

The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Divine Service. A Lutheran Response to the Challenge from Charismatic Worship

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In Philippians 3:3 Paul claims that those who belong to the new Israel, with its circumcision of the old self, 'serve' by the Spirit of God. They are able to 'serve' God because they are animated by the Holy Spirit. But he does not explain how they are empowered to do so.

This may, at first glance, seem a rather insignificant. Yet our understanding of the Spirit's role in Christian worship does, in fact, determine what is done in the divine service, and how it is done. My question is: how can those who serve as ministers in the 'ministry of the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:8) promote the operation of the Holy Spirit in the divine service? How can they be sure that they are agents of God's Holy Spirit?¹

1. The Role of the Spirit in Charismatic Worship

The charismatic movement has popularised a form of worship that revolves around the work of the Holy Spirit in empowering Christian worship. It identifies worship with praise singing and associates the work of the Spirit with that kind of worship. As it praises God a congregation which has been baptised and filled with the Spirit is moved by the Spirit to thank and praise and adore God. So charismatic worship assumes that the Holy Spirit empowers the faithful with the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the reception of certain charismata for divine service. Those who are filled with the Spirit worship God with their praises and so lead others in Spirit-worked praise.

There is much in this way of singing that resembles what has always been done in the church. But there are also some things that are different and new. The praise singing movement has not just composed new repertoire of songs that are accompanied by electronic instruments rather than the organ or piano. It has introduced a new liturgy, a new form of worship, based on a new theology of praise. In fact, it tends to equate worship with praise. And that is part of its appeal, the reason for its success in touching and moving people.

We cannot understand this new practice of praise singing unless we appreciate its historical origins and its theological foundations. It came out of the revival movements that swept across America in the nineteenth century. These promoted a pattern of worship in which a series of lively gospel songs introduced an address that culminated in an altar call, a challenge to make a decision for Christ. This pattern of worship was reshaped by the Pentecostal movement. The old style Pentecostal churches used a

¹ This is a revised version of my article on "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Worship," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 44/1 (2005): 15-22.

time of praise to lead to speaking in tongues and singing in the Spirit. This was often followed by prophecy and healing. The sermon came after that as a kind of appendix to the time of worship. Thus the singing of praise was connected liturgically with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The theology that is enacted in this kind of praise is quite simple. God is enthroned in the praises of Israel². Through the performance of praise, God's people have access to his heavenly presence. When they enthrone him in their hearts by singing his praises, their spirits ascend, as on a ladder, by the power of the Holy Spirit into the heavenly realm, where they stand together with the angels before God's throne. There they present their offerings to Him and receive His heavenly gifts. Thus praise singing is regarded as a kind of heavenly escalator by which believers ascend, as on the wings of an eagle, from earth to heaven. It presupposes that neither the risen Lord Jesus, nor God the Father, is really present with his people in the divine service. Rather, when Christ ascended bodily into heaven he left his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit to substitute for him in his absence. By their performance of praise, believers join Christ in the heavenly realm; they stand with him on holy ground before the throne of God. In short, the band with its musicians and singers replaces the altar as the focal point of the assembly

This spiritual ascent into heaven takes place in three stages which are marked by three different kinds of praise (Ps 100:4).³ These three stages correspond with the three main divisions of the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament: the outer court with its gates for **thanksgiving**, the inner court with the altar for the offering of **praise**, and the Holy of Holies with its throne for the **worship** of God, the adoration of Him. God's people enter the gates of the outer courtyard with songs of thanksgiving for what God has done. So the service begins with exuberant acts of thanksgiving that are accompanied by the clapping of hands, bodily movement and upbeat music. From there praise takes them into the inner court. Here they focus on what God means to them personally now, their experience of him. The songs that are sung become more emotive and intense as they pour out their hearts to God. Some members of the congregation may speak in tongues, while others may sing in the Spirit. All this culminates in their entry into the heavenly Holy of Holies and their performance of true worship. Worship is understood as an act of awesome adoration before God Himself in which the spirit of the believer surrenders itself to Him, as if it were prostrate before Him, and experiences a deep sense of holy intimacy with Him. Their entry into God's presence for worship is accompanied by a final bracket of songs that are much more solemn than previously, more measured, reflective, and reverent. This is the place where God's people experience the presence and power and glory of God.

