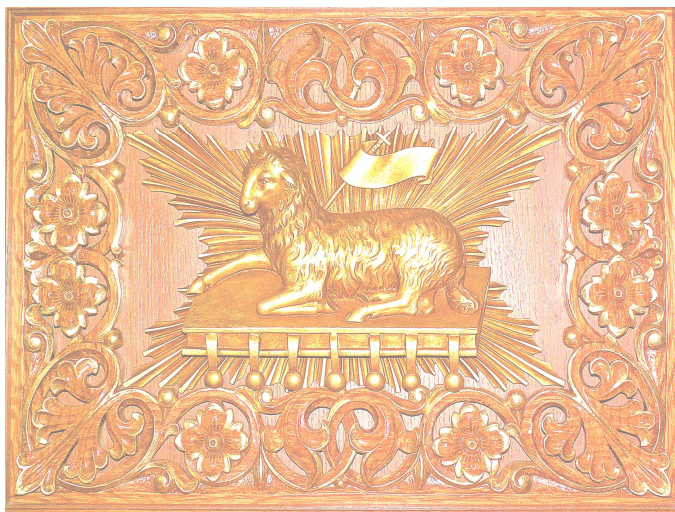


The Liturgy In The Book of Revelation



**A Simple Way to
Understand Both Liturgy
and Apocalypse**

By Timothy A. Rossow

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The Liturgy and the Apocalypse**

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Chapter 1

The Liturgy in the Book of Revelation

The Goal of this Booklet

The Book of Revelation is very intimidating to most people. It is filled with countless bizarre images and has a confusing timeline. One point of entry into the book is to view it from the standpoint of something very familiar to traditional Christians, the liturgy. This booklet identifies and explains the numerous phrases and gestures from the liturgy in the Book of Revelation. Along the way, we also offer explanations of the basic parts of the book and provide a liturgical outline that breaks the book down into more easily digestible parts.

Seeing the liturgy in the Book of Revelation will also help us realize how Biblical the liturgy is. Most traditional Christians know that there is a worship war going on. The traditional liturgy is being replaced by a less formal worship outline that is akin to pop culture. Seeing the liturgy in the Book of Revelation helps us realize that it is not some ornate man-made thing from the middle ages. Instead, the liturgy is a form of worship that is drawn from the forms and structure of the worship that we see in the Bible itself.

The book of Revelation has more liturgical references than most other books of the Bible. It is important to recognize that the life of the people of God in the Old Testament (before our New Testament era) and the life in the world to come (after this New Testament era) are characterized by liturgy and ritual. The Old Testament is at one end of the world's historical spectrum and it is built around the sacrificial system that God gave to the people of Israel in the

wilderness. It is highly liturgical. On the other end of the spectrum we see that the book of Revelation is also built around a liturgical model. That's what this booklet is about. By showing select parts of the book of Revelation with liturgical commentary I hope you will see how prominent the liturgical approach to God is in the Bible.

Modern Christianity has an anti-ritual tendency that is based more on the principles of the Enlightenment (17th and 18th century philosophy of humanism and reason) than on Biblical theology. This booklet is intended to give you a guide into the liturgical nature of the book of Revelation. It is not a complete commentary on the visions of John, although some helpful summaries are provided for each section of Revelation that might help you better understand the book.

How this Booklet is Organized

The booklet includes the liturgically significant parts of the Book of Revelation followed by a brief commentary. (The Bible translation used is the English Standard Version.) Parts of the Book of Revelation that are less relevant liturgically speaking have been left out but brief summaries are provided for these sections so that the reading of this booklet will provide for the reader the full story line of the end times.

The Bible text is in italics and is indented. Verses that have liturgical implications are in bold typeface. The commentary is in plain font following the Bible text.

The Purpose of the Book of Revelation

The purpose of the Book of Revelation is to assure God's people that He is in control and working to bring us all safely to heaven. That message is cast in highly liturgical form as you will see below. The most prominent theme of the book is

the same general theme of the entire Bible: *God hates sin but has sent His Son into the flesh to die to pay for our sins with His blood.*

In the book of Revelation this theme is presented in striking imagery. The following outline is based on the major liturgical sections of the book. (For a more traditional outline see the *Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, 2009.)

