

Leitourgia Konferanse  
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***Worship and Culture:***

***The Lutheran World Federation's Nairobi Statement and Evangelical Lutheran Worship***

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Deepest thanks—mange tusen tak—for your invitation to me to come here and to be among you who gather as Leitourgia, who gather for *leitourgia*, and who gather for the sake of *leitourgia* and its capacity to renew the one holy catholic and apostolic church. It has been my privilege to meet some of you who have visited North America and who have participated also in the work and mutual conversation of your sibling organization, the North American Academy of Liturgy. I count it a particular honor at our Toronto meeting in January 2007 to have met Karl-Gunnar Ellverson of blessed memory, and to have placed in his hands some of the fruits of recent worship renewal on our continent, namely, the assembly and leaders editions of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, which had just been published.

As a member of the executive committee of the North American Academy of Liturgy, I invited our president, Dr. Judith Kubicki of Fordham University in New York, to express the good wishes of our organization to yours on this occasion. So here are her words to you.

Warm greetings to members of Leitourgia gathered in Trondheim, Norway from members of the North American Academy of Liturgy. As your colleagues in promoting scholarly and pastoral excellence in liturgy, we are very pleased that our collaboration continues through Martin Seltz's presence with you during this meeting. Blessings on your work! May your time together be stimulating, enjoyable, and productive. Know also that we look forward to greeting many of you in Baltimore, Maryland this January when the NAAL meets from Jan. 2-5, 2009.

Sincerely,

Judith M. Kubicki

President, North American Academy of Liturgy

The discussion about the relationship between worship and culture has been vast and wide-ranging in the literature and in the churches for at least fifty years, if we consider the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which is nearing its fiftieth anniversary, as a significant starting gate for a generation of conversation. My approach to this topic is quite narrow. I come to it not out of experience as a teacher of liturgy; I have held no academic positions. Rather, my work over the past fifteen years as an editor and publisher has focused on some of the tangible outcomes of worship renewal especially in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—that is, the books and other resources used by assemblies and their leaders. These have in a way culminated with *Evangelical Lutheran Worship's* publication in 2006, but ELW was preceded by a decade of related and provisional resources and by far-reaching churchly processes for determining the approaches used to shape these materials.

I can think of no better way for Lutherans to engage the discussion about worship and culture than through the three volumes prepared as part of the Lutheran World Federation's study

of this intersection, carried out between 1993 and 1998, with significant participation from such Nordic representatives as Nils-Henrik Nilssen and Øystein Bjørdal. Within this extraordinary collection of papers and commentary is the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture, which emerged from the consultation of the study team held in Nairobi, Kenya, in January 1996.

This paragraph from the statement summarizes its chief points: “Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways. First, it is *transcultural*, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. Second, it is *contextual*, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is *countercultural*, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is *crosscultural*, making possible sharing between different local cultures.” This fourfold understanding has had a profound effect on our work.

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, soon after its release the Nairobi Statement was reprinted and distributed in a free study edition titled “Getting Ready for Worship in the Twenty-First Century.” Although its impact at the local level is hard to measure, within the organized denominational work of worship renewal the principles of Nairobi were strongly felt in the decade to follow. I want to give a few examples of how this effect was felt, especially in the outcome of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. But I also will point to places where the realities of a church body with much diversity and many disagreements led to compromise and an incomplete attainment of Nairobi’s vision about the intersection of Christian worship and culture.

### **Worship as Transcultural**

First, let us address the *transcultural* dynamic of Christian worship. Nairobi points to the resurrected Christ “through whom by the power of the Holy Spirit we know the grace of the triune God” as the one who “transcends and is indeed beyond all cultures.” The statement further points to baptism, eucharist, scripture and its preaching, Sunday and the church’s year especially at its Easter center, and certain core texts such as the prayer of Jesus, as among the transcultural elements of worship. But allow me to take you to this transcultural place by a local detour.



Besides my day job in Lutheran publishing I am privileged to have a small part in leading the worship and music at Christ Church Lutheran in Minneapolis, as one of the cantors. Four weeks ago our congregation, together with the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Walker Art Center, hosted a weekend retrospective on the work of Eero Saarinen. Eero Saarinen is best known in North America for such iconic secular structures as the Gateway Arch in St. Louis and the TWA Flight Center at what is now JFK airport in New York City. Christ Church's participation in this weekend was an opportunity to highlight also the work of Eero's father, Eliel, for it was Eliel who designed Christ Church's worship space, built in 1949.