This pattern of praise singing has subsequently been modified in two ways. First, some churches have run the first two stages together. They do not therefore distinguish so

² This teaching is often based on the translation of Ps 22:3 in the RSV: "Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel." The NIV gives a much more accurate translation: "Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel."

³ See P. W. Wohlgemuth, "Praise Singing," *The Hymn* 38/1 (1987): 18-23.

clearly between thanksgiving and praise. Second, praise singing once used to foster speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing. But now, in the interests of outreach, this has been sidelined in many Pentecostal churches and rarely happens in many charismatic churches, such as those that have been influenced by Hillsong. Instead, entry into the heavenly Holy of Holies culminates in the presentation of the tithe, the offering of money to God, so that flood gates of blessing and prosperity will be opened for God's people on earth (cf. Mal 3:10-12). But, despite these modifications, we still have the same basic theology of worship that is enacted in praise singing.

The practice of praise singing has created a new liturgy for the church, a new order of worship based on a new theology of worship. In it the emphasis is on our service of God, rather than on God's service of us in word and sacrament. It equates worship with praise singing. Everything else is peripheral and secondary. In this kind of worship the lead singer replaces the pastor as the worship leader. Preaching is reduced to the teaching of principles for godly living. The Scriptures are not read, except in snatches to introduce a song, or as a proof text to back up a point in the sermon. No intercessions are offered for the church and the world. The Lord's Supper has no real function in the service except as a memorial meal that can be tacked on almost anywhere.

Now it is true that there are some very helpful features in this practice of praise singing. Praise is indeed an important part of our worship. It is a heavenly activity. It is true that we perform songs of thanksgiving, praise and adoration to God together with the angels in the heavenly sanctuary. The Holy Spirit does produce praise in the hearts of God's people. We do reach out to the world when we praise God. But we do not ascend into heaven in our songs of praise. In the divine service the triune God comes down to earth for us and meets us here on earth in the proclamation of his word and the celebration of the sacrament. As Luther so aptly reminds us, Jacob's ladder reaches from heaven to earth, so that God can meet us where we are. We build our worship around his physical descent to us in his incarnation, rather than by our spiritual ascent to him. Our songs of praise announce and celebrate the presence of the triune God with us here on earth in the divine service. Our thanksgiving, our praise, is associated with the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, where we join with the angels in their adoration of the triune God. That is the place for our thanksgiving and adoration. That is where heaven comes down to earth for us so that we have access the heavenly sanctuary here on earth through Christ's flesh and blood (Heb 10:19-22).

Yet we do have much to learn from the increasing popularity of praise singing in all the churches around the world. We will not meet its challenge by criticising its excesses, no matter how important it is to do so, nor by pointing out its theological deficiencies. Instead, we need to promote a sound theology of praise as taught in the Scriptures and enact it in a way that is consistent with our Lutheran tradition.⁴ We need to promote the

⁴ See John W. Kleinig, "Singing with Grace in our Hearts: The Function of Hymnody in its Cultural Context." Pages 103-17 in *Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord: Essays in Honor of Glen Zweck*. Edited by J. Bart Day and others. The Zweck Festschrift Committee: Houston, and "What's the Use of Praising God?" *Lutheran Theological Journal* 38/2

practice of orthodoxy, the right praise of the triune God as taught by God himself in his Word, so that we can fulfil our vocation as members of the heavenly choir. But most of all we need to have a sound theology of worship that is enacted in a sound order of worship and taught from the Scriptures.⁵ An essential part of that is clear scriptural teaching on the work of the Spirit in the divine service.

2. The Role of the Spirit in the Lutheran Theology of Worship

Luther gives a different answer than the charismatic movement to the question of how the Spirit empowers us in our worship, an answer that has not received much attention in our modern debates about worship, even from those of us who are his modern heirs. He agrees that it is the Holy Spirit who produces faith and love, prayer and praise, the self-giving and almsgiving. He agrees that the Spirit gives gifts to empower the faithful in their service of God. Yet he also teaches that the glorified Lord gives the Holy Spirit through the external ministry of the Word in the divine service. He maintains that ‘God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before’.⁶ By the external Word Luther does not just refer to the words of the written Scriptures but also to their liturgical enactment. His claim is that God the Father gives the Holy Spirit through the proclamation and enactment of Christ’s words in the liturgical assembly. We can therefore only be sure that we are empowered by the Spirit in our service of God if God’s inspiring Word is proclaimed and enacted in it.

