

THE
LORD'S
SERVICE

THE LORD'S SERVICE

The Grace of
Covenant Renewal Worship

Jeffrey J. Meyers

Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship*

© 2003 by Jeffrey J. Meyers

Published by Canon Press, PO Box 8729, Moscow ID 83843

800-488-2034 | www.canonpress.com

07 08 09 10 11 12 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Cover design by Paige Atwood

Printed in the United States of America.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the author, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Meyers, Jeffrey J.

The Lord's service : the grace of covenant renewal worship / Jeffrey J. Meyers.
cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-591280-08-8 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 1-59128-008-7 (pbk.)

1. Worship. I. Title.

BV10.3 .M49 2003

264—dc21

2002154033

To my beloved wife Chris,
still a Meyers after 23 years

Table of Contents

Introduction and Acknowledgments	9
PART I: The Divine Service of Covenant Renewal:	
A Biblical and Theological Orientation	15
1—Why Go to Church on Sunday?	17
Some Popular Answers	
2—Covenant and Worship	33
3—Covenant Renewal:	55
Worship as Sacrifice	
4—The Sacrificial Liturgy of Covenant Renewal	73
5—The Lord’s Service and Ours	93
6—The Trinity and Covenant Renewal Worship	105
Part 1-The Nexus Between Worship and Confession	
7—The Trinity and Covenant Renewal Worship	117
Part 2-The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Liturgy	
8—Corporate Rites and Rituals	131
PART II: The Lord’s Service Explained	
9—Entrance and Call to Worship	163
10—Confession and Absolution	181
11—Consecration and Ascent	195
12—Communion and Benediction	213

PART III: Essays on Worship and Liturgical Theology	231
13—Whom Do We Trust:	233
The Use of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds in Worship	
14—The Place of the Minister in the Lord's Service	263
15—On Hearing God's Voice <i>Extra Nos</i>	283
16—The Regulative Principle of Worship	297
17—Using the Traditional Liturgies	315
18—A Parking Lot Parable:	331
Is the Church Year Biblical?	
19—A Ministerial Robe and Collar	337
20—The Ascension Offering Examined	355
21—We All Partake of One Loaf:	367
Restoring Our Children to the Lord's Table	
22—A Bibliographical Essay	397
<i>Finis Coronat Opus</i>	433

Introduction and Acknowledgments

I am amply supplied – Philippians 4:18

When someone called Goethe’s attention to the unsettling journalistic practice of undermining the public’s confidence in the originality of important men and their works by trotting out all the supposed sources of their inspiration, Goethe responded, “That is very ridiculous. We might as well question a well-fed man about the oxen, sheep, and swine that he has eaten and which have given him strength. We are indeed born with talents, but we owe our developments to a thousand influences of a great world, from which we appropriate to ourselves what we can and what is suitable to us.” Goethe’s point is twofold. On the one hand, we cannot *reduce* someone’s character and work to the sources that have sustained and inspired him. But, secondly, as the Apostle Paul said to the cocky Corinthians: “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

I confess both truths. I am, of course, responsible for everything in this book, and my own personality, history, education, and idiosyncratic interests are evident throughout. Nevertheless, everything you read in this book I have received from someone else. *Everything*. I have been well fed by a rich feast of liturgies, liturgists, and liturgical theology spread for me by the Church of Jesus Christ. I cannot begin to identify everyone that needs to be

thanked; a short list must suffice. First, I want to acknowledge and thank the church and pastors of my youth—the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. This may seem odd for a Reformed pastor, but I believe it is appropriate and necessary for me to do so. I didn't always appreciate my liturgical heritage.

During my college years I was taught by various campus ministries to despise the formality, predictability, and rigid order in which I was raised. It was all just rote and therefore meaningless repetition, I was told. I was instructed to include in my “testimony” words to this effect: “I never heard the Gospel and didn't get saved until I came to college. No one ever shared the Gospel with me until I met people associated with such-and-such campus ministry.” It didn't take long for me to realize that this story was not accurate. Shortly after coming back to the faith of my childhood I would walk into a church service and be able to participate with relative ease. Most churches in the mid-1970's were still liturgically traditional. How did I know how to sing the hymns? Why could I recite the creeds without looking at the words? Why did these prayers sound familiar? What accounts for my being “ready” for the sequence of events in the worship? How did I know these stories that the pastor was reading? It all came back to me. As a child I was trained to worship. It was drilled into me from my infancy. Week after week I participated in the common liturgy of my Lutheran parish.