Son Eero completed the building complex with a courtyard and education building about 15 years later.

The story I want to tell today, however, is not about the Saarinens but about a professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Minnesota, Professor Ozayr Saloojee. Ozayr delivered the keynote presentation about the Saarinens' work at Christ Church and is preparing a fuller monograph on this subject. His research is especially intrigued with the foundational pattern of Christian eucharistic worship—the ordo of Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending—as a key to understanding the design of this worship space.

What I find remarkable is that Professor Saloojee is a practicing Muslim. On the day of his presentation at Christ Church, the carpet in the Saarinen-designed pastor's office became the rug from which he made his midday prayers. One claim of the Nairobi statement is that “the use of a shared core liturgical structure” is an expression “of Christian unity across time, space, culture, and confession.” Might we go farther in saying that, by reflecting elemental patterns of human interaction and the internal logic of human experience, transcultural dimensions in worship offer gateways to *human* unity across time, space, culture, and creed?

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* lifts up the shared core liturgical structure and other central transcultural elements of worship in both visual and verbal ways. The art and design at the outset of the Holy Communion service depict an assembly gathered around the means of grace.



**Holy Communion**  
*Setting One*

**Gathering**  
*The service may begin with confession and forgiveness **OR** with thanksgiving for baptism (p. 97). Either order may be led at the baptismal font.*

**Confession and Forgiveness**  
*The assembly stands. All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.*

In the name of the Father,  
and of the + Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

**OR**  
Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God,  
who forgives all our sin,  
whose mercy endures forever.  
Amen.

The pattern (ordo) of worship, together with a brief narrative catechesis, precedes the Holy Communion rite.

Yet even at this foundational center of Christian worship, differences arose in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Critics of the pattern claimed that it placed too much emphasis on human action and not enough on divine initiative. Others noted that other patterns of worship have emerged in the North American context that ought to be given serious

consideration. For example, a pattern that leads from extensive song and prayer to a climax in a lengthy teaching sermon, a pattern that James White has called “frontier worship,” is prevalent in some American congregations, including Lutheran churches, and among them notably those who still lift up reformers like Hans Nielsen Hauge and the Lutheran free church movement. And finally, some have argued that the transcultural elements of word and baptism and eucharist are insufficient in a society that seeks other experiential expressions of prayer and community. In summary: although no one disagrees that certain dimensions of worship transcend cultures, there can be and is disagreement about what elements or features of worship are truly transcultural.

### **Worship as Contextual**

Quoting Nairobi again: “In the mystery of [Jesus’] incarnation are the model and the mandate for the contextualization of Christian worship . . . A given culture’s values and patterns, insofar as they are consonant with the values of the Gospel, can be used to express the meaning and purpose of Christian worship.” Much attention has been given to the contextual dynamic of worship over the past several decades, spurred by the work of Anscar Chupungco, for example.

In a project like Evangelical Lutheran Worship and similar efforts, an important distinction must be made between what is contextual to the larger culture or predominant subcultures of a region or country, and where allowance is made for contextualization at the level of the local congregation. Again I ask you to turn with me to Christ Church Lutheran and Eiel Saarinen’s design.



People coming from around the world to Christ Church are consistently impressed by the use of light in the space. The image of light may be considered a transcultural image, because everyone, on this planet at least, lives in a daily cycle of light and darkness. Light and darkness have additional regionally contextual dimensions outside the equatorial regions, for the farther



south or especially north you go, seasonal cycles become filled with meaning. In these lands you know more about that than even we who live in Minnesota. And so, surely, did Eliel Saarinen, coming as he did from this part of the world. The architect situated the building to take full advantage of natural light across the seasonal cycles, with full length windows on the south side of the chancel.



In the summer, when the sun is high, the light is subtle and diffuse, and the non-air-conditioned space stays cooler. In the winter, at the hour of worship, the sun's light floods the space, warms the worshipers when we need it most, and proclaims the true Light who has come into the world. Yet, while being regionally contextual, the simplicity and clarity of the design leave much room for further local contextualization. In contrast to the Gothic structure the congregation had originally planned, full of ornament and carving and stained glass, this modern design is more of a canvas than a painting. It is ready for local color to be applied.

And that balance, it seems to me, is critical for those who guide the renewal of worship in the churches today. We must first seek to confirm the transcultural dimensions of worship, and where we disagree we must seek the most constructive "middle ways." And then we must seek to identify those larger structures, patterns, and elements that express regional contexts and cultures, while leaving broad room for local color to be applied. Here are some examples of how *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* attempts to strike this balance.


