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Eduard R. Riegert

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# WORSHIP AND THE CHURCH'S MISSION

*Eduard R. Riegert*

In dealing with the relationship between the church's worship and its mission it is well to begin at an obvious but necessary place, namely, the scriptural evidence that a great divorce may exist between worship and mission. It can scarcely be expressed more bluntly than Amos expressed it: "I hate it, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take away from me the noise of your songs: to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream" (5:21-24). The point is clear: worship that has no effect on the way people live, is unrelated to life in the home, the marketplace, and the law-court, is an abomination.

There is an even sharper sting in Isaiah 58. The house of Jacob asks plaintively of the Lord: "Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?" To which the Lord replies: "Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high . . . Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? . . . Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am" (3-5a, 6-7, 9a).

These are the words Jesus picked up in his parable of the Last Judgment. The Son of Man does not say to the blessed, "You sang the liturgy beautifully, you made lively processions, you made graceful signs of the cross, you celebrated the saints days with gorgeous banners, you tastefully enlarged your church building." No. He says, ". . . I was hungry and you gave me food . . . in prison and you came to me" (Mt. 25:31-46).

This is not news to us. Karl Ferdinand Muller states it flatly: "Worship which does not include being sent out into the world and the impetus for a spiritual way of life in the midst of the world has lost its meaning." Even more strongly he states, "The limitation of worship to mere cultic activity is one of the most disastrous heresies of the Christian Church for centuries. Faith, too, has its social and political aspects. And therefore so has worship."<sup>1</sup> The document, *Lutherans at Worship*, is equally clear:

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1. Karl Ferdinand Muller, "Living Worship," *Worship and Secularization*, Wiebe Vos, editor (Geneva: Commission on Faith and Order, World Council of Churches, 1970), pp. 90, 88.

Worship "is the event in which the faithful gather in God's presence to receive him in Word and Sacrament, and to respond by praising the Lord and *making commitment to his mission in the world.*"<sup>2</sup>

Yet the truth is that worship and mission are more often severed than joined. I am a member of a congregation that, after long hesitation, is just embarking on a building project. A funds campaign has surpassed the most optimistic calculations. It frightens me. We are in danger of "seeking our own pleasure in the day of our fast." If we say of our building program, "This is the Lord's work!" we are in peril; if we can say, "The building can help us *do the Lord's work,*" we may yet stand with the sheep and not with the goats.

That is a parable of the way it is with worship and mission: we are in danger of *creating our own special little world.* For in my congregation we are so conscious of our needs and wants that we transform our building program into the Kingdom program and persuade ourselves our mission is to erect yet another building.

And that brings me to the thesis of this paper: When the church creates—especially in and through worship—her own world, her mission will be truncated and/or narrowly defined; when the church accepts God's world, her worship will empower mission.<sup>3</sup>

## THE POWER TO CREATE WORLDS

Worship, as ritual, has enormous power to create and maintain a special world.<sup>4</sup> Consider: Every family has rituals, and these make the family unique. Through them that family receives its common sense of identity, acknowledges its common authority, relives its common memories, holds up its common vision, savors its common life together, and empowers its common life in the world.<sup>5</sup> Now suppose a family's rituals are so distinctive they nurture an excessive sense of difference; the family is forced to seek out other families who share the same rituals. A community is born: most likely an ethnic community; it may become a ghetto like the famous "Chinatown" in Vancouver. Its life is focussed *inward*, and a world within the world is created. Many per-

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2. *Lutherans at Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), p. 10, emphasis added. Quoted in Alan R. Cook. *Toward An Ambiguous Theology of Work*, Comprehensive Seminar paper, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, 1982, p. 72.
  3. The "mission" of the church is, of course, a direct result of the church's conception of itself, i.e., of ecclesiology. For example, Avery Dulles in *Models of the Church* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974) has described five models (the church as institution, as mystical communion, as sacrament, as herald, and as servant), each of which produces its peculiar expression of mission, and both together will call for a congruent liturgical style: see Walter R. Bouman, "Models of the Church and Styles of Liturgy," *Trinity Seminary Review*, 4, 1 (Spring 1982).
  4. The truth of this assertion can be experienced by reading Black Elk's account of the seven traditional rites of the Oglala Sioux, which include the Pipe ceremony, the Vision Quest, the Sweat Lodge, and the Sun Dance. Joseph E. Brown (ed.). *The Sacred Pipe* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1971).
  5. I have borrowed and adapted these terms from William H. Willimon, *Integrative Preaching*, Abingdon Preacher's Library, William D. Thompson, editor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), pp. 54ff. They are, he says, six requisites to congregational unity, but they seem to me to summarize rather well the functions and purposes of ritual and liturgy.