I may not have appropriated or appreciated the liturgy with maturity until college, but it was there all along. Indeed, in the liturgy of my childhood years, the Gospel was read, preached, sung, and prayed every Lord's Day! I knew it, and I believed it *as a child*. Even today when I occasionally worship with the local LCMS church in our neighborhood (which still uses the older liturgy from *The Lutheran Hymnal* [1941]), I experience freedom that I don't experience in Presbyterian churches that are constantly fiddling with the order and content of their liturgy. I'll say more about *that* later. For now, I simply want to give thanks to God and some long overdue credit to my Lutheran brothers in Christ.

Of course, I am no longer a Lutheran. I am Reformed and Presbyterian, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America. There are theological and ecclesiastical reasons for my change that cannot be explained here. What I can do is acknowledge the contribution of many former Presbyterian pastors, professors, and friends, especially those men who challenged me to think biblically and theologically about the corporate worship of the local church. After my wife and I joined the First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, Georgia, Pastor John W. Oliver modeled for me the dignified way a minister ought to conduct himself officiating the service of worship. The late Rev. David Winecoff, my pastor and mentor while at Covenant Theological Seminary, spent many precious hours with me and other men personally training us in how to research, construct, and lead worship. I learned from him that the minister's stewardship of the corporate liturgy of the church is equally as important as the preaching ministry. I was also privileged to sit under the teaching of Dr. Robert G. Rayburn at Covenant Seminary before his death. I consider the present work something of an extension of his own *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980). Dr. Rayburn's solemn warnings about specific liturgical errors commonly made by evangelical ministers in leading the service often echo in my mind when I stand before God's people on the Lord's Day.

In addition, the time I spent at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Tyler, Texas during the mid-1980's was of inestimable value—primarily for the mentoring and later friendship of James B. Jordan, but also for the rich liturgy my family and I entered into every Lord's Day. But Jim Jordan really does need to be singled out. One does not need to read between the lines in this book to see his influence on every page. My book is largely a popularization of his profound biblical, theological, and liturgical insights. So deeply has Jordan's work affected my thought and life that I suspect many parts come perilously close to plagiarism.

The fundamental content of this book began to take shape about a dozen years ago as I wrote a series of essays explaining the meaning of the Lord's Day service. They were first distributed as newsletter articles for Covenant Presbyterian Church, the congregation I served in Houston, Texas. I am grateful to the elders and members of that congregation for the patience they displayed with their young, zealous minister. I revised those articles slightly in the mid-1990's for the congregation of Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri where I am presently Senior Pastor. Since that time, my own understanding of the meaning and practice of Christian worship has developed significantly as I have participated in the worship of the Church and continued to study the Bible as well as liturgical history and theology. The elders and members of Providence Reformed Presbyterian church have responded with an enthusiasm and appreciation that often leaves me speechless. No minister could ask for a better session or congregation to lead before the throne of God every Lord's Day.

For many years this book circulated in a spiral-bound edition. Many friends and acquaintances have made numerous suggestions that I have incorporated into this final version. I especially want to thank my associate, Pastor Tommy Lee, for all of his suggestions and corrections. I am grateful the help and encouragement of Brian and Melanie Carter, who read the entire manuscript and found numerous errors. Doug Jones of Canon Press has been extraordinarily kind and supportive throughout the process of publication. I should also mention others who have carefully read earlier editions of this book and provided helpful theological advice: Dr. Peter J. Leithart, Rev. James B. Jordan, Pastor Burke Shade, Pastor Mark Horne, Pastor Jeff Steel, and the many seminary interns at Providence whose tongues have been effectively loosed by the many cigars and beers enjoyed on my back patio over the years. I can't imagine working on such a project without a community of scholars like these men offering encouragement and guidance at every step. A reader familiar with this informal community will see evidence of our "common mind" all through this work.

The original version of this book was written to help explain the Sunday morning service at Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church. At first *The Lord's Service* was a small manual designed to equip the membership of Providence for intelligent participation in worship and also to provide visitors with a biblical and theological rationale for our form of corporate worship. The elders of Providence wanted the inquiring visitor as well as the committed member to know the biblical explanations for our corporate Sunday worship and so be able to worship intelligently with us, experiencing the fullness of reverent worship and praise. We wanted our members and interested visitors to know that we had thought through our worship services, that there were good reasons behind our liturgy. The original, smaller version did not clutter up the text with academic references and extended polemical arguments because it was designed, first of all, as a relatively simple explanation of our service, accessible to any adequately educated member or visitor.