I would like to develop this insight about God’s word as the means of the Spirit to explore how the Holy Spirit works objectively through physical means in the divine service. My question is: how can we be sure that we serve God by his Spirit in our performance of the divine service? My answer is: though the use of His holy Word and faith in His holy Word.

a. Christ gives the Spirit to the church through his word.

In John 6:63 Jesus says: ‘**The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.**’ That short sentence sums up the connection of God’s Spirit with the spoken word in both testaments. By his Word Jesus speaks the Spirit to his disciples; by his Word he puts his Spirit into them.⁷

The association of ‘spirit’ with spoken words was obvious to all Hebrew and Greek speakers in the ancient world. For them ‘spirit’ meant ‘wind’ and ‘air,’ ‘the life-breath’ and ‘life-power’ that was used in breathing and speaking. Speaking made use of air and breath to form words and to carry them into the ears of the hearer. So breathing air and

(2004): 76-88; also *Lutheran Forum* 40/2 (2006): 6-14. For these and other articles that I have written, see *John W. Kleinig Resources Publications*, <http://www.johnkleinig.com>

⁵ For a popular summary of this, see John W. Kleinig, “The Biblical View of Worship,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 58/4 (1994): 225-54.

⁶ *The Smalcald Articles* 3.3.8:3. See also *LW* 34, 286 and 40, 146-49.

⁷ See Luther’s helpful remarks on this passage in *LW* 23:173-77.

speaking words went together. Thus in the Old Testament God's Word is commonly associated with his Spirit, as in Psalm 33:6: ***By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath (Spirit) of his mouth.***⁸

This applies too in the New Testament! Thus we read in John 3:34: ***He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.*** St John tells us that the risen Lord Jesus *spoke* the Spirit to his apostles when he commissioned them (John 20:22). And Jesus stills *speaks* the Spirit, the Spirit who *speaks* God's Word to the household of God (Heb 3:7).⁹ Since God's words are filled with the Spirit, they do what they say. His words are effective and powerful (1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12). When God speaks, the Spirit acts through the words that are spoken. They are Spirit-filled, Spirit-giving words. The performative power of his words, their force, their spiritual charge, depends on the Spirit who energises them; through those words the Spirit animates and energises those who hear them and put their trust in them.

When Jesus speaks he *speaks* with the Holy Spirit; his words convey the Spirit. By speaking to believers Jesus *breathes* the Holy Spirit into them, just as he breathed the Holy Spirit into the apostles on Easter Eve by saying: '**Receive the Holy Spirit**' (John 20:22).

This understanding that God gives His Spirit through the Word is summed up in article five of the Augsburg Confession. Since 'the Holy Spirit is given through the word of God' (AC 18, 3), God has appointed human agents to teach the gospel and to administer the sacraments as the means by which 'he gives the Holy Spirit, who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel' (AC 5). Luther calls that the external word,¹⁰ the embodied word of the gospel,¹¹ the vocal word that is heard in the reading of the Scriptures, spoken in the absolution, proclaimed in the sermon, sung in the songs of the church, confessed in its creeds; the word that is

⁸ See also Ps 147:18; Isa 34:16; 59:21.

⁹ For additional references to the 'speaking' Spirit, see Ezek 3:24; 8:3-5; 11:15; Mark 13:11; Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 20:3; 21:11; 28:25; Heb 3:7; 10:15-17; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:17).

¹⁰ Note the words of the condemnation in AC 5, 4: 'Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external (embodied) word of the gospel through our own preparations, thoughts, and works.' Luther explains what he means by 'the external word' most fully in SA 3, 3, 8, 3-13. It is the opposite of 'the internal word' that is received by the enthusiasts who believed that they had God speaking his words immediately and prophetically to them in their hearts. In contrast to this exaltation of immediate spiritual inspiration Luther taught that the Spirit was mediated through the external word, the embodied word. It is telling that his teaching on the external word comes in the article on confession which focuses on the value of private absolution as God's spoken word of pardon to the sinner. By the use of this term he refers to the written words of the Sacred Scriptures that are preached and heard in the divine service, spoken in the absolution and enacted in the sacrament of the altar, and meditated on and assimilated in daily devotions.

