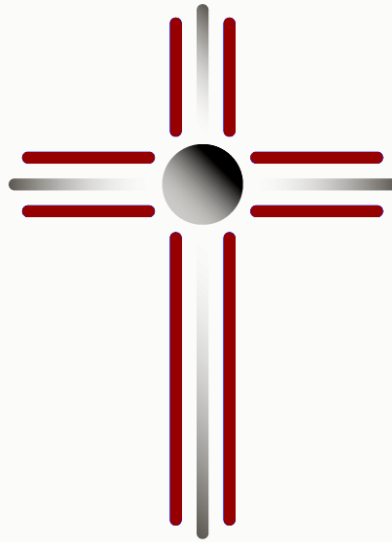


**The Gospel Message in the Worship Practices of
Martensville Baptist Church**



A Liturgical Mystagogy

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2016-17

Introduction

Worship is the central calling of the Church. Christian worship, properly understood, is not simply an event to attend but an all-encompassing way of life (*cf.* Rom. 12:1-2) lived as a response to the revelation of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, as led by the Holy Spirit, and witnessed to in the scriptures. This Biblically-anchored, Spirit-led life, dedicated to loving, praising, and honouring God with all that we are, will overflow into every aspect of our lives (*cf.* Lk. 10:27). For example, the vision of Martensville Baptist Church is

“to fulfil the *Great Commandment* and the *Great Commission* through strategic and intentional worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism.” True Biblical worship will encompass and embody all aspects of this vision (see *figure 1*). *Worship is an act of fellowship. Worship is an act of discipleship. Worship is an act of ministry and evangelism.* Far too often the distinctions between these

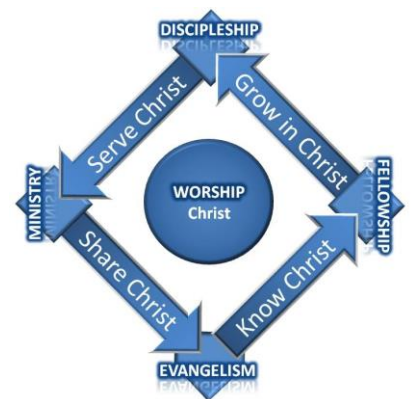


Figure 1: The Centrality of worship as popularised by Rick Warren.

have been too strictly drawn when, in reality, the lines *need to blur*. After all, at what point does worship end and evangelism begin? And if worship does not disciple us, drawing us toward and forming us into the image of Christ, then can it be called worship in any meaningful way? It is worship which draws the entire Christian life into a cohesive whole.

The Church has known this since its inception. In the early years of Christianity, a phrase was used to describe how worship is related to the rest of our faith and life: *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi* (literally this translates as: *law of prayer, law of belief, law of life*).¹ This Latin phrase could be translated as saying, “the *way we worship* forms *what we believe* which

¹ The origin of this phrase has usually been attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine who, in speaking of the prayers passed down to the church from the Apostles, said “*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*” or “that the law of praying might establish the law of believing”.

shapes *how we live*.² In our (post)modern context, we might not put those three phrases in that order; many of us would tend to put *belief* first. However, there is wisdom in acknowledging that there is a dynamic give-and-take between what we believe, how we worship, and *vice versa*.³ The fact is that, not only do our beliefs shape our practices, our practices also shape our beliefs. This highlights the importance of ensuring that our worship practices conform to the Gospel message and invite all of creation to participate in that Gospel.

In the early 8th century, Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, wrote a brief document entitled *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation*.⁴ In this short book, Germanus examines their liturgy (their form/structure of worship) and demonstrates how it proclaims the Gospel of Jesus; he shows how their worship practices are intended to inform the beliefs of the congregation. In other words, he uses their *lex orandi* (worship) to proclaim the *lex credendi* (belief). This explanation of their worship practices is called a *Liturgical Mystagogy*. While this term might seem strange to many of us, this is precisely what I am hoping to accomplish here: I intend to produce a *liturgical mystagogy* for Martensville Baptist Church. In using the term *liturgical*, we are referring to the formal shape or order of our worship. *Mystagogy* is a word which indicates the process of introducing, instructing, and initiating people into something which would otherwise remain mysterious. This term is, perhaps, more apt than we might initially think. After all, for many people who are not yet Christian or are new to the Christian faith, many of our most common practices may seem enigmatic.