The first example is the great thanksgiving of the Holy Communion service, from the dialogue and preface through the Lord's Prayer, but especially that part variously called the anaphora or the eucharistic prayer or, in ELW, the thanksgiving at the table. This example illustrates how two theological cultures that are present within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, sometimes in vigorous disagreement with one another, are helped to live under the same roof liturgically. Form I is a eucharistic prayer constructed by Luther Reed for *Service Book and Hymnal* in 1958 using as his raw materials a number of ancient anaphoras. Form II is

the institution narrative. Such a paired presentation is nothing new, of course; it was present in the 1958 book and in *Lutheran Book of Worship* from 1978, where a third option based on the Swedish *Masbøk* of 1942 was added. But here considerable pains have been taken to ensure that the two options appear side by side as equals.

*The presiding minister continues:*

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise . . . *Here the minister continues with the preface for the day, concluding:* . . . we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

S108



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of  
 pow-er and might, heav-en and earth are full of your glo-ry. Ho-  
 san - na in the high-est. Blessed is he who comes in the  
 name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

*The presiding minister continues, using one of the following or another appropriate form.*

**I**  
 You are indeed holy, almighty and merciful God. You are most holy, and great is the majesty of your glory.

You so loved the world that you gave your only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.

We give you thanks for his coming into the world to fulfill for us your holy will and to accomplish all things for our salvation.

*Continue on the following page.*

**OR**

**II**  
 In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

*Continue with the Lord's Prayer (p. 112).*

And even though nearly everyone involved in the liturgical work affirms the value of the eucharistic prayer, the accompanying interpretive materials have emphasized the validity of these options as two viable strands within Lutheran liturgical practice.

The second example is the gathering section of the service. This example illustrates the provision of a flexible pattern, a canvas, in place of what once was a fixed sequence. The 1958 sequence in *Service Book and Hymnal*, reflecting the long tradition of the Western mass, included invocation, confession, introit, Kyrie, Gloria, and collect. The 1978 sequence in *Lutheran Book of Worship* positioned confession and forgiveness as an optional preparatory rite, followed by apostolic greeting, Kyrie and/or hymn of praise (“Glory to God” or another option), and prayer of the day (the collect). Seasonal variations on this sequence were encouraged, including a newly constructed hymn of praise, “This is the feast of victory,” based on Revelation 7.

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* provides an even broader range of options for use as the assembly is gathered. A form for confession and forgiveness remains optional but is now incorporated into the gathering section. A thanksgiving for baptism, with an optional rite of sprinkling, is provided as an alternative to the confession. “Gathering song” is the phrase used to describe a time of singing as part of the gathering, which may include a hymn or hymns, a Kyrie, and/or a canticle of praise. The greeting may take place at several points along the way. The gathering section is thus capable of being shaped in many different ways to suit the season, the day, and the practices of the local congregation.

Finally, the provision for local contextualization is illustrated by the regular use of phrases like “in these or similar words,” “this or another appropriate prayer,” “the following or another suitable song.” Far more frequently than its predecessor, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* uses these permission-giving expressions to make room for adaptation and assimilation of the liturgy in the local congregation.

The wide expanse given to local decision, and the presence of options that may seem conflicting, are at times troubling to those who would like to see the church advocate healthy liturgical change more vigorously. However, at least in the North American context, here is where *Realpolitik* meets worship and culture. Neither of the North American Lutheran bodies legislates or authorizes how worship will be conducted in the local congregation. We can only commend or recommend. We must rely on gifts of winsome persuasion in order to attract and entice local assemblies and their leaders first of all to adopt and purchase new resources, and then actually to use them.

### **Worship as Countercultural**

Quoting Nairobi again: “In the mystery of [Jesus’] passage from death to eternal life is the model for transformation, and thus for the counter-cultural nature of Christian worship . . . Contextualization of Christian faith and worship necessarily involves challenging of all types of oppression and social injustice wherever they exist in earthly cultures. . . . It also involves the transformation of cultural patterns which idolize the self or the local group at the expense of a wider humanity . . .”