sons are born, live, and die in such inner worlds; they may have very little awareness of anything beyond the borders of their "Chinatown."<sup>6</sup>

It should be clear that congregations do the same thing; the formation of Lutheran Church bodies in North America occurred initially on ethnic lines, and despite mergers and a common culture we retain still a ghetto mentality.<sup>7</sup> The enormous power of ritual tends to create a world within the world, and mission then becomes the maintaining of that world (for example, Lutheran mission in North America has consisted largely of following up Lutherans).

During the past two decades we have observed the power of ritual creating both benign and demonic worlds. The early "charismatics" fled the secularized and technologized world and created a mystical world of warm fellowship and intimate contact with God. As the movement has matured, a focus on the renewal of the church has steadily gained clarity.<sup>8</sup> Thus its mission, at first very narrowly and self-protectively defined, has broadened considerably. On the other side, we watched with horror as Jimmy Jones led his faithful into rehearsed mass suicide.<sup>9</sup>

Usually the world created and maintained by worship is what can only be called a "spiritual" world. Perhaps the crassest expression of it comes in the song, "I walked in the garden alone," where the Son of God "walks with me and talks with me, and tells me I am his own." This is an enormously intimate and private world, because "the joys we share as we tarry there, *none other* can ever know." This song fits exactly the dominant view of religion held by North American Protestantism and society in general: the separation of church and state has come to mean the assigning to God of certain territory and his exclusion from other territory. Unfortunately but inevitably Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, when set into this milieu, has come to mean the same thing. When Project North began pressing for justice for the Inuit and Indians in the North, the Christian businessmen, oil barons, and mining magnates were at first puzzled ("What are nice Christians like you doing in a place like this?") and then angered ("The church [translation: God] has no business in Northern development!"). God belongs only in that private, intimate, mystical world of the Garden.

How may this special world created by the church's worship be described?

1) It is a *history-less* world; the present personal history of the individuals in the group is all that really matters. If anything, there is the attempt to reproduce New Testament life or some supposed ideal period while ignoring the intervening centuries.

2) It is a *self-conscious* world in that it is deliberately set over against the world "out

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6. I intend the reference only to be descriptive of a common phenomenon. See "Peace and Long Life," a pictorial and word essay on Vancouver's Chinatown in *Beautiful British Columbia*, 24, 1 (Summer 1982), pp. 3-12.

7. See the informative book by Walter Freitag, *Prospect and Promise of Lutheran Unity in Canada* (Calgary: Foothills Lutheran Press, 1974).

8. See the well-balanced article by Egil Grisliis, "The Challenge of the Charismatic Renewal to Lutheran Theology," *Consensus*, VII, 4 (October 1981).

9. See the studies by John e. Biersdorf, *Hunger for Experience* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); Harvey Cox, *Turning East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977); Robert S. Ellwood, *Alternative Altars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Friedrich W. Haack, "New Youth Religions, Psychomutation and Technological Civilization," *International Review of Missions*, 69 (1978), pp. 436-447. I am indebted to John Latimer, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, for these references.



there.” It is “different” than the so-called “secular” world: it is “holier,” enlightened, saved; it is both a judgment upon and an invitation to the world “out there.”

3) It poses as a *self-contained* world; it contends it has everything anyone could possibly need or want, of a quality unmatched anywhere.

4) It is, consequently, an *enterprising and competitive* world, using evangelism, worship, and other programs to attract and win new converts.

5) It is a *simple* world. All teaching and preaching must be kept on an elementary level; any intellectual and theological sophistication becomes suspect.

6) It is a *special* world in which God is held to be uniquely present and uniquely active. He operates differently and does different things here than in the “secular” world. Therefore those who function here must dress differently than they do anywhere else;<sup>10</sup> they must—in some cases—use a language unique to this special world.<sup>11</sup> And the senses of God’s presence and power are special senses used only here; the things done and the subjects talked about are done and said only here.

7) It is essentially a *painless* world, therefore, where sweetness and light reign, where all the folks get the right strokes, where the Lazaruses of the dung-heaps are screened out by stained glass, the cries of the wronged are drowned by choirs and organs, and the cross of Golgotha is an ornamental medallion.