² Cf. Glenn Packiam, *Discover the Mystery of Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 16.

³ For an excellent engagement with how this concept can be contextualized within a Baptist setting see: Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 172-176.

⁴ See: Saint Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

Thus, the following is intended to communicate how our weekly, corporate worship gatherings are intended to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and invite all who are present to participate in this Good News. This will be done in the form of a *liturgical mystagogy*: an introduction to, explanation of, and invitation into our *lex orandi*.

Liturgy: The Form of our Worship

For the purposes of this project, the use of the term ‘liturgy’ helps differentiate between the broader, all-encompassing concept of Christian worship and the specific, ordered, gathering together of God’s people for corporate worship.

While the term ‘liturgy’ is not a common one in most Baptist or other free-church contexts, the fact is that every church has a liturgy, a basic form or structure of worship, whether they acknowledge it or not. So, the question is not *if* a church has a liturgy. The real question is whether their liturgy is a good or a bad one. Thus, it becomes imperative that every church asks probing questions about their liturgical practices: Is our worship shaped around the preferences of the congregation? Are our worship practices dictated by pragmatics; whatever is easiest, most convenient, or what gets the most people through the doors (ie. is our worship focussed more on accessibility and style than on content)? Is our order of worship based on the whims of one of the pastors? Are the various elements of our liturgy considered to be little more than a ‘warm up’ and then ‘cool down’ from the sermon? One of the difficulties with much of free-church worship is that the answer is “yes” to any number of these questions. This often results in a dysfunctional liturgy and, if our *lex orandi* is dysfunctional, it will inevitably result in a dysfunctional *lex credendi* which, in turn, impacts our *lex vivendi*.

The solution is to have a liturgy which is shaped, not by convenience, personal preference, or a succumbing to consumeristic mentalities, but by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is true that many free-church congregations have strong, Biblical, Christ-centred content, but it is far less common for these churches to consistently present this content in a coherent manner. Everything communicates something and if our Biblical content is not presented within a readily comprehensible structure, the content itself suffers. As Marshall McLuhan famously said, “The medium is the message.”⁵ The structure of our worship matters almost as much as the content itself. Indeed, McLuhan’s point was that the content and the method in which the content is delivered cannot be separated; the structure and style of our worship are part of the content. Thus, for our worship to be consistently Biblical and Christ-centred, the structure and style need to match and compliment the content.

What is presented below is intended to ensure that our worship has non-negotiable Gospel-centred *content*, Biblically, theologically, and historically informed *structure*, with an appropriately contextualised *style*.⁶ Churches which craft their liturgies with the interdependence of content, structure, and style in mind will ensure that their corporate worship will move beyond narcissistic self-expression and become an act of *spiritual formation* which transforms the worshipper and honours our Triune God.

⁵ This phrase is from McLuhan’s book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

⁶ For a helpful overview of the relationship between content, structure, and style see: Robert Webber, *Planning Blended Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 20-22.

Proclaiming the Gospel through Worship

Martensville Baptist Church currently implements a modified version of the historic “fourfold order” which structures corporate worship into four basic sections or ‘folds’: 1) the *Gathering*, 2) the *Service of the Word*, 3) the *Response/Service of the Table*, and 4) the *Sending*.⁷ The fourfold order is the most historically, Biblically, and theologically robust liturgical structure. All evidence points to the fact that this ‘order of worship’ was used right from the outset of the Christian Church and it continues to be used in most Christian churches today.⁸ Contrary to popular perception, and despite the diversity of the Baptist movement, the fourfold order is also the historic structure of Baptist worship.⁹ However, for most Baptists, more compelling than an appeal to history and tradition will be a brief exploration of the Biblical roots of the fourfold order.

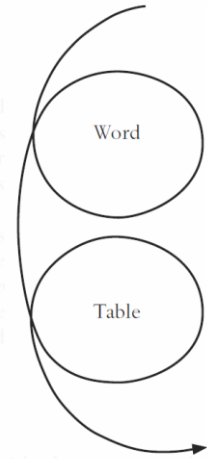


Figure 2: The Fourfold Order in a Baptist context. From "Gathering for Worship" pg. 5.