Another detour to Christ Church, Minneapolis, if you please. Moving beyond the worship space designed by father Eliel, we come to the Luther Lounge on the main level of the education complex, which son Eero supervised. Its primary purpose is as a place for adults to gather to study scripture and faith in relationship to the world. Here we find a very long wall of floor to ceiling windows that open the room completely to the outside world. Eero Saarinen designed a



similar window wall for the Miller House, a well-known residence built for a wealthy architectural patron outside Columbus, Indiana. But here is the difference. At the Miller House, the window wall opens out to a broad expanse of landscaped lawn, carefully shielded by plantings from any intrusion by the world beyond. At Christ Church, the window wall opens directly out to a very humble residential street. A few weeks ago when I arrived at church in the evening there was a vibrant party happening on the street, cars parked up and down the block, laughter and shouting in several languages. Perhaps the effect is unintentional on the architect's part. But it is unmistakable. Contrary to prevailing trends in the culture that seek to set up barriers, either in distant suburbs or through elaborate security in the city, the church is not a gated fortress, open only into itself. It is wide open, floor to ceiling, wall to wall, to the world.

Christian liturgy is of course innately countercultural in many ways. It welcomes the stranger and gathers the outcasts. Its Magnificat word turns tables on the ruthless and the well-fed in favor of the powerless and hungry. Its equitable meal is a table with no distinctions. Its ending is not merely a conclusion, but a sending into the rest of the world.

It seems to me necessary for worship renewal in our time, not to invent a countercultural dimension of worship, but to uncover and shed light on the profound prophetic dimension that it already proclaims. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* includes several features that seek to do this. One example to note is the identification and strengthening of the sending rite.

#### Dismissal

*The assisting minister may send the assembly into mission.*

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

OR

Go in peace. Share the good news.  
Thanks be to God.

OR

Go in peace. Remember the poor.  
Thanks be to God.

OR

Go in peace. Christ is with you.  
Thanks be to God.

The mission-oriented dismissal was recovered in *Lutheran Book of Worship*: "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." Now a selected few options further open the meaning of that dismissal, especially "Go in peace. Remember the poor." The sending rite now specifically notes the possibility of including two additional components: the sending of the word and bread and wine of holy communion to the absent, and the option for a brief rite called Affirmation of Christian Vocation.

Under the heading of worship as countercultural we may discuss briefly the matter of inclusive language. However, it is clear that language in worship is a more complex matter that involves all four of the Nairobi categories. In some recent liturgical revision the focus has been on language that limits the image of God or human beings to predominantly masculine categories. For example, I learned in January that the Swedish Handbook Group chose the term "gender-sensitive liberating language (*ett könsmedvetet befriande språk*)" to describe this effort. In the language principles that were developed to prepare for *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, terms like "expansive language" and "language that embraces all" were used. These principles envisioned a broader scope than language related to gender. These principles addressed also

language sensitivities related to race and ethnicity, ability and disability, the range of age and experience, and the whole creation. "We seek to use words, images, and metaphors that express the breadth of God's love."

However, it was in the area of language that the principles developed provisionally in 2001 met with enough resistance in the review process that the final publication in 2006 reflected a number of strategic compromises. In the area of language for the Trinity, for example, the opening sentence in the gathering rite sits side by side the traditional trinitarian invocation and a biblically based acclamation.

### **Thanksgiving for Baptism**

*The assembly stands. All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.*

In the name of the Father,  
and of the + Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

**OR**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God,  
the fountain of living water,  
the rock who gave us birth,  
our light and our salvation.  
Amen.

At the washing of baptism, the same traditional trinitarian language is used, but it may be followed by an assembly response: "Blessed be God, the source of all life, the word of salvation, the spirit of mercy." Several hymns are included in two versions, one the traditional, and the other an alternative text that minimizes gender-specific language. The most far-reaching "side-by-side" approach, however, involves the assembly song section of the worship book. Here, all 150 psalms and 90 service music pieces are presented in versions that consistently avoid masculine pronouns for God, although some masculine images (king) are retained and most significantly, LORD is used as the English rendering of the tetragrammaton YHWH. On the other hand, the 600 plus hymns include a wide range of language usage. Many hymn texts, especially those originally written in English, remained intact, while others reflect some adaptation in light of the language principles.

Still, even this approach—relatively conservative compared to recent similar projects—was criticized as going too far. One eminent liturgical scholar, who had participated significantly in the preparation of *Lutheran Book of Worship*, claimed that the process had been hijacked by an "influential minority." In this view, giving in to "political correctness" is not a countercultural move but a capitulation to contextual pressures that are not only wrong-headed but are on their way out.