In short, such a “spiritual” world created in and nourished by the church in worship is an *escape* world. The church’s mission will consequently be limited to maintaining this “shangri-la”, and attempting to bring more people into it. Amos, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, and Jeremiah were rather merciless about such special worlds: “Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord . . . Amend your ways and your doings, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord’ ” (Jeremiah 7:2b-4). And St. Paul echoes: “You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain” (Gal. 4:10-11).

## ONE WORLD: GOD’S WORLD

Over against any tendencies to create such a special world, Ernst Kaesemann says, “. . . the church can no longer be regarded as some sacred temple precinct. The field of the church’s operation must be the world in its totality, for nothing less can be the field of Christ the Cosmocrator.”<sup>12</sup>

That is an enormously important statement, for it contends that the church is not supposed to be making any other world, but is to live in and deal with *the world God has already made*. John Reumann put it this way: “Worship is meant to drive away our dullness, to alert our sensitivities, not just toward God but also to his world, and to direct our gaze away from selfish worldliness to God, so that he may speak to

10. I wonder, mischievously, whether this is why women are often not desired as pastors: liturgical vestments on them are *not* so different! More seriously, exclusion of one sex always makes a place or event different.

11. Curiously, the traditional shamans of some Inuit groups spoke a special and archaic language while in trance.

12. Ernst Kaesemann. *Studies in Biblical Theology: Essays on New Testament Themes* (Chatham, England: SCM Press, 1964), p. 72.

listening, obedient ears."<sup>13</sup> That is the true polarity in which the church finds herself: God, and the world God has made. Therefore we must say this hard thing: when the church creates a special world and relegates God to that world, it is committing idolatry.

We should know that from our theology. At the heart of it is the Incarnation. God did not reveal himself ultimately in an especially religious way in an especially religious place; he did it in a baby in a barn. Which is to say: If you want to find God don't look in the shrines, look in the barns of life. Moreover, in Jesus it is made clear that God does his saving work not in a grand movement of triumphal power but through the weakness of suffering, pain, and death.

The Incarnation and the Cross determine our understanding of God's presence and his way of working in the world, namely, that God is never "nakedly" present, but is present always through some medium: supremely, the man Jesus; then the Holy Scriptures and the Sacraments and the fellowship of faith; and then, as we perceive the utter *secularity* of these media, we may perceive his saving presence there where "the crowded ways of life" cross. Westerhoff and Willimon express it accurately: "Christianity is, in some ways, a surprisingly mundane, materialistic, everyday kind of faith. Christian worship, at its beginning, was a surprisingly mundane, material, domestic-like affair which took its central rites not from a temple altar but from a dinner table in a home."<sup>14</sup>

If the church's worship is indeed to empower the church's mission, then it must take the world God made with utmost seriousness. Our worship, maintains Vilmos Vajta, "must restore again its contact with life, with the ordinary life of man" because it is precisely in *ordinary* life that contemporary people experience an emptiness, while the "sacral" worlds offered by the church's worship are remote and alien to them. "Contemporary atheism," he continues, "accuses the church because it gets the impression that the church has robbed man of the world."<sup>15</sup> That is precisely the point.

## THE WORLD IN WORSHIP

How is worship to take God's world seriously so that it may empower our mission to that world?

1) We will need to see the world again as *creation*. More and more as our technology develops we have seen the world and its geography, its geology, its flora and fauna and even its peoples as *things*. But according to the Creed, we confess our faith in God the *creator* who created every form and force of nature; we are dealing not with *things* but with a *creation*. The First Article of the Creed is a judge upon our rapacity.

The Second Article has always held prime place in our worship; the Third Article,

13. John Reumann, "Holy Scripture and Worship," *The Lutheran Quarterly*, XX, 1 (February 1968): 21.

14. John H. Westerhoff, III and William H. Willimon. *Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), p. 28.

15. Vilmos Vajta, "Worship in a Secularized Age," *Worship and Secularization*, Wiebe Vos, editor, p. 76.

has now transformed a good deal of worship. I suggest it is time now to bring the First Article to prominence. There are a number of places in the Church Year where we can begin.