Encountering the Resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:13-35)

This well-known passage, where two disciples encounter the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus, provides the precedent for the fourfold order being the New Testament form of worship. Simply following the storyline provides us with the basics of the fourfold order: Jesus meets with his disciples (Gathering), he uses the scriptures to proclaim himself (Service of the

⁷ My adaptation of the fourfold order was inspired by Robert Webber’s: Webber, *Planning Blended Worship*, 191. For a uniquely Baptist contextualization of the fourfold order see: Christopher J. Ellis and Myra Blyth, eds., *Gathering for Worship* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2012), 4-13.

⁸ Helpful overviews of how the fourfold order is present in the worship of diverse denominations can be found in: Mark Galli, *Beyond Smells and Bells* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2008), 126-127. Also see: Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

⁹ G. Thomas Halbrooks, “A Baptist Model of Worship” in *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing Group, 1994), 231-235.

Word), he reveals himself to them through the breaking of bread (Service of the Table), and once Jesus is revealed to them, the disciples immediately leave to proclaim the good news (Sending).

This transformative encounter with Jesus in Luke 24 is precisely what we hope to facilitate in worship. We gather in faith that Jesus will meet us. We explore the scriptures (the word) to understand more about Christ (the Word). In the breaking of the bread (Communion), Jesus reveals himself to us as the one who offers himself ‘for us and for our salvation’. We are then sent out with a purpose: to proclaim to all the world everything that has been revealed to us. From beginning to end, we seek to rehearse and re-live this story in a way which is led by the Spirit and praises the Father for what he has accomplished and continues to do through Jesus Christ.

The Devotion of the Early Church (Acts 2:42)

Another oft-quoted verse from the life of the early church describes their acts of devotion. Acts 2:42 says that the disciples of Jesus “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers” (HCSB). In this description, we can again see the basic elements of the fourfold order. The core of these acts of devotion are the “apostles’ teaching” (Service of the Word) and “the breaking of bread” (Service of the Table). Prayer and fellowship (Gathering) are the settings in which these central practices of worship are carried out. The context of this passage (see vs. 41 & 47) makes it clear that their worship is what fueled and sustained their sense of mission (Sending).

Living Within the Biblical Narrative

While other specific passages could be used to point to the Biblical foundations of the fourfold order (e.g. Ex. 24:1-8, Dt. 26:4-11), it is worth noting that this liturgical structure also

provides a way for us to worship within the broader Biblical narrative. The fourfold order provides us with a way to worship which proclaims the story of scripture: *Creation – Fall – Redemption – Thanksgiving – Mission*.¹⁰ In the *Gathering*, we assemble to praise God for who he is and his mighty acts of creation. As we recognise who we are in light of who he is, we acknowledge our fallenness. This transitions us from the *Gathering* into the *Service of the Word* where we confess our sins and, proclaiming Jesus’ redeeming work, can be assured of our right-standing before God, through the High-Priestly intercession of Jesus (Heb. 7:24). Having been given the opportunity to address any sinful barriers which might prevent us from hearing what God has to say, we can now come to the preaching of the scriptures.

Following God’s revelation to us through scriptural preaching/teaching, a *Response* is required; a response of thanksgiving! The ultimate form of response has been given to us by Jesus himself in Communion, where we give thanks (ie. *Eucharist*) and remember (ie. *anamnesis*) him by sharing or “communing” in his body and blood (1 Cor. 10:16-17). At MBC, our practice is to celebrate Communion at least once each month. This practice of monthly Communion requires that most of our worship gatherings have an alternate response of thanksgiving. While there are a variety of ways for us to express thankful worship, our most consistent practice is through singing a song of (re)commitment during our

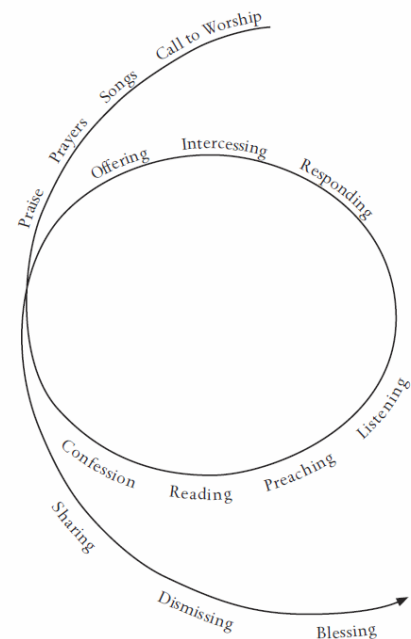


Figure 3: The Fourfold Order in a Baptist Context with an alternate response. From “Gathering for Worship”, pg. 6.