### **Worship as Cross-Cultural**

Quoting Nairobi again: "[Jesus] welcomes the treasures of earthly cultures into the city of God . . . The sharing of hymns and art and other elements of worship across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church and strengthen the sense of the *communion* of the Church."

Cross-cultural dimensions of worship, especially in the arts, are of course nothing new. One thinks of the way northern European composers traveled to Italy during some periods of history to assimilate the latest musical styles, or the way some ecclesiastical architecture in the southern Iberian peninsula reflects Moorish influence.

Buildings such as Christ Church Lutheran in Minneapolis and St. John's Abbey in Collegeville reflect a modest kind of mid-20th century cross-cultural influence. At a time when church architecture often mindlessly repeated caricatures of what people thought churches should look like, the modernist movement especially from Northern Europe helped people envision a new and elemental approach to church design that was consonant with many of the principles of the 20th century liturgical renewal movement. As our horizons have widened to include more expressions in worship from cultures across the world, the simplicity and clarity of such design provides a canvas not only for local color to be applied, but for the judicious use of cross-cultural elements from other parts of the world.

In *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, one very visible way in which cross-cultural elements are included is the gallery of images that are used to introduce the major sections of the book. Some of the graphic art is designed to be more all-embracing and less culture-specific, and to unify the volume as a whole, such as the image by Nicholas Markell that introduces the calendar and propers section.



Other art that serves as frontispiece to the various other sections of the book includes images by Latino, African American, and Chinese artists, such as the image by He Qi that introduces the Holy Communion section.



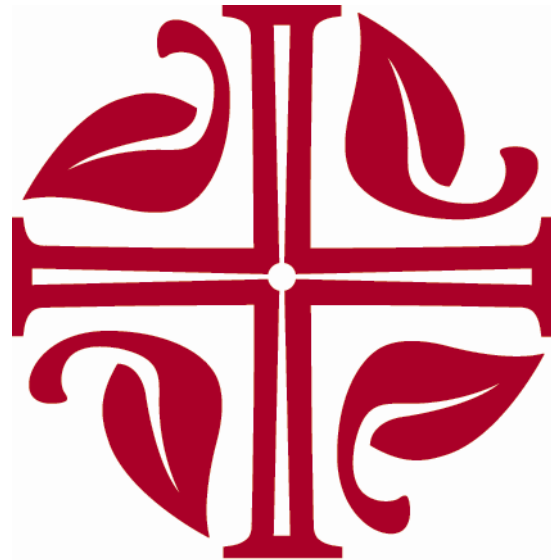
The hymn collection includes over two dozen hymns with both Spanish and English texts, and one musical setting of Holy Communion that includes canticles with texts in both languages. African songs such as those introduced in Utryck's *Freedom Is Coming* have become widely used in North American churches.

At the same time, it has always been emphasized that ELW is an English-language worship book, one which contains representative examples of materials from other languages and cultures, but one which makes no claim to be a multicultural resource. And, it is a reality that the cross-cultural elements many North American Lutherans are still experiencing are the

diversities of theology, practice, and expression of other North American Lutherans who come from another branch of the Lutheran tree. Finally, the use of cross-cultural elements in worship must today be carefully informed to avoid any hint of colonialism or exoticism, so that the advances in understanding the global mission work of the churches, namely, as mutual accompaniment across cultures and theological traditions, may be carried over also into the liturgical work of the churches.

### **Challenge to the Churches**

The Nairobi Statement concludes with a challenge to the churches, and to the Lutheran World Federation itself, to undertake more efforts related to these four dimensions of the relationship of worship and culture. Organized efforts at the LWF level have subsided somewhat since the foundational work carried out in the 1990s. "Where the action is" is in the regional and national church organizations, especially those carrying out worship resource revision. As you hear more from one another about how this is going in your part of the world, I want to offer you the most heartfelt encouragement not only from heirs of the Lutheran Reformation across the ocean, many of them heirs also of your Nordic cultural traditions. But also your other North American colleagues from many traditions with a passion for the work of leitourgia--I can assure you that they are cheering you on, as is that great cloud of witnesses, the saints of every time and place, who worship with us in the eternal presence of God.



#### *Author's note*

Several months following this presentation to the Leitourgia meeting in Stiklestad, Christ Church Lutheran was named a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior (January 16, 2009). Landmarks illustrate important contributions to the nation's history and culture; they include such locations as Mount Vernon, Pearl Harbor, and the Martin Luther King Birthplace in Atlanta. Christ Church Lutheran is one of the few church structures across the nation that has received this designation.