

Chapter One: The Theology of Christian Worship

W-1.01: Christian Worship: An Introduction

W-1.0101: Glory to God

Christian worship gives all glory and honor, praise and thanksgiving to the holy, triune God. We are gathered in worship to glorify the God who is present and active among us—particularly through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. We are sent out in service to glorify the same God who is present and active in the world.

W-1.0102: Grace and Gratitude

God acts with grace; we respond with gratitude. God claims us as beloved children; we proclaim God’s saving love. God redeems us from sin and death; we rejoice in the gift of new life. This rhythm of divine action and human response—found throughout Scripture, human history, and everyday events—shapes all of Christian faith, life, and worship.

W-1.0103: God’s Covenant

The Old Testament tells the story of God’s steadfast love from generation to generation. To Adam and Eve, to Noah and his family, to Abraham and Sarah, to Moses and Aaron, and to the house of David, God made everlasting promises of faithfulness, calling the people to respond in faith. In the fullness of time, God made a new and everlasting covenant with us through Jesus Christ.

W-1.0104: Jesus Christ

“Fully human, fully God” (B. Stat. 11.2), Jesus Christ came into the world to show God’s love, to save us from sin, and to offer eternal, abundant life to all. Jesus is God’s Word: spoken at creation, promised and revealed in Scripture, made flesh to dwell among us, crucified and raised in power, interceding for the redemption of the world, returning in glory to judge and reign forever. Scripture is God’s Word: the Old and New Testaments together testify to Jesus Christ. Proclamation is God’s Word: we bear witness in word and deed to the good news of Christ our Savior.

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- W-1.0101: Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4: 8, 11; 7:12; Nic. Creed 1.1; Ap. Creed 2.1; Scots Conf. 3.01; Heid. Cat. 4.122; 2 Helv. Conf. 5.023; West. Conf. 6.011–6.013, 6.112–6.113; S. Cat. 7.001, 7.045–7.048; L. Cat. 7.111, 7.213–7.216, 7.289; Conf. 1967 9.35–9.37; Bel. 10.1; B. Stat. 11.1.
- W-1.0102: Ps. 136:1; Jer. 33:1–9; Rom. 6:1–11; 8:12–17; 1 John 4:19; Heid. Cat. 4.002; Conf. 1967 9.17; B. Stat. 11.4.
- W-1.0103: Gen. 2–3; 9:1–17; 15–17; Exod. 19–31, 34; 2 Sam. 1:1–17; Jer. 1:4–10, 31:31–34; Heb. 8:8–12; Scots Conf. 3.02–3.06; West. Conf. 6.037–6.042; Conf. 1967 9.18–9.19; B. Stat. 11.3.
- W-1.0104: John 1; Rom. 10; 2 Cor. 4; Phil. 2; Col. 1; Heb. 1–2; Rev. 19; Nic. Creed 1.2; Ap. Creed 2.2; Scots Conf. 3.06–3.11; 2 Helv. Conf. 5.001–5.004, 5.062–5.079; West. Conf. 6.043–6.50; Barm. Dec. 8.10–8.15; Conf. 1967 9.07–9.11, 9.21–26, 9.32–33; B. Stat. 11.2.

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Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God’s gracious action in history and the model for our grateful response to God. In Jesus we find the full and clear revelation of who God is; in him we also discover who God is calling us to be. Therefore we worship Jesus Christ as Lord, even as he leads us in the worship and service God desires.

W-1.0105 : The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is “the giver and renewer of life” (B. Stat. 11.4), who instills our faith and enables us to follow Jesus Christ. The Scriptures describe how the Spirit moved at the dawn of creation, anointed Christ in baptism, raised Jesus from the dead, and was poured out on the Church at Pentecost. The same Spirit is still at work in the life of the Church and the life of the world.

The Holy Spirit manifests God’s gracious action and empowers our grateful response. The Spirit gathers us for worship, enlightens and equips us through the Word, claims and nourishes us through the Sacraments, and sends us out for service. To each member of Christ’s body, the Spirit gives gifts for ministry in the Church and mission in the world.

W-1.0106 : Word and Sacrament

In Christian worship Jesus Christ is truly present and active among us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. Wherever the Scriptures are read and proclaimed and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated, the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word, and proclaims the mystery of faith. Through these means of grace, God imparts and sustains our faith, orders our common life, and transforms the world. Through these same acts of worship, we share in the life of the Spirit, are united to Jesus Christ, and give glory to God.

W-1.0107 : Worship and the Church

God’s gifts of Word and Sacrament establish and equip the Church as the body of Christ in the world. The mission of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church flows from Baptism, is nourished at Lord’s Supper, and serves to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all. In the same way, the Church’s ministry emerges from the font, arises from the table, and takes its shape from the Word of the Lord. Therefore the worship of the triune God is the center of our common life and our primary way of witness to the faith, hope, and love we have in Jesus Christ.