Offering. The offering of our finances to God is a sacrificial act of faith, motivated by a thankful

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for a chart which outlines the relationship between the Biblical narrative and the fourfold order. Appendix 2 provides a sample Order of Service which demonstrates what this might look like in our context.

heart which desires to see the Kingdom of God furthered by our joyful participation in it. This brings our focus to the final ‘fold’ of the liturgy and completes our retelling of the Biblical narrative: mission. When the disciples encountered the risen Jesus, he commissioned them to go and proclaim the Good News (Mt. 28:18-20). In the same way, just as God reveals himself to us in worship, so we are sent out to continue worshipping through lives of evangelical obedience.

The use of the fourfold order in our liturgy provides us with an ideal blending of medium and message. This liturgical structure provides us with an order for our corporate worship which allows multiple layers of Biblical and theological content to subtly form the minds and hearts of our congregation. The fourfold order also provides practical guidance for those leading worship, giving them helpful criteria for what content to include and how to arrange that content while remaining flexible enough for creative articulation of the Gospel. This order is structured enough that it ensures no individual or group of individuals can set an agenda for our worship outside of the Gospel of Jesus Christ but remains dynamic enough to allow for appropriate contextualization.

Conclusion

What is described above represents an ideal, it is the goal our liturgy is hoping to accomplish. At the same time, Martensville Baptist Church joyfully stands within the free-church tradition, resisting manmade structures and traditions which may hinder the dynamic leading of the Holy Spirit. Yet, as Ellis and Blyth remind us, this emphasis on liturgical liberty needs to be properly defined: “Free church worship is just that – free. Not in the sense that each has the liberty to do what they like, but in the sense that each has the freedom to be open to the leading

of God's Spirit, both in preparing and in leading worship."¹¹ The case has already been made that our liturgy is no manmade structure but rather a deeply Biblical structure which provides us with an opportunity to meet the risen Christ through a liturgical marriage of form and content. Beyond this, the purpose of having a set liturgical format is so that, when the Spirit speaks, we will already be 'moving in the same direction.' The last thing we would want is for the Holy Spirit to have to work *against* the flow of poor liturgical planning or leadership which has been carried out in the name of "freedom." Thus, the more our form and content conform to the Gospel Story, the less likely it is that the Spirit will need to work counter to how our worship has been planned.

It also needs to be acknowledged that, in allowing for freedom and creativity within the planning and implementation of our corporate worship, we will rarely, if ever, truly attain to the ideal we strive for. The ideal fourfold service will likely not be carried out with any degree of perfection at any one of our worship gatherings. Because of this, we rely even more on the Holy Spirit to guide us, not only in the preparation and leadership of each individual Sunday but also in how the cumulative discipline of life-long worship will shape and form us through the liturgy.

To a certain degree, worship will always remain a mystery. Just exactly *how* the Holy Spirit translates our prayers (Rom. 8:26) and *how* Jesus intercedes for us to the Father we may never know. Yet, there is no need for our earthly worship practices to remain overly mysterious. Whenever we gather, our desire is to glorify God by re-entering and re-living the Gospel Story so that week after week we will stand in awe of Jesus' astounding acts of redemption and reconciliation. Our prayer is that our *lex orandi* will challenge and nurture our *lex credendi* so that our *lex vivendi* will consistently proclaim Christ and him crucified to the world around us.

¹¹ Christopher J. Ellis and Myra Blyth, eds., *Gathering for Worship* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2012), xiv.