¹¹ The German for this is 'das leiblich Wort,' the bodily word, the embodied word.

enacted in baptism and in the Lord's Supper.¹² God's Word in all its forms is the means of the Spirit.¹³ So then, the ministry of the Word is 'the ministry of the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:8).¹⁴ That ministry conveys the Spirit to the faithful people of God through his Word in the liturgical assembly.

If that is so, then every celebration of the holy liturgy is little Pentecost. In every service Jesus gives his Holy Spirit to those who listen to him and put their trust in him. In every service the faithful assemble in order to receive the Spirit and the Spirit's empowerment for self-giving, prayer, and praise. Whenever God's Word is faithfully enacted and proclaimed, the church can be sure that the Holy Spirit is at work. There and then in that assembly!

b. By his word Christ institutes the divine service and empowers it with God's Spirit.

The teaching of the connection of the Spirit with God's Word explains why Luther and his followers were so concerned with the issue of divine institution. Whenever they touched on the practice of worship, they asked whether it was divinely instituted or not. In doing so, they distinguished those things that were divinely instituted through Christ and his apostles¹⁵ from those that had been established by human tradition and authority.¹⁶

¹² For a discussion on the close connection between the external word and the ministry of the word, see Norman Nagel's essay on 'Externum Verbum: Testing Augustana 5 on the Doctrine of the Holy Ministry,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 30/3 (1996): 101-10.

¹³ For the bestowal and work of the Spirit through the word, see AC 5:1-4; 18:3; 28:8; *Apol* 4 § 135; 12 § 44; 24 §58, 59, 70; SA III.VIII § 3-13; LC 2 § 38, 42, 58; *FC Ep* 2 § 4, 5, 11, 13, 19; 12 § 22; *FC SD* 2 § 4, 5, 48, 52, 54, 55, 56, 65; 3 § 16; 11 § 17, 29, 33, 39, 40, 41, 69, 71, 76, 77; 12 § 30. See also Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians*, Oliver and Boyd: Edinburgh and London, 1955, 170-92, for the treatment of this topic in Lutheran Orthodoxy.

¹⁴ See the remarks on this in FC SD XI, 29.

¹⁵ The letter to the Hebrews touches on the issue of divine institution by speaking about 'the ordinances for service' in both covenants (9:1). Yet it also distinguishes the ministry of Christ as the heavenly 'liturgist' whose 'liturgical ministry' is not founded on a new law but on far better promises than the provisional 'ordinances of the flesh' which are unable to deliver a clean conscience (9:10).

¹⁶ For a good treatment of this topic, see Heinz Eduard Tödt, 'Institution,' *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Vol 18, Gerhard Müller (ed), Walter de Gruyter: Berlin & New York, 1987, 206-20.

The purpose of this approach to worship has, I think, been largely forgotten.¹⁷ It is, of course, true that the concept of divine institution was not invented by the Lutheran reformers, nor is it limited to them. It goes back to the Old Testament and to the work of the Jewish rabbis. It is integral to the catholic understanding of the priesthood and the Mass. It is a key term in Calvin's theology. Yet all too often it seems to function only as a legal-theological term, without due appreciation that divine authorisation necessarily implies divine empowerment. Their assumption is that by His ordinances God authorises certain agents to act on His behalf here on earth; by His ordinances He gives them the legal warrant for what they do in the divine service. The accent in this understanding of divine institution therefore falls on active obedience and legal responsibility.