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- W-1.0105: John 14:15–31; 1 Cor. 12:1–11; Nic. Creed 1.3; Ap. Creed 2.3; Scots Conf. 3.12–3.13; 2 Helv. Conf. 5.005; West. Conf. 6.051–6.054, 6.183–6.186; Conf. 1967 9.20, 9.31; B. Stat. 11.4.
- W-1.0106: Luke 24:13–35; Scots Conf. 3.18; Heid. Cat. 4.065; 2 Helv. Conf. 5.134–5.135; West. Conf. 6.078–6.080, 6.140–6.145; S. Cat. 7.088; L. Cat. 7.264; Barm. Dec. 8:16–8.18, 8.26; Conf. 1967 9.27, 9.30, 9.35–9.37; B. Stat. 11.4.
- W-1.0107: Isa. 55:1–13; Matt. 28:1–20; John 21:15–19; 1 Cor. 13:13; 2. Cor. 13:13; Eph. 4:1–16; Nic. Creed 1.3; Barm. Dec. 8.26; Conf. 1967 9.48–9.52.

To be a Christian is to worship Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. To be a member of Christ's body, the Church, is to share through Word and Sacrament in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

W-1.02: Time, Space, and Matter

W-1.0201 : Creation and Redemption

Time, space, and matter are all created by God, redeemed by Christ, and made holy by the Spirit. Through Christian worship—at certain times, in particular places, and with material gifts—we participate in God's plan for the redemption of time, space, and matter for the glory of God.

W-1.0202 : Time

Because God is the author of history, we may worship at any time. The psalms reflect the daily worship of the people of God, while the Torah teaches that one day in seven is to be set apart as holy to the Lord. The prophets anticipated God's judgment and triumph over evil on the day of the Lord. The Gospels all testify that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. The apostles came to speak of this as the Lord's Day, claiming God's victory over sin and death through the power of Jesus' resurrection.

The first Christians began to celebrate Jesus' resurrection every Lord's Day, gathering to proclaim the Word and celebrate the Sacraments. The Church continues to gather, traditionally on the first day of the week, to hear the gospel and break bread in Jesus' name, with the confidence that the risen Lord is with us.

Through two thousand years of Christian worship, the Church has developed ways of keeping time—many of them adapted from the feasts and fasts of Israel that Jesus kept. This pattern of the Christian year keeps us centered in Christ as we seek to proclaim the story of our faith, grow as Jesus' disciples, and serve Christ's mission. The year begins with a focus on Christ's incarnation, with the seasons of Advent and Christmas encompassing the Nativity and Epiphany of the Lord. After Epiphany we celebrate Jesus' Baptism and Transfiguration. At the heart of the Christian year is the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, with the seasons of Lent and Easter encompassing Ash Wednesday, the Great Three Days—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil—the Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord, and the Day of Pentecost. After Pentecost we commemorate Trinity Sunday, All Saints Day, and the Reign of Christ.

The pattern of daily prayer also connects the Church with the worship of ancient Israel, centuries of Christian tradition, and Jesus' own practices. Whether in large assemblies, with small groups, or at home, daily prayer serves as a bridge between public worship and personal affairs, helping us to live out our faith each day.

W-1.0201: Rom. 12:1–2; Conf. 1967 9.16 .

W-1.0202: Gen. 1:1–5; 2:1–3; Ps. 1:2, 92:1–4; Isa. 58:1–14; Joel 2:1–16; Luke 24:13–35; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1, 10:9, 20:7; Rom. 14:5–6; Col. 2:16–17; Rev. 1:9–11; Heid. Cat. 4.103; 2 Helv. Conf. 5.223–5.226; West. Conf. 6.118–6.119; S. Cat. 7.057–7.062; L. Cat. 7.225–7.231.

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We mark other occasions in worship, reflecting the cycles of civic and agricultural life, cultural and family celebrations, the commemoration of significant persons and events, and the programs and activities of the church. It is appropriate to observe such things, provided that they never distract from the worship of the triune God.

W-1.0203 : Space

Because heaven and earth belong to God, we may worship in any place. The Old Testament describes stone altars, tabernacles, temples, and other places where the people gathered and encountered God. The Gospels tell us that Jesus worshiped at the synagogue and temple, but he also worshiped in the wilderness, on hillsides, and at lakeshores, demonstrating that God cannot be confined to any one place.

The first Christians worshiped at the temple and in synagogues, homes, catacombs, and prisons. The important thing was not the place, but the gathering of Christ's body—the people of God—and the presence of Christ among them in Word and Sacrament. Later the Church began to build special places to meet for worship. To this day, space for Christian worship is primarily established by the presence of the risen Lord and the communion of the Holy Spirit in the gathering of the people of God.