A Liturgical Outline of the Book of Revelation

Part I - Christ Appears to John in Liturgical Attire and dictates the Seven Letters to the Churches (chapters 1-3): The book opens with Christ appearing to John in the same liturgical garb that pastors have been wearing in the divine service for nearly two millennia.

Part II – Christ the Slain Lamb Elicits “This is the Feast” and other Liturgical Music (chapters 4-5): In this section we see Christ appearing as a slain Lamb who alone has the authority (because of His wounds) to open the seals on the scrolls that reveal the images of the last days (chapter 4). He is then praised in the words that are the basis of our hymn of praise “This is the Feast” and other praise that finds its way into the hymnal.

Part III – White Robes, Incense and Prostration (chapters 6-16): After viewing the great feast in heaven we see the history of the end times revealed via a series of 7 cycles (7 seals, 7 bowls of wrath, 7 trumpets, etc.) which includes several interesting references to liturgical practice.

Part IV – (chapters 17-18) Destruction of the Whore, Chasing After Other Gods, Why We Close the Communion Rail– This part of the revelations describe the judgment of the great whore (false teacher and apostate church) and the beast (secular power). The whore or apostate church, chases after all sorts of false gods and is punished for bringing this into Christ's church. This gives us eschatological motivation to continue closing the communion rail

Part V – The Lord's Supper, Liturgical Posture and Reverent Attitude in the New Heaven and the New Earth (chapters 19-22): The book concludes with a fantastic description of the temple of God in heaven (notice the liturgical theme of the temple) and the great eternal city, the New Jerusalem that we believers will inhabit forever.

The mysterious symbolic imagery in the Book of Revelation can be intimidating, but we must remember that God intends it to be a book of comfort for us on the long and sometimes difficult road to heaven. Read the book with the preceding theme in mind and try not to be distracted by symbols that you do not understand. (There is not space in this little booklet to explain all of those images.) Just keep your eyes on the Lamb who was slain for you while you read this wonder-filled book of the Bible and He will lead you on a liturgical tour from His cross, through our current age, and right up to the final judgment. He cherishes you and shall keep you safe in the faith until His ultimate return.

Part I
Chapters 1-3

**Christ Appears to John in Liturgical Attire
And the Seven Letters to the Churches**

Chapter 1:1 – 1:8 – John’s Introduction

*1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. 4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: **Grace to you and peace** from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him **who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood** 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. **Amen.** 7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

The book of Revelation is letter of encouragement to seven churches in Asia Minor. This practical intention should encourage us to read the book with hope and not frustration.

Right away in the first chapter we have liturgical significance. Notice that John breaks into prayer (vv. 4-6). Much of Scripture is in the form of prayer. Prayer and liturgy are not alien to God's word but flow seamlessly with it. Note also that the words the pastor says before the sermon are taken from this passage (vv. 4-5). In v. 5 John mentions the blood of Christ - the heart of the message of the Bible - which is also the heart and soul of the liturgy (confession and absolution to make us worthy to come into the Lord's presence, procession of the cross, the Lord's Supper, etc.).

Note also the liturgical use of "Amen" (v. 6). Saying "Amen" is to say "yes it is so" or "that is a true saying." Saying "Amen" is not a part of our normal speech pattern and yet we confidently add it to our prayers. We have learned to do so. This is a good example of how we can learn to appreciate forms and actions that are not a part of our everyday life but enrich our worship of God. Saying "Amen" in the service is not just for Baptists. The congregation I serve has learned to say "Amen" along with the pastor at several points during the liturgy such as at the end of the votum, at the beginning of the sermon and at the conclusion of the service. This is a Biblical practice. We have also sought to replace the generic offering of greetings to fellow members with the scriptural liturgical greeting "the peace of the Lord be with you," followed by the response "and also with you."

Chapter 1:9-20 Vision of the Son of Man

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and

to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw **seven golden lampstands**, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like **a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest**. 14 The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.



Jesus is described here as wearing clothing very similar to the attire worn by liturgical pastors. He wears a white robe and with a sash (i.e. a stole). He is surrounded by candle stands, another key feature of liturgical worship. Thus we see in the book of Revelation not only the words of the liturgy but also the accoutrements.