*Thanksgiving Day* is an obvious place and time to hold up the stewardship of creation. Yet isn't it startling that on only *one* day of the entire year, we turn attention to the earth? Perhaps not, when we realize that even the Lectionary makes little reference to creation. Gerard S. Sloyan observes: ". . . the Lectionary is all but silent on the marvel of creation . . . It uses none of the great nature psalms as a sustained reading and from the riches of Job calls only on . . . [38:1-11, *Lutheran Book of Worship*] . . . (which) provides all one could ask for on the power of God over wind and wave but one rightly suspects that its choice was governed by the gospel reading of the stilling of the storm (Mark 4:35-40)."<sup>16</sup> Even Genesis 1:1-2:3, which Sloyan calls the great "poem of creation with all its cosmic grandeur," is read only once, on Holy Trinity, Series A, when the focus is not at all on creation but the doctrine of the Godhead. A part of this poem, 1:1-5, 26-31, is appointed for the Day of St. John (27 December), where the emphasis clearly is meant to evoke John 1:1. Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17; 3:1-7 is appointed for First Lent, Series A; the recounting of the creation of man and his placement in Eden is thus only a prelude to the story of the Fall, a primary concern of this passage as a Lenten reading. Finally, Genesis 2:18-24, Pentecost 20, Series B, deals with the naming of the animals and the creation of Eve; again the aspects of creation are overshadowed: the animals are literally put aside since they are not "fit helpers" for Adam.

The Lectionary thus speaks of creation only by implication, not by intention. One day a year, Thanksgiving, is surely only a tokenism. Happily, the *Lutheran Book of Worship* does give us the magnificent canticle, "All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord" (#18).

A second place where we can emphasize the world as creation is in the traditional Rogation Days, the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before the Ascension of our Lord, which were the times to ask God to bless the seed, the soil, and the crops.<sup>17</sup>

A third place is summer holiday time. We are as consumptive in our recreation as we are in the rest of our society, and that is tragic: to recreate ourselves we consume our natural heritage like grasshoppers. Has our worship no way of redeeming this savagery?<sup>18</sup> Herbert Brokering tells a little parable: "Once there was a church where

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16. Gerard S. Sloyan, "The Lectionary as a Context for Interpretation," *Interpretation*, XXXI, 2 (April 1977): 137.

17. See "Celebrating God's Creation: Rural Life, Stewardship of Creation, Rogate," *Living Liturgy*, Division for Parish Services, Lutheran Church in America, April, 1980.

18. Perhaps traditional Native practices offer some possibilities. For example: "We might consider the Pueblo view that in the springtime Mother Earth is pregnant, and one does not mistreat her any more than one might mistreat a pregnant woman . . . Some Pueblo folks still take the heels off their shoes, and sometimes the shoes off their horses, during spring. I once asked a Hopi whom I met in that country, 'Do you mean to say, then, that if I kick the ground with my foot, it will botch everything up, so nothing will grow?' He said, 'Well, I don't know whether that would happen or not, but it would just really show what kind of person you are.'" (Barre Toelken, "Seeing With a Native Eye: How Many Sheep Will it Hold?" *Seeing With a Native Eye: Essays on Native American Religion*, Walter H. Capps, editor, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 14.



the organ broke. So they opened their windows and listened. They heard the clapping of thunder, the transmissions of trucks, the beat of jumping ropes, the swaying of leaves, the rubbing of branches, the drone of the fan, the walking of women, the running of boys, the moving of traffic, and the whistling of wind. Every Sunday they do this. They are thinking of not replacing the organ for awhile."<sup>19</sup>

2) Secondly, we need again to pay attention to the "offering" element of worship. Vilmos Vajta recalls how uneasy he felt with the European practice of a collection box at the door of the church. "And then one day I was present at an American church service . . . : the gifts were collected pew by pew and then brought to the altar and offered to God with a prayer. Only then did it dawn upon me that my wallet had been offered to God."<sup>20</sup> That practice is old hat to us. Yet the offering is an enormously *theological* part of worship. It is not only a way to pay the bills, and certainly is not a giving-in-order-to-get God's favor; it is the total response to God's gracious presence. We Lutherans are suspicious of "offering" anything to God, because we do not want to give any encouragement to the notion that we can buy or earn God's mercy.<sup>21</sup> Yet there is a response we must make to God. As H. Grady Davis said, "If God is speaking to me, it is imperative that I answer him at once." And this answer must be a "decent reply."<sup>22</sup> Such a decent reply cannot only be some select activities one hour a week. A truly decent reply is *all* of us and all our life. St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "I appeal to you . . . to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (12:1). That's a decent reply! But be clear about this: such a reply brings the whole world into worship, and throws worship into the world.