Space that is set apart for worship should encourage community, be accessible to all, and open us to reverence for God. It is not to be an escape from the world, but a place for encountering the God of all creation who gathers us in and sends us out. Space for Christian worship should include a place for the reading and proclamation of the Word, a font or pool for Baptism, and a table for the Lord's Supper. The arrangement of these symbols of Word and Sacrament conveys their relationship to one another and their centrality in Christian worship.

W-1.0204 : Matter

Because God created the world and called it good, we use material gifts in worship. The Old Testament tells of various things that were used in the worship of God: the ark, linens and vessels, oil and incense, musical instruments, grain, fruit, and animals. At the same time, the prophets warned of the danger of idolatry: mistaking physical objects for divine presence. The Gospels show how Jesus used common things—nets and fish, jars and ointment, a towel and basin, water, bread, and wine—in his ministry of teaching, healing, and feeding. On the cross, he offered his body as a living sacrifice.

W-1.0203: Gen. 28:18; Exod. 25–31; 1 Kgs. 6–8; Ezra 6:13–22; Ps. 24:1; Luke 2:22–52; 4:16–21; John 4:20–24; 6:1–14; Acts 2:43–47; 16:25–34; 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 1 Pet. 2:4–5; 2 Helv. Conf. 5.214–5.216; West. Conf. 6.117.

W-1.0204: Gen. 1:31; Exod. 25–31, 32; Ps. 50:7–15; Isa. 1:11–17; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:6–8; Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 5:1–11; John 13:1–20; Rom 12:1–2; 1 Cor. 11:17–34; 12:12–13; Scots Conf. 3.21; Heid. Cat. 4.066–4.068, 4.096–4.098; 2 Helv. Conf. 5.020–5.022, 5.169–5.184; West. Conf. 6.149–6.153; S. Cat. 7.092–7.093; L. Cat. 7.272–7.274; Conf. 1967 9.50.

The first Christians, following Jesus, took three primary elements of life—water, bread, and wine—as symbols of God’s self-offering to us and our offering of ourselves to God. We have come to call them Sacraments: signs of God’s gracious action and our grateful response. Through the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, God claims us as people of the covenant and nourishes us as members of Christ’s body; in turn, we pledge our loyalty to Christ and present our bodies as a living sacrifice of praise.

The offering of material gifts in worship is an expression of our self-offering, as an act of gratitude for God’s grace. We give our lives to God through Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us. The practice of offering also reflects our stewardship of God’s good creation. Mindful that the earth and everything in it belong to God, we present tithes and offerings for use in Christ’s ministry and mission.

We offer creative gifts in worship as well, including music, art, drama, movement, media, banners, vestments, vessels, furnishings, and architecture. When such gifts only call attention to themselves, they are idolatrous; when, in their simplicity of form and function, they give glory to God, they are appropriate for worship.

W-1.03: Language, Symbols, and Culture

W-1.0301 : The Word Made Flesh

God brings all things into being by the Word. Through the incarnation, this same, eternal Word of God became flesh and lived among us, in a particular person in a particular time and place—Jesus of Nazareth. Our use of language, symbols, and cultural forms in Christian worship is founded on the gift of Jesus’ incarnation. Through Jesus Christ, God speaks to us in truth and reaches out to us with grace; through Jesus Christ, we may speak truthfully to God and lift up our hearts with gratitude.

W-1.0302 : Language

The mystery and reality of God transcend our experience, understanding, and speech, such that we cannot reduce God to our ways of speaking. Yet we are compelled to speak of the glory, goodness, and grace of the God who is revealed in the world around us, in Scripture, and above all, in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament speaks of God in personal ways, as creator, covenant-maker, comforter, liberator, judge, redeemer, midwife, mother, shepherd, sovereign, bearer, begetter. It addresses God as “Lord,” a word that conveys the sovereignty of God while standing in for the hidden name revealed to Moses at the burning bush. It also borrows images from nature, describing God as rock, well-spring, fire, light, eagle, hen, lion. The Gospels show

W-1.0301: John 1:1–18; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 1:1–4; Conf. 1967 9.27.

W-1.0302: Exod. 3:13–15; 24:17; Deut. 32:11–12, 18; Ps. 22:9–10; 23:1; 27:1 Isa. 40:18–26; 42:14; 43:14–15; 49:15; 55:3–9; 66:13; Ezek. 34:11–31; Hos. 11:3–4, 10; Matt. 17:9; Mark 14:36; Luke 5:33–35; John 10:11–18; Rom. 11:33–36; Gal. 3:27–29; Jas. 2:1–9; 2 Helv. Conf. 5.217; West. Conf. 6.114; B. Stat. 11.1, 11.3.

