

Called through the Gospel: The Holy Spirit in Lutheran Liturgy

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As christocentric (*solo Christo*) Lutherans, the active role and presence of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is often overlooked within Lutheran worship and liturgy. The tendency is to focus praise and thanksgiving on the first two persons of the Trinity, leaving the third person to enjoy the leftovers. The risks in amplifying the Lutheran liturgy to focus on the Spirit can be seen in an excessively spiritualist flavor and sanctity-laced messages that lift up the gifts of the Spirit while diminishing salvation through Christ.

Despite the often separated Sanctifier from Savior, the Holy Spirit is integrally intertwined with the teaching of the truth about Jesus Christ (John 14:26), speaking on what is heard from Jesus to glorify him and declaring to God's people the gospel (John 16:13–14). Therefore, it could be suggested that the Holy Spirit itself is christocentric. Teaching, declaring, and sanctifying are the principle communication roles of the Holy Spirit within and among the church. The Spirit is that which produces communications and establishes a vertical relationship between God and God's people as well as a horizontal relationship between God's holy people in community (Rom 8:14). God communicated with humans through the realm of the Spirit (2 Sam 23:2) and humans communicate with God through the same Spirit (Rom 8:26–27).

In *Luther's Small Catechism* the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles'

Creed about the Holy Spirit also highlights the Spirit's communicative nature:

The Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.¹

Luther's explanation points to the Spirit that manifests itself through the work of the people (*leiturgia*) when the gospel is proclaimed through word and celebrated through the breaking of bread to gather a community (*koinonia*) in Christ. The communicative gift of the Spirit always gathers the scattered into community and scatters the gathered into the world to be witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since Christology often garners more attention than pneumatology in Lutheran theology, we who stand in the heritage of Martin Luther and who live out the liberation of justification by grace through faith should explore how and where the Holy Spirit is actively present. In order to live the dynamic ecclesiology of "always being reformed," we must reflect on the presence of the Spirit, which allows and empowers us to be able to focus on Christ and the cross as our center.

So where is God's Spirit in our worship

1. Kolb-Wengert, 355.6.

and liturgical practices? How is the Spirit reforming, transforming, and instigating change in the church? What from our Lutheran worship and liturgical practice reveals Luther's theology of the Holy Spirit? Does exploring the vibrancy of the third person of the Trinity reduce the focus of the faithful from Christ or does it strengthen that focus? While the search for Luther's systematically summarized teachings on the Holy Spirit may prove a tough slog, the experience of the doctrine of the Spirit through worship and liturgy is one of the most accessible and revelatory means to understand what Lutherans believe and teach about God's sanctifying Spirit.

The newest hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*, presents Luther's understanding of the gospel-filled actions of the Holy Spirit in its pattern for worship. Presented as a cycle, the *ELW* identifies four main parts of Lutheran worship: gathering, word, meal, and sending.² Each of these four liturgical parts has embedded within it the divine presence and movement of the Holy Spirit. When the liturgy of Lutheran worship is closely explored, Luther's theology of the Holy Spirit is revealed. This article examines the vivid movement, presence, and activity of the Holy Spirit in the pattern for Lutheran worship in the liturgy of Holy Communion outlined in the *ELW*.

Gathering

Sanctification is the office of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit alone is holy because it sanctifies all Christians in baptism and continues sanctifying through the work and presence of the community. In highlighting Luther's explanation of the Holy Spirit in his *Large Catechism*, Oswald Bayer

points to scripture (Lev 19:2) and the Reformation movement, to show that all members of the communion of believers are "holy" because God sanctifies them, "in that God delivers himself to the believer as the holy one, the one who alone is holy. God himself is holy; and the one he addresses and thus creates becomes holy in that way as well. In this way he imparts his holiness, which he does not desire to keep for himself."³

According to the Apostles' Creed, the Holy Spirit affects our being made holy through the communion of saints, which is the holy catholic and apostolic church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Luther further clarifies that "to speak proper German we ought to say 'a community of saints' (*ein Gemeinde der Heiligen*) that is, a community that is composed of only saints, or still more clearly, 'a holy community' (*ein heilige Gemeinde*)."⁴ The Holy Spirit first leads us into holy community, which Luther says, places "us in the church's lap, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ,"⁵ to participate in what God is doing, and to be the body of Christ in the world. For this reason, the gathering nature of the Holy Spirit calls us together as God's holy community of saints to worship, learn, commune, and be sent out carrying and proclaiming all that we have experienced together. Cheryl Peterson suggests that God's Spirit, coming from the past, dwelling in the present, and opening up the future, creates this holy community that not only experiences "new life through the forgiveness of sins and the reconciling of relationships among its own members,

3. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 242.