While Luther and his followers did not disagree with their contemporaries on the legal character of divine institution, they emphasised its performative function. For them, as for Aquinas in his understanding of the sacraments,¹⁸ the present, operative power of the divine service derived from its divine institution. They understood it, evangelically and liturgically, as Christ's ongoing provision of the Holy Spirit for the spiritual empowerment for the church.¹⁹ By instituting what was necessary for the life of the church, Christ established the creaturely means by which he delivers his gifts to people through people here on earth. Take, for example, Luther's teaching on baptism. By instituting baptism, Christ empowered it with his Word and Holy Spirit.²⁰ The same Word that instituted the rite of baptism regenerates a person and produces the new regenerate life of the baptised by the power of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Christ's words for the institution of Holy Communion do not just provide the legal warrant for what is done in the Eucharist; they consecrate the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ and deliver his blessings to those who put their trust in what he says.²¹

So then, if a practice is instituted by Christ through his apostles, the church can be sure that it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit may indeed be at work elsewhere. But apart from God's Word no one can be certain whether the Spirit is at work, and how.

¹⁷ For an appreciation of divine institution as foundational empowerment, see Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*; tr. Thomas H. Trapp; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 2008, 249-53.

¹⁸ See *Summa Theologicae* III, 64, 2-6.

¹⁹ So AC 28:21 claims that whatever is divinely instituted 'is done not by human power but by God's word alone'.

²⁰ In answer to the question about how the water of baptism could bring forgiveness of sins, redemption and eternal salvation, Luther teaches in the Small Catechism: 'Clearly water does not do it, but the Word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit," as St. Paul says to titus in chapter 3[:5-8].' (Robert Kolb and Timothy John Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Fortress: Minneapolis, 2000, 359). See also the Large Catechism 4, 23-31, 52-63 (Kolb-Wengert, 458-60, 463-64.

²¹ See the Large Catechism 5, 4-32 (Kolb-Wengert, 467-469).

When the church faithfully does what Christ has given for it to do in his Word, it can be sure that the Holy Spirit is at work there. Hence Luther claims: *God has so ordered it that the Holy Spirit ordinarily comes through the Word* (LW 23:174).

c. The church receives the Holy Spirit by faith in God's word as it is proclaimed and enacted in the divine service.

The New Testament teaches that all those who have been baptised and believe in the Lord Jesus, receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). There is only one baptism (Eph 4:5) through which we are born again by water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Since all Christians have been baptised into Christ's body, they have all been given the one and same Spirit to drink (1 Cor 12:13).

Yet it is not right to conclude, as some do, that since they have received the Spirit, they somehow own the Spirit as their personal possession. Since the Holy Spirit is not a thing but a person, Christians keep on receiving the Spirit, without ever actually possessing the Spirit.²² They do not possess the Spirit, any more than a wife possesses her husband and his love, because she is married to him. The giving and receiving of love in marriage is a life-long business that has its foundation in a single event, the ceremony of marriage. So too the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit has its foundation in baptism (Acts 2:38; Titus 3:5-6)! Yet Christ's disciples keep on receiving the Spirit daily for as long as they live; they cannot live by the Spirit without receiving the Spirit.

That ongoing process of receiving the Spirit begins with a single event, just as breathing begins at birth and married life starts with a wedding. Just as a husband gives himself and his love to his wife on the day of their marriage, so God the Father gives the Holy Spirit to us through Jesus in baptism. But that's not the end of it! Those baptised people who have been given access to the Spirit in baptism, keep on receiving the Holy Spirit from God the Father for as long as they live here on earth. So, in that sense, they never possess the Spirit, just as we never possess the light of the sun; they keep on receiving the Holy Spirit. That's why Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus to 'be filled with the Spirit' (Eph 5:18), even though they have already been baptised and 'sealed with the promised Holy Spirit' (Eph 1:13).

The Biblical teaching on the operation of the Holy Spirit in the church makes full sense only if it is understood that Christ does not just give his Holy Spirit, once for all, at one point in person's life, but continually. And not just individually, but corporately, as on the day of Pentecost! Jesus is the fountain, the spring from which his disciples keep on receiving the Holy Spirit, like drinking water from a tap (John 7:37-39). When Jesus declares that his words are 'Spirit and life' (John 6:63), he affirms that he gives his life-giving Spirit to them through his word. In Galatians 3:1-5 St Paul maintains that his

²² When Paul speaks about 'having' the Spirit in Rom 8:9 and 1 Cor 6:19; 7:40, this refers to reception of the Spirit as an available gift rather than his ownership of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:12).

readers receive the Spirit by faithfully hearing God's word. So wherever God's word is proclaimed and enacted, there Christ gives the Holy Spirit to those who put their trust in him and his words.