In time the small manual became a much larger work. I developed an expanded edition for the benefit of ministerial students, church officers, and others who needed to dig deeper into the study of worship and liturgy. This larger, beefed-up edition included extensive reference notes as well as additional chapters that dealt with matters important for pastors and seminary students. The book that you now hold in your hands is a revised edition of that expanded version. I have revised it considerably. The book is now divided into three major sections. First, there are eight chapters in which I briefly explain the biblical reasons for the overall order and content of our worship. In Part II we walk through each element of the service step by step as I explain its place and significance in the movement of the liturgy as a whole. Finally, Part III includes an extended bibliographical essay that should be useful to those who are interested in more advanced study, as well as various essays in which I have addressed a few of my concerns about traditional (and untraditional) themes in Presbyterian worship.

Although this book will now reach a much wider audience, I have retained Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church as a model for three reasons. First, it seems appropriate to talk about the worship of the Church from the perspective of one's own liturgical experience. Authors who write on the liturgy or liturgical theology normally do so from within their own tradition. Every pastor must necessarily begin his ministerial service *in medias res* when it comes to the liturgy of the congregation that he serves. Although Providence's worship may not be everything I would want, it is where the Lord has situated me and I am very grateful for it. In my own humble opinion, it doesn't get much better than this in Presbyterian circles. Second, if I were to write about some ideal form of liturgy that has never been learned and lived by any particular church, what good would that do anyone? As it is, I have included enough hints and suggestions here and there in the book to give discerning readers clues about what might be improved. Third, if readers wish to experience what they read, they can visit St. Louis and see and hear how it works. One will discover too, however, that Providence is in many ways an ordinary church with problems similar to those in most ecclesiastical communities.

There are reasons why Reformed congregations ought to behave in certain ways and not others during the Sunday service—sound biblical, theological, and historical reasons. We should not simply follow the dead, musty, liturgical traditions of our fathers. Neither should we clamor to be “trendier than thou,” like too many twenty-first-century American evangelical churches seem to be doing these days. I believe the worship I describe in this book is both securely grounded in the Word of God and effectively draws on the wisdom of the historical liturgy, especially the Reformed tradition. I pray that this book will help promote the kind of worship that will please our Lord and effectively expand his kingdom.

Pastor Jeffrey J. Meyers
Trinity Season A.D. 2002

PART I

The Divine Service of Covenant Renewal:

*The first foundation of righteousness is
undoubtedly the worship of God.*

— John Calvin

The first part of this book (chapters 1–8) deals with biblical and theological fundamentals that are indispensable for addressing questions about the practice of corporate Christian worship. G. K. Chesterton once argued that when things go wrong, we need “unpractical men” who will analyze the problem before rushing in with solutions.

There has arisen in our time a most singular fancy: the fancy that when things go very wrong we need a practical man. It would be far truer to say, that when things go very wrong we need an unpractical man. Certainly, at least, we need a theorist. A practical man means a man accustomed to merely daily practice, to the way things commonly work. When things will not work, you must have the thinker, the man who has some doctrine about why they work at all. It is wrong to fiddle while Rome is burning; but it is quite right to study the theory of hydraulics while Rome is burning.[†]

[†] G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong With the World* (1910), in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton, Volume IV*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 43.

Too many contemporary pastors rush to solve attendance and interest problems in their churches with “practical” solutions for making worship services more comfortable, relevant, or exciting for modern people. Such ad hoc, often novel, liturgical practices have ignited fiery controversies in Reformed and evangelical circles that some have called “worship wars.” Many authors have worked hard to sidestep foundational theological questions so as to suggest without needless delay practical down-to-earth, how-to advice to douse on this blaze. “The church is burning,” they cry. “We need water now!” But is all of this practical advice correct? Will all this activity extinguish the fire? It looks like water. It feels wet like water. Nevertheless, it would be a good idea for someone to examine the liquid to determine the validity of these claims. After all, it may be gasoline.

To paraphrase Chesterton, It is wrong to fiddle while a fire rages over worship practices; but it is quite right to study the biblical theology of corporate worship in order to discover the best remedy for quenching the fire. This book’s first eight chapters do not contain a great deal of how-to advice. Some would say they are very unpractical. Nevertheless, I am convinced that Christian ministers and people must rediscover the foundational biblical and theological reasons for corporate worship. No pastor should plan or lead a congregation before God’s holy presence in worship until he has carefully considered the kind of issues I address in the first part of this book. Ministers who actually compose services, write prayers, choose hymns, and are responsible for ordering the events of a corporate worship service are obligated to make a studied effort to achieve some competency in these matters. Christian men and women who gather together each week for the Divine Service will also find their experience of worship enriched by thinking through these same issues.