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Appendices

Appendix #1: The Fourfold Order in relation to key elements of the Gospel Story:

The Gathering:

- invitation
- celebration
- preparation

The Word:

- preparation (confession/assurance)
- sharing/testimony
- sermon

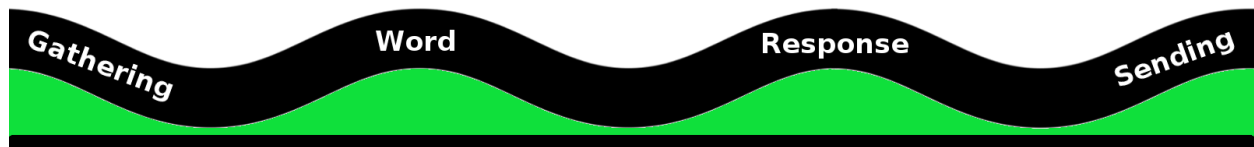
The Response:

- reflection
- celebration
- sacrifice
- commitment

The Sending:

- Commissioning
- Blessing
- worship results in transformation

LEX ORANDI ~ LEX CREDENDI
LEX VIVENDI



The Gospel Story

Creation

Praise God for His Great Acts

Fall

Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness

Redemption

Jesus' Death & Resurrection

Thanksgiving

Worshipful (re)commitment and unity in Christ

Mission

Commission to doxological, lifestyle proclamation

Appendix #2:

Based on our current (2016-17) song repertoire, below is a sample *Order of Service* (liturgy) which provides an example of how the fourfold order can be used to proclaim the Gospel Story in a manner which is appropriate for our context. Beside each liturgical element is a brief rationale to help identify why each element is placed where it is. Since we celebrate communion only once each month, this service demonstrates what a non-Eucharistic service with an alternate *Response* might look like.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| <i>Gathering</i> | <i>Call to Worship</i> Psalm 96:1-5 | We begin corporate worship with God speaking first. He is revealed through scripture and then everything else we do is in respond to his revelation. |
| | “Greatly to be Praise” <i>Fee</i> | Echoing the words of the preceding Psalm, the congregation is encouraged to praise God for his acts of creation and salvation. |
| | “How Great Thou Art” <i>The Digital Age</i> | This song builds on the previous one, walking from creation – redemption – new creation. |
| <i>Service of the Word</i> | “Search My Heart” <i>Hillsong</i> | As we praise God for who he is and what he has done, we acknowledge that we need forgiveness. In this song, we ask God to search us and reveal what sins need to be confessed so that we can continue to praise him. |
| | “We Confess” <i>Glenn Packiam</i> | This is a song which leads us through a time of confession and into a scriptural assurance that, through Jesus, our sins are forgiven. |
| | Scripture Reading and Prayer | Having been assured of our right-standing before God, we know that there is nothing preventing us from hearing from him through the scriptures. Thus, we hear an extended passage of scripture connected to the sermon, praying that God would speak to us through the upcoming time of scriptural instruction and exhortation. |

| Sermon | |
|--|--|
| Response (without Communion) | <p>“This I Believe (the Creed)” <i>Hillsong</i></p> <p>Our initial response to God’s speaking to us ought to be one of submission, obedience, and a declaration of exclusive allegiance to him. Thus, we recite (or in this case <i>sing</i>) one of the historic creeds.</p> |
| | <p>Offering</p> <p>The offering of our finances is an act of submission as well as faith and thanksgiving (that as God has provided, he will continue to provide). Giving in this one area can also be a powerful symbolic act of us giving <i>everything</i> to God.</p> |
| | <p>Pastoral Prayer</p> <p>Having affirmed our (re)commitment to God, we now come before him as our beneficent lord, making our humble requests.</p> |
| | <p>“As it is in Heaven” <i>Matt Maher</i></p> <p>As a way of summarising and completing our prayers, we pray (or in this case <i>sing</i>) the prayer that Jesus taught us: the Lord’s Prayer.</p> |
| Sending | <p>“Ready for You” <i>Worship Central</i></p> <p>Preparing to disperse from our gathering, this song is a prayer and a declaration that we are ready for God to lead us into the world to proclaim his glory.</p> |
| | <p>Closing Prayer and/or Benediction</p> <p>A scriptural benediction is the preferred sending since it provides Biblical ‘bookends’ to our worship: God has the first and the last word. Because he is ‘the beginning and the end’, he both commences and concludes our worship.</p> |