4. LC II, III, 49.

5. *Ibid.*, 37.

2. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 92–93.

but is also a communion that is opened up by the Spirit to work for justice among people and for the healing of creation.”⁶ When the Holy Spirit gathers us in, as

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a mother hen to her brood, we are held together by the perichoretic love that exists within the Trinity itself and we are made God's own.

The radical inclusiveness of the gospel

6. Cheryl M. Peterson, “Spirit and Body: A Lutheran-Feminist Conversation,” in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 156.

is made real and visible in the gathering of the Christian community in which believers experience the forgiveness of sins through the celebration of the holy sacraments and the grace of the absolution, “as well as through all the comforting words of the entire gospel.”⁷ Heiko Oberman contends that the primary function of the Holy Spirit now is to gather together the Church through the preaching of the gospel that may occur at any time and place.⁸ Not only do we exist as the gathered spiritual community of God, but we are also made into a hearing community by the Spirit so that we can hear the promise of the gospel and listen for the pain, injustice, and fear in the voices of our neighbors.⁹

During the gathering part of the Lutheran liturgy, members of the gathered community corporately and individually confess their sins and hear the words of mercy and grace in the absolution. It is only by the Holy Spirit's presence in us that we can feel true contrition and recognize the presence of sin within us and our presence within sin, which generates the desire to turn away from sin and back to God. In the corporate confession of sins, when we become resigned to the fact that we justly deserve the condemnation because of living captive to the law and enslaved to sin, we are conformed to Christ's death. Additionally, when we accept the absolution as liberating good news, then we are united with Christ in his resurrection.¹⁰

7. LC II, III, 54.

8. Heiko A. Oberman, “Preaching and the Word in the Reformation,” *Theology Today* 18, no. 1 (April 1961): 21–22.

9. Peterson, “Spirit and Body,” 160.

10. Arnold E. Carlson, “Luther and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (May 1959): 138.

For Luther, the activity of the Holy Spirit comes through clearly and is never construed apart from the gospel that takes the form of the *verbum externum*, the external word that can be heard and also can be seen and discerned in the holy sacraments. According to Luther, the gospel through “sermonic words, baptism, and the Lord's Supper are the three means or ways in which the Holy Spirit comes to us.”¹¹

Word

Once the community of saints is gathered in worship, the Holy Spirit communicates God's message of love, forgiveness, grace, and mercy to their hearts through the proclamation of the gospel within the church. This is the proclaiming or preaching nature of the Holy Spirit. Luther emphasized the living, proclaimed Word over against the written word of God in the holy scriptures. Peterson indicates that for Luther, the spoken and heard Word actualizes the promise of the salvation of Christ in the preaching event. The preached gospel is an acoustic event of the Spirit that speaks the liberating gospel of Christ through the sound of the human voice. She notes that Luther considered the ear, rather than the eye, the means by which we encounter the gospel.¹² This communication by the Spirit about Jesus occurs in the transmission of the transformative, living Word (2 Pet 1:21) in that space between proclaimer and hearer, never failing to engage the actual context. Oberman further develops this notion,

The double operation of the Holy Spirit in opening the Bible through the preacher and opening the hearts of the listeners constitutes the sermon as

11. Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 242–243.

12. Peterson, “Spirit and Body,” 158.

corporate action which links speaking and listening. Just as the Holy Spirit is not effective in the sacraments when faith is absent, so no preaching of the Gospel is possible without the whole congregation being involved, positively or negatively, accepting the Word or rejecting it.¹³

From the mouth of the preacher to the ears of the faithful, the Holy Spirit is actively moving and working to enter the heart of everyone present where the seeds of Christ are planted and from where the fruits of the Spirit are produced. Luther understood that scripture did not remain solely letter, but became the Spirit, that is “something alive in the heart, which takes possession [of the hearer],” writing living words in the heart. Gerhard Ebeling suggests that “what is uttered *vocaliter* by the voice, must be understood *vitaliter* in the heart through the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴

In the divinely spoken event of the preaching of the gospel, the potential for transformation and conversion is palpable because the Spirit is the dynamic, life-giving presence of God.¹⁵ The preacher may preach what she or he wishes; however, she or he has no control over how, where, or when the liberating message of God in Christ will strike and convert people; for only God controls that through the working of the Spirit with the preaching. Luther says, “After preaching, leave the matter in God's hands; he will move whatever hearts he will.”¹⁶ Paul Althaus explains, “The fact that the external word enters and

13. Oberman, “Preaching and the Word,” 22.

14. Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 98.