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how Jesus used and adapted these images when speaking to and about God, particularly in his intimate use of Abba, Father. He also claimed some of these terms in speaking about himself—as good shepherd, bridegroom, and Son of Man. New Testament writers continued to use and adapt Old Testament language in speaking about Jesus—especially in their use of “Lord” to convey his sovereignty over the powers of this world, and to identify him with the Holy One of Israel.

In worship the church shall strive to use language about God that is intentionally as diverse and varied as the Bible and our theological traditions. Language that appropriately describes and addresses God is expansive, drawing from the full breadth and depth of terms and images for the triune God in the witness of Scripture. Language that authentically describes and addresses the people of God is inclusive, respecting the diversity of persons, cultures, backgrounds, and experiences that flow from God’s creative work. Such language allows for all members of the community of faith to recognize themselves as equally included, addressed, and cherished by God.

Since Pentecost, the Church of Jesus Christ has been a community of many nations and cultures, united by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore our churches worship in many languages. The words we use in worship are to be in the common language or languages of those who are gathered, so that all are able to receive the good news and respond with true expressions of their faith. Through the rich variety of human speech we bear witness to God’s saving love for all.

W-1.0303 : Symbols

Certain biblical images have come to have deeper significance, multiple associations, and lasting meaning for the people of God. We call these symbols. There are numerous examples in the Old Testament—tree, temple, rainbow, river, sheep, scroll, building, body. New Testament writers drew on this treasury of common meaning to convey their understanding of Christ, the gospel, the Church, and the realm of God. Certain prominent symbols from Scripture, such as light, book, water, bread, cup, and cross, play an important role in Christian worship. Such things are not objects to be worshiped, but signs that point to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

We come to know God’s Word more fully when it is both proclaimed and enacted in worship. The Old Testament describes symbolic actions in worship—fasting and feasting, rejoicing and lamenting, dancing and singing, marking and anointing, cleansing and offering, doing justice and showing mercy. The Gospels demonstrate how Jesus brought new meaning to existing practices of faith—especially baptism and breaking bread—and transformed ordinary acts of compassion—healing the sick, giving alms to the poor, feeding the hungry, and washing feet—into new ways of serving God. Christian worship includes a

W-1.0303: Gen. 2:9; 9:8–17; Exod. 15:20–21; 2 Sam. 6:1–5; Ps. 23:5; 30:11–12; Ezek. 3:1–3; 34:11–31 36:24–28; 47:1–12; Joel 2:12–14; Mic. 6:8; Zeph. 3:14–20; Matt. 26:26–29; 28:18–20; Mark 6:56; 10:21; Luke 9:1–2, 12–17; 10:1–2; John 6:35; 8:12; 13:1–20; 1 Cor. 1:18; Gal. 6:14; Rev. 20:11–15; 22:1–5, 17; B. Stat. 11.2.

variety of symbolic actions, with strong ties to these and other biblical practices—gathering and sending, kneeling and standing, speaking and singing, cleansing and offering, marking and anointing, eating and drinking, blessing and laying on of hands. All of these convey the gracious action of God and communicate our grateful response.

W-1.0304: Culture

God has poured out the Holy Spirit on all flesh; Scripture promises that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The book of Acts and the New Testament epistles record the challenges and controversies of an emerging Church that would be “no longer Jew or Greek” (Gal. 3:28), but one in Jesus Christ. As the Church has grown and spread over two thousand years, it has taken root and flourished in cultures and lands all around the globe—bearing witness to the love of God for all the world and Christ’s sovereignty in every place. Finally, from the book of Revelation, we know that the company of the redeemed will be a great multitude from every nation, tribe, and people, singing praise to the Lamb of God.

Christian worship is contextual—emerging from a particular community and incorporating the words, images, symbols, and actions that best convey the good news of Jesus Christ in that gathering of God’s people. It is also cross-cultural—reflecting the diversity of traditions and cultures within and beyond the community of faith. Christian worship is transcultural—proclaiming the universal message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ and rooted in common elements of human life that transcend all cultures. It is also countercultural—asserting the scandal of the gospel and anticipating God’s reign of righteousness, justice, and peace. Finally, faithful worship should be an intercultural event—fostering mutuality, dialogue, and equality among all people.

Whenever and wherever we gather in Jesus’ name, we join the praise and prayer of the people of God in every time and place. Therefore, it is fitting that we share stories and sing songs from cultures other than our own as we pray for and with the Church throughout the world.

W-1.0304: Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:17–21; 10:9–16; Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 9:19–23; 10:23–33; Rev. 7:9–12; Conf. Bel. 10.3; B. Stat. 11.4; *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture* (Lutheran World Federation, 1996).