Since that is so, Christians go to church in order to receive the Holy Spirit. They go to church to be filled with the Spirit. This does not just happen as they hear the Word of God in the Bible readings and the sermon, but also as they receive Christ's body and blood. The body and blood of Jesus are Spirit-filled, Spirit-giving food and drink for God's people, spiritual nourishment for their journey through this world to their heavenly homeland (1 Cor 10:3-4). In Holy Communion all those who have been baptised by one Spirit are given the same Spirit to drink (1 Cor 12:13).²³ In his Large Catechism Luther makes this claim about what we receive in Holy Communion:

Here in the sacrament you are to receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and brings God's grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defence, and power against death, the devil, and all troubles (LC 5, 70).

So, as the church hears God's Word and receives Christ's body and blood, it prays for the Spirit and receives the Spirit, just as Christ promised in Luke 11:13: ***'If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.'***

d. The Holy Spirit works together with the Father and the Son in the divine service.

There are two sides to the operation of the Spirit in the divine service. On the one hand, through Christ's presence in the assembly and his service of the church, we receive the Holy Spirit as the Father's gift to us. There Jesus speaks the word of God the Father, His word from heaven.²⁴ There Jesus proclaims his Spirit-filling word to us earthlings; through his word Jesus brings the Holy Spirit to the church on earth. Lutherans call this the **sacramental** side of the divine service; the eastern Orthodox tradition calls this the **descending** work of Christ.²⁵

On the other hand, those who are animated with Christ's Spirit are empowered by his Spirit for service with him as his co-priests. The Spirit joins them with Jesus. As their high priest Jesus represents them before God the Father (Heb 9:24) and intercedes for

²³ Even though Paul speaks about 'drinking' in connection with Holy Communion in 1 Cor 10:4 and 11:25, 26, most exegetes hold that the provision of the Spirit for drinking is a metaphor for the Spirit's bestowal in baptism. Yet since the Christians in Corinth most likely received the sacrament as soon as they were baptised, here in 1 Cor 12:13 Paul does not just refer to the Spirit's provision at baptism but to the ongoing reception of the Spirit in the Lord's Supper, their drinking of the Spirit from him as their spiritual rock.

²⁴ In Hebrews 12:22-25 the description of the church's participation in the heavenly liturgy culminates in God's gracious speaking from heaven to his people on earth.

²⁵ See James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, Paternoster: Carlyle, 1-57.

them, so that they can approach the Father through him (Heb 7:25). Just as Christ offered himself to the Father by the eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14), they offer themselves to God by that Spirit, the Spirit who moves them to respond to their reception of gifts from God the Father by presenting their God-pleasing, Spirit-produced²⁶ offerings to Him through Jesus and together with him (1 Pet 2:5). By the Spirit they pray (Rom 8:26-27; Jude 20), praise (Eph 5:19-20), and present their offerings to God the Father (Rom 15:16). Lutherans call this the **sacrificial** side of the divine service; the eastern Orthodox tradition calls it the **ascending** work Christ.²⁷

The descent of the Spirit always the main thing in the divine service. It is foundational for our worship. Thus Peter speaks about that Trinitarian descent in his sermon at Pentecost. There he declares that Jesus the exalted Son pours out on the Church the promised Holy Spirit that he himself receives from the Father (Acts 2:33). The Father gives the Spirit through the Son.

Jesus speaks even more fully about the descent of the Spirit as a speaker and teacher and preacher in the farewell discourses of John's gospel. There he describes that work of the Spirit from three different points of view. First, Jesus describes the Father's role in that descent in John 14:26. The Father 'sends' the Spirit to his disciples in the name of Jesus to 'teach' them what the ascended Lord was saying to them now by applying what Jesus had previously said to them in their present situation. Second, Jesus describes his own role in the Spirit's descent in John 15:26. Jesus 'sends' the Spirit of truth from the Father to his disciples, the Spirit who proceeds from the Father, the Spirit who 'bears witness' to the presence of Jesus with them and his ongoing ministry to them. Third, Jesus explains the Spirit's role in John 16:13-15. The Spirit 'glorifies' Jesus by listening to what the Father was saying to Jesus and 'declaring' it to the disciples; the Spirit receives the Father's gifts from the Son and delivers them by his preaching to the church.²⁸

That descending Trinitarian operation, I maintain, provides the basic shape, the order for the holy liturgy, the service of word and sacrament. This basic order is taught most clearly by Luke in his account of the disclosure of the risen Lord Jesus to two of his

²⁶ In Apol 24:26 Melanchthon quite rightly asserts that when Peter speaks about 'spiritual' sacrifices he refers to 'the operation of the Holy Spirit in us.'