Again a parable from Herbert Brokering: "Once there was a church where the people took the offering back home with them. First it was collected and brought to the altar. After they asked God to bless it, they put it back into their pockets. They mixed it up with all their other money, so that they couldn't tell which was blessed and which was not. Then they left. All week they spent as though each piece was blessed. And was to be used lovingly."<sup>23</sup>

3) Thirdly, we need to work hard at *intercession*. Intercessory prayers, writes Vilmos Vajta, "are not recommendations to God as to how He should behave in the world; on the contrary, they are my commitment for the world before God, my surrender to God and my adoption by God into His service."<sup>24</sup> We are learning from church renewal movements how powerful and beneficial it is to have people pray for each other, and many congregations are making room in their services for a "sharing time" in which prayers are requested and made. We need to open up space in the

19. Herbert Brokering. *"I" Opener* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974), p. 56.

20. Vilmos Vajta, "Worship in a Secularized Age," p. 77.

21. Some question the whole notion of an offertory procession because it mixes up our self-offering with Christ's offering and thus opens the way to our "participating in Calvary." Cf. Oliver K. Olson, "Contemporary Trends in Liturgy Viewed from the Perspective of Classical Lutheran Theology," *The Lutheran Quarterly*, XXVI, 2 (May 1974): 147f., 156.

22. H. Grady Davis. *Why We Worship* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 14. See the helpful commentary on Offertory by Jay C. Rochelle. *Create and Celebrate* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 30-32.

23. Herbert Brokering. *"I" Opener*, p. 31.

24. Vilmos Vajta, "Worship in a Secularized Age," p. 77.



liturgy for this. I am frequently surprised how little time a congregation spends in prayer, apart from the liturgical verses and responses.<sup>25</sup> But the prayers and the Offering must be held together as the “decent reply” we make to God. It is peculiarly here that the “churchy” curtains are raised and worshippers directed to the total world of God’s love which is commended to our stewardship and loving service. How sad if we pray only for ourselves! Surely we should do that—remembering our fellow members, especially those with pressing needs and joys. But precisely there we can see the active creating of our own world: we remember and serve only our own group. It is through intercessory prayer that the needs of the whole creation can be held up to God, unwearingly. The Psalms are prime material; I regret that the *Lutheran Book of Worship* is so selective of them. The Rev. Donna Seamone discovered that “only thirty-six of the fifty-seven lament psalms appear in print in the LBW. Of these only twenty-one are recommended for use in the lectionary. Of those recommended for use only seven are to be used in their entirety.”<sup>26</sup> This is an unfortunate reduction of the very kind of material which exposes the plight of the peoples of the world: loneliness, oppression, persecution, pain, intimidation, despair, injustice, want; and, as well, the emergence from these “Good Fridays” to the “Easter” surprises of grace and joy. We need to learn to use these Psalms for more than responses to the First Lesson.

Again a parable from Herbert Brokering: “Once there was a church where once a month they kept the doors locked. They met on the sidewalk and decided where they would go to worship that day. They went to all kinds of places where they thought God was. Sometimes they were chased away. Finally they decided to quit it. Now they are back inside their church building. They haven’t given up yet and have a committee looking into the matter. They believe God is out there in all those places.”<sup>27</sup>

4) Fourthly, we need to recover the fuller dimensions of the Sacraments. The Baptismal rite again has given us the magnificent “water prayer” which recalls the Flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. But what we need to recover is that this “passage” through the water is not an esoteric symbol but the expression of a basic and deep reality of life. Our life is the negotiation of a constant series of such “passages” in which the “old” must die so that the “new” can come to be (Rom. 13:11-14). Baptism draws the “pattern” of life, and the rite laun-

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25. There is theological reason for this, namely, the Lutheran understanding of worship as primarily a movement of God to man. Thus Lutherans could not, as Roman Catholics do, describe the liturgy as *prayer*, for that makes the movement from man to God—which, of course, then comes to full expression in the “sacrifice of the mass” which Luther abhorred. For a full discussion, see Oliver K. Olson, “Contemporary Trends in Liturgy Viewed from the Perspective of Classical Lutheran Theology,” as well as Gordon Lathrop, “The Prayers of Jesus and the Great Prayer of the Church,” *The Lutheran Quarterly*, XXVI, 2 (May 1974).

