Lutheran liturgies.” According to Richard, however, what made a liturgy “pure” was not that it had a certain list of items in a particular sequence. Rather, doctrine made a liturgy “pure” or “impure.” The point at issue was whether the liturgies of southwestern Germany that were structurally simple and ceremonially sparse were indeed “Lutheran.” For Richard, they were “Lutheran” because of their doctrinal basis and content. Structures and ceremonies varied so much from place to place that to base an entire liturgical reform project upon them was dubious, if not impossible. As Richard perceived it, the task of liturgical renewal involved faithfulness to confessional principles and priorities *and* the ability to understand local and national conditions and customs.<sup>16</sup>

A lengthy response to Richard, written by George U Wenner, appeared in the next issue of *The Lutheran Quarterly*.<sup>17</sup> Wenner had played a key role in making the Common Service possible. Much of his article was devoted to refuting

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>17</sup>George U. Wenner, “An Answer to the Liturgical Question,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (1890) 299-342.

Richard’s reading of sixteenth-century liturgical evidence. It was possible, Wenner argued, to arrive at what could be called a “normal Lutheran service.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the manner in which such a service was arranged was a confessional statement, and it was this arrangement that made Lutheran worship different from Reformed worship. Lutheran worship sought to be both “sacramental” and “sacrificial,” involving clear awareness of the Lord’s promise to be graciously and actively present *and* the congregation’s response “in petition and thanksgiving, in psalms and harmonies, in prayers and hymns, in vows and confession.”<sup>19</sup>

The matter of the congregation’s response was a particularly knotty issue and centered on whether an “offertory” should be included. For Richard, this was evidence of “Roman Catholicism.” Wenner, on the other hand, pointed out that the “sacrificial” dimension of the Common Service was rooted in the New Testament understanding of thank-offering which involved both prayer and praise and a faithful and fruitful life.

An even knottier issue was the “consensus rule.” For Wenner, it simply meant “majority.” If faced, for example, with three liturgies which began “Introit-Kyrie-Gloria in excelsis,” “Hymn-

Kyrie-Gloria in excelsis,” “Introit-Prayer-Hymn,” “the consensus is in favor of Introit-Kyrie-Gloria in excelsis because the majority indicate these parts and in that order.”<sup>20</sup>

In the remainder of his article, Wenner sought to counter Richard’s contention that Lutheran worship should be marked by brevity and simplicity. By following closely the structure of the Roman Mass, Richard thought that the Common Service had departed from Lutheran principles and precedent. Wenner argued, however, that because Richard had misunderstood the “consensus rule” as well as the term “consensus,” and had failed to comprehend the internal structure and meaning of Lutheran worship, his whole critique of the Common Service was flawed. But what really made Richard’s position on liturgical matters untenable was his underlying assumption that American Lutheranism was an inherently “Reformed” church. If that was the case, according to Wenner, then Richard’s critique “would be correct.”<sup>21</sup> Consciousness of Lutheran origins, however, should lead one to a radically different conclusion, and it was on this point that the two men agreed. The stake in the gospel had definitive value for the direction of American Lutheran liturgical development and expression. But should such expression in worship have a particular shape? For Wenner, the answer was “yes,” since shape is also a confessional matter. For Richard, however, simplicity and brevity were more important and more appropriate for conveying “the true idea of the Gospel.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 311; cf. also Edward T. Horn, “The Lutheran Sources of the Common Service,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (1891) 6. The “Normal Lutheran Service” was comprised of Introit, Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Collect, Epistle, Alleluia, Gospel, Creed, Sermon, General Prayer, Preface, Sanctus and Hosanna, Exhortation to Communicants, Lord’s Prayer and Words of Institution (*or* Words of Institution and Lord’s Prayer), Agnus Dei, Distribution, Collect of Thanksgiving, and Benediction.

<sup>19</sup>G. Wenner, “An Answer to the Liturgical Question,” 319.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 337.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>22</sup>J. W. Richard, “The Liturgical Question: A Rejoinder,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (1890) 481.

We have looked primarily at the initial exchange between Richard and Wenner. What occurred in the remaining articles, two by Richard and one by Wenner, was more of the same.<sup>23</sup> Both saw the need for continuity with the past, but differed dramatically and radically on what should comprise such continuity. For Wenner, structural *and* doctrinal principles were crucial, while Richard argued for the centrality and normativity of doctrine in shaping liturgical practice and understanding. Significantly, as we shall see in the final portion of this essay, these issues continue to be on the agenda of current liturgical discussions. We are very much concerned with how best to make a tradition of worship “work” in ways that are recognizably continuous with its “heart-core” and yet contemporaneous “with our own time, our own places, our own cultures.”<sup>24</sup> The Common Service debate is a provocative and challenging precursor to current concerns. Thus, the final portion of this essay is devoted to a discussion of three substantive issues currently being addressed by liturgical scholars: the role and value of historical research for the present practice of worship; achievement of an appropriate understanding of the relationship between worship and doctrine; and how best to contextualize a liturgical tradition in ways that reflect not only a contemporary experience and expression of Christian faith but also a connection with a catholic and ecumenical sense of what worship is and what it is about.