15. Oberman, “Preaching and the Word,” 21.

16. WA 39.I, 370.

overwhelms the heart is therefore not the result of an inherent dynamic which the word possesses in itself. On the contrary, the activity of the Spirit which always occurs through the word, must first be added to the preaching and hearing of the external word.¹⁷

The Spirit's gift of preaching the gospel (Eph 4:11) calls us with a power to transform sadness to joy, desperation to hopefulness, unbelief to faith, condemned to forgiven, and unloved to unconditionally loved. It is the Holy Spirit, who works through the gospel message, which moves the believer from the grief and death of Good Friday to the hope and life of Easter Sunday. Through the pneumatic event of the proclaimed Word, the Spirit of God breathes and is breathed into the church, giving it abundant life. Peterson again points to this life-giving Spirit as the person of the Trinity who "has the power to speak and challenge the status quo, which is especially sensitive and important for marginalized persons who are too often told to be quiet and listen; that they have no space for their voice."¹⁸

Calling us through the gospel, the Holy Spirit preaches to us and brings us even closer to Jesus Christ to receive his blessings and in doing so we are sanctified and offered redemption. We cannot come to Jesus nor be made holy on our own efforts, but only through the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ God arranges for the Spirit to call us through the preached gospel so that after we have heard the word with our ears and grasped it within our heart, the same Spirit, who is the real teacher,

17. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 38.

18. Peterson, "Spirit and Body," 159.

19. LC II, III, 38.

comes and gives power to the word in order for it to take hold.²⁰ What will take hold are all the teachings that Jesus gave his disciples (John 14:26) that still apply and come to us in worship through the proclaimed Word. Luther summarizes the action of the Spirit in Lutheran liturgy, "everything in the Christian community is so ordered that everyone may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and sacraments appointed to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live on earth."²¹ The proclaimed word nourishes and disturbs in such a way that the assembled community is gathered even further in by the Spirit, around the Lord's table to hear again and see, indeed taste that the Lord is good.

Meal

The feeding nature of the Spirit is found in one of the sacramental means through which the Holy Spirit comes to us: in the breaking of bread within the gathered community. Here we are reminded of all that Jesus has said, especially, "This is my body given for you; this is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me." This is the proclaimed gospel word in tangible form. Through this means of grace, God's Spirit creates, strengthens, and sustains faith. If we take Luther's understanding that the word *communio*, translated as "community" and qualified by the adjective "holy," then the Eucharist shared during the worship is the meal of the holy community.²² The sacraments, whether Holy Baptism or the Eucharist, possess a *com-unio* function, which is the gift that gathers. Therefore, the sharing of Christ's meal is the second

20. WA 17.II, 459-460.

21. LC II, III, 55.

22. Ibid., 49.

gathering in the Lutheran worship, where the Holy Spirit creates in us love toward God and our neighbor, renewing and sanctifying us.²³

The Holy Spirit, in the ordinary meal of bread and wine, pulls the empty stomachs and well-worn spirits of the gathered community to the table like a magnet. The healing power of the meal gives us strength for the mission to testify to Christ crucified and resurrected. In the very ordinary act of feeding, the Spirit gathers us around the table as a company of sinful saints and creates sacred space where the mystery of faith is revealed to our discerning senses.

In the eucharistic meal, Christ is the presider and the Spirit is the inviter who recounts for the community again the story of God's mighty acts in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are given assurance of our Lord's presence through the gifts of his Holy Spirit. It is the same bread of life and the same cup of blessings that strengthens us through our participation in the body of Christ, through which we understand and receive God's forgiveness. Luther, in explaining the forgiving reality of God, states:

Further we believe that in this Christian community we have the forgiveness of sins, which takes place through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire gospel. This encompasses everything that is to be preached about the sacraments and, in short, the entire gospel and all the official responsibilities of the Christian community. Forgiveness is constantly needed, for although God's grace has been acquired by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the unity of the Christian church, yet we are never

23. FC SD III, 23.

without sin because we carry our flesh around our neck.²⁴

In the Eucharist the gathered community is fed and nourished before the Spirit begins the holy dispersion.