26. Donna Lynne Seamone. *Worship: Search for an Image*. Comprehensive Seminar paper, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, 1982, p. 42.

27. Herbert Brokering, “*I*” *Opener*, p. 16. “Prayer is not something separate from mission nor is it the cause of mission. When the church prays, as when Christ prayed in Galilee, it is engaged in mission; it participates in the divine action for the world” (J.G. Davies, “Mission and Worship *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, J.G. Davies, editor, (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1972), p. 274.

ches the person upon it and exposes and expresses the ultimate dimensions of it, namely, "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus . . . were buried . . . with him . . . into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4).<sup>28</sup> Baptism will remain either a nice and proper thing to do or a semi-magical act unless people can begin to see that "dying and rising", Good Friday and Easter, have to do with the deepest reality of their life, a reality mirrored in every experience of effective change. Then the presence of God will cease to be a Sunday veneer and become their way of being in the world.<sup>29</sup> Baptism is precisely the enactment of the Good Friday-Easter passage. It tells the way life is, and the way God is in that life.<sup>30</sup>

Volumes have been written about the Lord's Supper. Yet here again we have focussed so much on the Second Article of the Creed that the First and Third have suffered neglect. Surely bread and wine (as well as the water, fire, and oil of Baptism!) link us to the earth, to wind, rain, sun and sky, to life fluids and blood (in a word, to all creation!); as well as to all table-fellowships, all the celebrations of life together from birthday cakes to wedding cakes to funeral cakes, all anniversaries, family reunions, dinners, and picnics, (in a word, to all our "spirit-ships"). The astonishing thing is that the Lord's Supper proclaims God's Real Presence in all of these, so that if we discover him there in our Holy Communion we will know him also wherever bread is broken and, most poignantly, know him where there is no bread to break and no water to pour.

These sacramental elements are *earth* elements. Water, seed, grape relate us to every life form in creation, demonstrating the interdependence of all life forms. "In the ancient eucharistic prayers of the church," writes Vilmos Vajta, "the great acts of God in creation are rehearsed again and again, and a song of praise is offered for

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28. Early baptismal fonts symbolized this death and resurrection experience of Baptism. The most primitive form, quadrilateral, is similar to a sarcophagus (a "tomb" says Ambrose). Hexagonal shapes referred to Christ's death on the sixth day of the week; octagonal shapes to his resurrection on the eighth. Baptisteries likewise took hexagonal or octagonal shapes, deliberately combining the two shapes (if font was hexagonal, the Baptistry would be octagonal) to make obvious the death-resurrection passage (J.G. Davies, "Font," *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, p. 180). The very dramatic Baptismal service on Holy Saturday eve, according to the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, had the candidates put off their old clothes, face West for the Renunciation, descend into the font to be buried, rise from it toward the East, to be clothed in white garments, fed milk and honey, and meet the risen Lord in the Eucharist at Easter's sunrise: thus vividly enacting the passage with Christ through death to life.
29. Cf. Eduard R. Riegert, "Baptism in the Lutheran Tradition," a study paper submitted to the Faith and Order Commission of the Canadian Council of Churches, 1971. Mimeograph.
30. Jay C. Rochelle writes: "People experience life-and-death cycles within their own lives. We have recently been conditioned to speaking of 'raising consciousness.' When this occurs to someone, his experience is often termed a rebirth. I enter a relationship with a person in which I give myself to him/her and he/she gives 'self' back to me, and we have created, or birthed, a new thing . . . I enter a different level of relationships with what I consider to be divine and I find my self reborn. Just as there is no growth without pain, so there is no life without death. The Christian faith in Resurrection relates to this personal experience. It is not guaranteed by the experience, but it is the ground out of which the experience can be interpreted. Easter is the fulfilment of experience. It can be seen as the paradigm for all experience of life-and-death."