### III. THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE OF THE COMMON SERVICE DEBATE

We have just suggested that the issues raised in the Common Service debate have a strikingly contemporary ring to them. Experiences of liturgical change surface particular and intense concern and discussion of not only what to say in Christian worship but also of how to say it. The development of an appropriate way to worship the God of Jesus Christ requires what Paul Bradshaw has called a “‘creative tension’ between adhering to tradition and following contemporary trends, in order to avoid the unacceptable extremes of either position.”<sup>25</sup>

(A) The Role and Value of Historical Research. Achievement of this “creative tension” involves, first of all, greater clarity regarding the role and value which historical research should play. Its purpose “is not to recover the past (which is impossible), much less to imitate it (which would be fatuous), but to *understand liturgy* which, because it has a history, can only be understood in motion, just as the only way to understand atop is to spin it.”<sup>26</sup> Although history will not tell us what present liturgical practice should be, it can provide perspective and understanding as well as challenge and critique.

<sup>23</sup>In addition to “The Liturgical Question: A Rejoinder” (cf. n. 22), Richard also wrote, “The Liturgical Question: A Final Word,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (1891) 84-97. Wenner’s article, “Professor Richard’s Rejoinder,” appeared in *The Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (1890) 642-649.

<sup>24</sup>John Gallen, “American Liturgy: A Theological Locus,” *Theological Studies* 35 (1974) 302.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Bradshaw, “The Liturgical Use and Abuse of Patristics,” *Liturgy Reshaped*, ed. Kenneth Stevenson (London: S.P.C.K., 1982) 145.

<sup>26</sup>Robert F. Taft, “The Structural Analysis of Liturgical Units: An Essay in Methodology,” *Worship* 52 (1978) 318.

A good example of the usefulness of the study of liturgical history is its clarification of Christian worship’s nature and design, and thus its challenge to a widely held concept of “liturgy as a list of items,” of worship as an external form. What we discover is that worship is not simply the use of set forms but is rather a dialogue, an event of listening and expression, “one of the ways the Church responds in praise, surrender, and thanksgiving, to the call of God’s revealing, saving word and deed.”<sup>27</sup>

The basic outline or design of Christian worship consisting of readings, sermon, intercession, and sharing of the Lord’s Supper that emerged by the middle of the second century well exemplifies an interplay of divine initiative and human response—“the eternally repeated call...and our prayerful response to it in faith and commitment.”<sup>28</sup> In this design, as some scholars have also noted, the assembly responds *only after* God gathers and speaks to them God’s Word.<sup>29</sup>

The rediscovery of this basic *Wort-Antwort* design of the church’s worship facilitates a greater awareness and appreciation of its corporate character and design. We see, moreover, that once this basic design was obscured by additional elements, the loss of verbal understanding, doctrinal changes, greater concentration on the “celebrant,” there was a consequent reduction of the role of the assembly to passive spectators. Understanding worship’s fundamental design and how it expresses a particular rhythm and theology of community prayer enables us to see that what is at stake is much more than an individual expression of faith and “infinitely more than a subjective expression of ‘where we’re at’ or where we’re coming from.”<sup>30</sup>

Because God’s unending saving activity creates and calls a people, Christian salvation and Christian worship are a “together,” a “gathering,” a Body of Christ. Robert Taft writes,

Redemption in the New Testament is a coming together, a solidarity in the face of evil in this world. It necessarily leads to community because only in common can new human values be effectively released and implemented. Christ came not just to save individuals, but to change the course of history by creating the leaven of a new group, a new People of God, a paradigm of what all peoples must one day be. In the Acts of the Apostles the life of this group is sustained in *gatherings*, and its basic dynamic is toward unity: that they may be one in Jesus, that they may love one another as Jesus has loved them and as the Father loves Jesus, is the will and prayer of Jesus in the Last Discourse in John's Gospel.<sup>31</sup>

(B) Relating Worship and Doctrine. Perspective and understanding, challenge and critique, provided by liturgical-historical research can also contribute to sharpened insight into the relationship between Christian worship

<sup>27</sup>Robert F. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986) 340-341.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Robert F. Taft, "How Liturgies Grow: The Evolution of the Byzantine 'Divine Liturgy,'" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 43 (1977) 362; David Tripp, "Shape and Liturgy," *Liturgy Reshaped*, ed. K. Stevenson, 77.