Sending

The fourth nature of God's Spirit in the movement of the liturgy of Lutheran worship is the Spirit's sending or scattering nature. The Word that is preached, consumed, and shared among the community enlivens and propels us forth from worship into service in the world. This *co-munus* function of the Spirit is the gift that disperses, scattering us into the *missio Dei*, which is not by compulsion, but rather spontaneously. For Luther, the holy community participates in the work of God in the world. This co-construction of the in-breaking of the reign of God here and now is essential for understanding Luther's theology correctly, especially when we speak of faith and sanctification. The good works that compose the *missio ecclesiae* are the fruits of the faith that come about through the planting, nourishing, watering, and harvesting of the Spirit of God. How the holy community lives out its experience of the triune God from worship in the world is the *missio ecclesiae* in fulfillment of the *missio Dei*. In the sending part of the pattern for worship in the liturgy of the *ELW*, it states,

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world. God's mission includes the gifts of grace that we share in worship and take also to the absent; now, we are sent to continue our participation in God's mission [through the fulfillment of the church's mission with the blessing of God, we go out to live as Christ's body in the world..²⁵

24. LC II, III, 54.

25. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 93.

Just as God is a gathering, teaching, and feeding God, so too is our dynamic God a sending God. God the Creator sends the Redeeming Son (1 John 4:14) and through the Son sends the Sanctifying Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The momentum of God's sending does not end with the persons of the Trinity, for it sends the church into the world to be more than the *locus* of God's mission, but to also be an instrument in God's mission. The *missio ecclesiae* is always and integrally related to the *missio Dei*. This sending motivation of God is the life force of the missional church (Matt 10:5–23; Luke 10:1) that is sent by God to be coworkers with God in the *mission Dei*. God's Spirit empowers the holy community of saints as we are scattered, for we could not but go out and be prophetic, proclaiming the radical gospel of Christ if it were not for the Spirit. G.J. Sirks helps us remember that in the gospel story, Jesus shares, even breathes the Holy Spirit with his disciples in the right moment. Sirks continues, "When in our public worship, we have heard the gospel of which Jesus

Christ is the center, and have lived through it with him, here comes the moment when we, too, are sent forth once more into the world. There the Holy Spirit will guide us and help us to adopt a critical attitude towards this life and the world."²⁶ With the final benediction pronounced over the gathered community, we are sent out, having been impacted by the worship, to have an impact in the world through Christian love and service.

The power and dynamism of God's Spirit in Lutheran worship and liturgy is repeated again and again, every time God's holy community is gathered, taught, fed, and sent out by the Holy Spirit, forgiven and sanctified. This, one might say, is the continual life cycle of the community of saints led by the Spirit.

26. G.J. Sirks, "The Cinderella of Theology: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," *Harvard Theological Review* L, no. 2 (April 1957): 87.

The Target of Mission in Ecumenical Mission Theology: A Critique

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Setting a target in mission is crucial for effective mission. Different target groups may require different goals and methods. For example, in traditional mission, the target tends to focus largely on saving souls through evangelism and church planting; the target group is nonbelievers who do not know Jesus Christ. In ecumenical mission, however, the target group is much broader and the focus is generally on social justice for the poor and oppressed and shalom for all creatures in the world.

This article examines the target group of ecumenical mission, compared to that of traditional mission. We will investigate how the differences came about, under what circumstances, with what kind of backgrounds, and how it affects the outcome of mission. By doing so, we will appreciate the contributions and limitations of the ecumenical understanding of the targets of mission. This will provide us with insights for clarifying the right targets for effective and dynamic mission.

Major Targets in Ecumenical Mission

1. The Poor

It is legitimate to claim that, among various concerns, the foremost target in ecumenical mission is "the poor." A document of the World Council of Churches (WCC), "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," says: "This implies that evangelization to the poor, with the poor,

for and by the poor, must be considered one of the church's highest priorities."¹ The reason that ecumenical mission is so deeply concerned about the poor is because Jesus Christ, the role model of our mission, himself came in human form among the poor and accepted their way of life. Jesus Christ came to make all people enjoy "fullness of life" (John 10:10) and, in particular, he revealed and subjugated the powers that deny the right of the poor to life through his death and resurrection (Luke 4:16–21). Also there is the claim that God, the master of mission, is the one who shows favoritism toward the poor. God's love is seeking the poor above all else, and God does not forget the people who are sacrificed by the exercise of power.² Ecumenical mission thus highlights that mission needs to put the first priority in mission on solving the difficulties of the poor.

Today the life of the poor is worsening as they are being oppressed and exploited by the rich. The gap between the rich and

1. Jean Stromberg, ed., *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 81.

2. In this sense, *Melbourne Report* says "God identified with the poor and the oppressed by sending his Son Jesus to live and serve as a Galilean speaking directly to the common people..." Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, *Melbourne Report: Your Kingdom Come* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1980), 171.