²⁷ These terms come from Melanchthon's discussion in the article 24:71-75 of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* on 'the Mass' (Kolb-Wengert, 271). While these two sides can be formally distinguished, they cannot be separated or reduced to a chronological sequence of a divine action followed by a human response. They can at times coincide and combine, as Melanchthon notes, in a single enactment with 'a twofold effect' (24:75).

²⁸ See Luther's remarks on this in LW 24:362, 364: *Here Christ makes the Holy Spirit a preacher... For here Christ refers to a conversation carried on in the Godhead, a conversation in which no creatures participate. He sets up a pulpit both for the speaker and the listener. He makes the Father the preacher and the Spirit the Listener.*

disciples in two stages in 24:15-35.²⁹ On that Easter evening Jesus made himself known to them first by preaching himself to them from the Old Testament and then by breaking bread with them. That is how the risen Lord Jesus now delivers the Holy Spirit with all other heavenly blessings from the Father to the liturgical assembly (Eph 1:3). The church is therefore at the receiving end of that descent, the work by which Jesus conveys God's heavenly blessings to His saints on earth.

The ascent of the Spirit corresponds to that descent and follows from it in the divine service. Paul sums up that dimension of our service succinctly in Ephesians 2:18 where he says: **'through him (Jesus) both of us (Jews and Gentiles) have access to the Father in the Spirit.'** Because the Spirit is at work in us we can present our offerings to God the Father, the offering of ourselves and our bodies, the offering of our prayers and praises, the offering of our possessions and the work of our hands. St Peter calls these our 'spiritual' offerings, because they are produced by the Holy Spirit; these offerings are 'well-pleasing' to God because they are sanctified by his Spirit-filled Word and offered to the Father through Jesus the Son (1 Pet 2:5). So, even in the ascending dimension of the divine service we do not operate by our own power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit not only brings the Father and the Father's gifts to us; it brings us and our gifts to the Father. That includes our praises and everything else that we offer to Him. And all this through Jesus the one and only mediator between God and humankind (1 Tim 2:5)!

Conclusion

How then can we be sure that the Spirit is at work in our worship? We can be certain of the Spirit is at work when God's Word is faithfully used as the means of the Spirit. That may be why all the classical ecumenical orders of service consist almost entirely of scriptural material. We therefore do everything with the Word in the divine service.³⁰ We absolve and bless with the Word; we preach and confess with the Word; we baptise and perform the Lord's Supper with the Word; we pray and praise with the Word; we offer ourselves and our gifts with the Word. Through the right enactment of God's Word we participate in the descending and ascending operation of the triune God in the assembly, the work by which the Spirit brings God the Father to us through his Son as well as the work by which the Spirit brings us to God the Father together with his Son. Whatever is done with the Word - and by faith in the Word - is done with the Spirit.

²⁹ See Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, Fortress: Minneapolis, 1993, 48-49, and Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Concordia Commentary, Concordia: St Louis, 1997, 1006-20.

³⁰ In his tractate "Concerning the Ministry" Luther says: 'Mostly the functions of a priest are these: to teach, to preach, and proclaim the Word of God, to baptise, to consecrate or administer the Eucharist, to bind or loose sins, to pray for others, to sacrifice, and judge of (sic!) all doctrine and spirits. Certainly these are splendid and royal duties. But the first and foremost of all on which everything else depends, is the teaching of the Word of God. For we teach with the Word, we consecrate with the Word, we bind and absolve sin by the Word, we baptize with the Word, we sacrifice with the Word, we judge all things by the Word' (*LW* 40, 21).

It is by the faithful use of God's Word in the divine service that God's promise in Isaiah 59:21 is fulfilled: *And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord: 'My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth shall not depart out of your mouth, or the mouth of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, from now and for ever.'*