<sup>30</sup>R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 341.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 342.

and Christian doctrine. That these two expressions are related is signaled by the classic, usually misquoted, and often misinterpreted axiom *legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi*: the law of prayer determines the law of belief. As such, theology's task is to interpret liturgical text and form, not determine them.<sup>32</sup>

As a result, we hear repeatedly these days that Christian worship needs to speak for itself, with its own voice, unencumbered by the *a priori* considerations of systematic and doctrinal theology.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly there is a difference between talking *with* God in Christian worship and talking *about* God in Christian theology. Moreover, the communicative goals of these two enterprises are different. The former aims at sharing, participation, relationship, and community, while the latter is concerned with the intelligibility and understanding of Christian faith that Jesus Christ has everything to do with human history, destiny, and ultimate meaning—is, in fact, the way to the one God of whom the Bible speaks.

But while the communicative goals differ, they do not need to be regarded as mutually exclusive. Rather, worship and doctrine exist on a continuum or within a "cultural-linguistic" framework. George Lindbeck has recently described this framework as a "total gestalt of community life and action" that "makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments."<sup>34</sup>

From a "cultural-linguistic" vantage point, we can begin to see how naive it is to continue maintaining that Christian worship can speak with its own voice, unencumbered by previously existing categories and considerations. After all, there will be participants who are present whose experiences and expectations have been and continue to be "shaped, molded, and in a sense constituted by cultural and linguistic forms."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, if we have learned anything from the



past two decades of liturgical change and from the Common Service debate, it is that Christian worship does *not* speak for itself. There is an ever-present dialectic of “text” and “context.” John Baldovin reminds us:

Since Christian worship is as much an activity as a set of prayers and propositions, any real understanding of the liturgical life of the past must take into account the social-historical context in which a particular rite developed. In other words, context is as important for liturgical study as text.<sup>36</sup>

(C) Contextualizing a Worship Tradition.<sup>37</sup> Attention to context requires particular awareness and appreciation of how forms of worship are expressive of how particular faith communities perceive, live, and celebrate their Christian faith.<sup>38</sup> These forms, moreover, serve as ways of saying what these communities

<sup>32</sup>Cf. R. Taft, “The Structural Analysis,” 316.

<sup>33</sup>E.g., Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing* (Minneapolis: Winston-Seabury, 1985); Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984).

<sup>34</sup>George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 36, 33.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>36</sup>John Baldovin, “La liturgie stationnale a Constantinople,” *La Maison Dieu* 147 (1981) 85.

<sup>37</sup>This concluding material is an all too brief summary of a larger work in progress on “ritual/liturgical communication.”

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Robert F. Taft, *The Great Entrance* (Rome: Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies, 1975) vii.

know, believe, and understand about their world in light of the Christian message. And they provide models of how to live and act in such a world. As such, worship involves both thought and action—or what some students of human ritual activity term “semantics” and “pragmatics.”<sup>39</sup> The semantic component of worship involves concepts, relations, and categories which seek to help those who participate to understand the world as meaningful, as “hanging together” in ways that can make sense to them. At the same time, however, such a world is not only thought about. It is lived in. There is, in short, a “pragmatic” or practical dimension to worship as well in that it provides a design for living.

More concretely, the semantic component of Christian worship will involve saying something specifically and clearly about “the difference it makes that Jesus...now lives with death behind him so that he must finally triumph.”<sup>40</sup> This paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, “the self-giving of a person, the very Son of God,”<sup>41</sup> is seminal and salient for the church’s worship being identifiably Christian.

The “pragmatics” of this event means that what is said is also something to be lived. There are social, relational, and moral consequences. Or, as a prayer which follows the receiving of Holy Communion states: “we pray that in your mercy you would strengthen us, through this gift, in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another.”<sup>42</sup> Such a prayer is a good illustration of that “conjunction of semantic and pragmatic features, and of thought and action, that occurs in rituals.”<sup>43</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

How such a conjunction can occur in a meaningful, compelling way is the question bequeathed to us by the Common Service debate. We continue to stand and live at the intersection of the New Testament message, Christian tradition, and contemporary culture as did J. W. Richard and George U. Wenner. And that means ongoing attention to questions of how to appropriately and adequately interpret a liturgical tradition, how to see and understand the relationship between worship and doctrine, and how to create possibilities in the midst of our hopes and fears. In so doing, we continue to hope that our worship of the God of Jesus Christ can indeed be that corporate and confessional expression of God acting and God's people responding in praise, surrender, and thanksgiving.

<sup>39</sup>Stanley Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1985) 2-4; 164-166.

<sup>40</sup>Robert W. Jenson, "The Augsburg Confession and the Act of Confession," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 7/2 (April 1980) 117.

<sup>41</sup>R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 335.

<sup>42</sup>*Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg; Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978) 74.

<sup>43</sup>S. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action*, 2.