*The Revolutionary Year*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, pp. 48ff.

them . . . In the West this reference to creation dropped out in the Roman Mass."<sup>31</sup> That is regrettable; more regrettable is the fact that we still have not restored it: we recite, in the Great Thanksgiving, only the history of *salvation*; there is no significant reference to the history of *creation*. Yet it is precisely the First Article of the Creed that reveals man to be both *creature* and *recipient*. "So long as man cannot receive, neither can he celebrate any worship in this world . . .," writes Vajta. "We have lost the world as creation because we are at such a loss about the Lord's Supper."<sup>32</sup>

Again a parable from Herbert Brokering: "Once there was a minister who wore a seed pod to a church banquet. They sat in the circle and acted like they never saw it. Someone couldn't stand it, and she pointed to the dry boutonniere and shouted, 'It's dead!' The man walked around the circle and gave each person a piece. They all went home and planted it. That was all he had to say. They are still talking about it."<sup>33</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show in a few instances<sup>34</sup> how in our worship we may rediscover and recover God's world so that we do not construct our own. If we construct our own world, our mission will be very narrowly focussed on it, and we will escape the mission to which God calls us. That is apostasy.<sup>35</sup> If, however, our worship keeps opening doors and windows upon God's creation, if it deliberately prevents us from fashioning an escapist world of our own, then our worship will empower mission authentically. Muller says, "God became man in Christ so that every way could be barred to me which would take me past my fellow men."<sup>36</sup> We could add that not only did God become man in Christ, he also created a world for that man in Christ—and for all the persons in Christ—as the place where salvation is worked out with fear and trembling and great laughter.<sup>37</sup>

Vilmos Vajta sums it up: "The church's worship is the praise of creation which

31. Vilmos Vajta, "Worship in a Secularized Age," p. 78.

32. Vilmos Vajta, "Worship in a Secularized Age," p. 78. See Jay C. Rochelle. *Create and Celebrate*, p. 35.

33. Herbert Brokering, "*I*" *Opener*, p. 4.

34. The dismissal deserves consideration: "Any and every service is most fittingly brought to an end by a dismissal which expresses this outgoing to the world at large [i.e., the Matthew 28 command]. It is therefore not a cozy rounding off of a cultic act but the sending of God's servants in mission" (J.G. Davies, "Mission and Worship," p. 274).

35. "The Church alone is called in *this* world to maintain its worship and not to construct its own world apart from God's creation which could only be apostasy" (Vilmos Vajta, "Worship in a Secularized Age," p. 81.)

36. Karl Ferdinand Muller, "Living Worship," p. 88.

37. "In the sharing, serving, and unity which we see in this meal, we see an example of the ministry of Christ as well as the ministry of Christ's followers. Jesus only did in the Last Supper that which he did in all the meals which he ate with his followers—he served others. When the disciples of Christ serve one another in this sacred meal, they repeat the table action of Christ as well as the action of his entire ministry—loving service to others . . . Christians only do at the table what they are expected to do in the world—loving service to others in the name of Christ" (Westerhoff and Willimon. *Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle*, p.31). "The purpose of the Eucharist is to stimulate and equip both individuals and the community for ministry and mission in the world. No longer can the liturgy be used as an escape from personal or social problems" (*ibid.*, p. 42).



though fallen has been healed in Christ. Worship is, therefore, mission into the world, a *missio* of healing for a sick world seeking recovery."<sup>38</sup>

Let Brokering have the second last word: "Once there was a church that didn't have a cross in it. The building committee told them they could save a hundred dollars that way. Instead they each have learned to make the sign of the cross with their fingers. They have learned to make the sign over bread and water and over each other. Now instead of one cross they have hundreds of them."<sup>39</sup>

And Karl Ferdinand Muller the last word: "It is less important to make the sign of the cross than to be a cross oneself . . . Worship . . . is life with the crucified, risen and present Lord and with one's fellow men in the here and now."<sup>40</sup>

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38. Vilmos Vajta, "Worship in a Secularized Age," p. 81. We ought not delude ourselves about this mission. Vajta continues: "The church will have to claim the right to freely proclaim forgiveness in every economic and political system. Its task is not to come to terms with whoever happens to be in power which has always, throughout history down to our own time, meant apostasy, but rather to represent in relation to the whole world the freedom of the Gospel of forgiveness. It will then be not the 'darling' of this world but the 'little flock,' a 'remnant' within humanity, which has remained true to its Lord by standing representatively for the salvation of the world with its faith in the power of life through the death on the cross."
39. Herbert Brokering. "I" *Opener*, p. 27.
40. Karl Ferdinand Muller, "Living Worship," p. 89.

# The Good Samaritan Society

(A LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION)

BOX 8190, STATION "F" T6H 5A2  
TEL. 436-0806

4TH FLOOR, 4225 - 107 STREET  
EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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RESIDENCE  
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*"The Good Samaritan Cared — so do we"*