Chapter 2:1-3:22 The Seven Letters to the Seven Churches

These are the seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. Each church has its own unique strengths and weaknesses and so the Holy Spirit moves John to write particular prescriptions for each church. This is a fascinating section of the book but is not included here because it has few if any liturgical references.

Here are the names of the churches and the approach that John takes to each one.

1. **Ephesus** – They were a strong church that had grown weaker and so John encourages them to return to their original zeal.
2. **Smyrna** – This was another strong congregation but they were about to be tested even beyond what they had already endured and so John encourages them with words that have now become one of our favorite confirmation verses: “be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.”
3. **Pergamum** – This too was a strong church but they had given in to some false teaching and would be tried with even more false teaching.
4. **Thyatira** – This congregation was full of love and good deeds but were tolerating a member who mislead them into pagan and sexually immoral practices. God promised to remove her from their midst.
5. **Sardis** – This church needed to wake up because despite its good reputation, it was a dead church.
6. **Philadelphia** – This congregation was weak from having been through so many trials but God promised to keep them strong.
7. **Laodicea** – This church was lukewarm and so God threatened to spit them out of his mouth.

Part II

Chapters 4-5

The Slain Lamb Elicits

“This is the Feast” and other Liturgical Music

Chapter 4 The Throne in Heaven

4:1 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. 3 And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. 4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, 6 and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: 7 the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. 8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” 9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and

thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

This is the beginning of the dramatic visuals intended to encourage us in the faith. Notice that the setting for the visions is the temple and the throne room of heaven. This is a liturgical setting (temple). It should inspire us to do our best and use the highest of style when worshipping God because we are reminded that He is on His heavenly throne.

In this passage the Book of Life is presented and John begins to cry because no one is found who can open it until Christ comes along, appearing as the slain Lamb with His wounds from the cross. Because of His wounds He has been given the name above all names (Philippians 2) and He has the authority to open the book. This is one of the richest texts for understanding the tone, mood and ambiance for appropriate worship of God. Verses 2-6 describe the throne of God in heaven. It is beautiful, glorious, emanating with thunder and lightning and surrounded with torches. It is no wonder that for 2,000 years the predominant “style” of worship in the church has been formal, liturgical, solemn and reverent. We do not have the throne of God in our midst but we do have the true body and blood of Christ that is served to us in our Sunday ritual. God’s presence is amongst us in the church service and so it is fitting that our worship aspire to what is described here in Revelation 4.

One reason that Protestant worship of the current American Evangelicalism stripe is not so reverent is because they do

not believe that the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the Lord's Supper. This makes a huge difference in how you worship. They also do not see the purpose of the Divine Service rightly as the serving up of God's forgiveness through absolution, baptism, preaching and distributing the Lord's body and blood. They do preach some forgiveness but the lion's share of their preaching is aimed at bettering the life of the Christian. Because of the lack of understanding of the presence of God and his forgiveness in the church service, they have adopted an informal approach to church which has been furthered by the advent of pop Christian music. It is sad to see so many formerly confessional Lutheran churches chasing after this informal style of worship that lacks the true guts of Biblical worship – the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 6 brings to mind the temple of the Old Testament. In the courtyard of the altar there was a large basin for ceremonial cleansing of the priests. The crystal sea described in v.6 may refer to this great basin of water on the temple grounds (see Exodus 30:18). If that is the case, this picture of the Old Testament temple present in this vision is a good reminder to us that the Christian faith and its worship are all about the sacrifice of sins done for us in the body and blood of Christ. It is also a striking reminder of the purifying water that cleansed us in Holy Baptism. Our baptismal pools can be seen as symbolic of this great basin in front of the temple in heaven (which is parallel to the altar where the real presence of Christ is found in His supper).

Verses 8-11 reprise the “trisagion” (three times holy) of Isaiah 6. Today we sing it in the Sanctus, just prior to the appearing of the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion. God is present in His holy temple in heaven and He is present in His supper and so we sing Him holy three times.

Other liturgical points of interest in this section include the fact that part of the text of “*This is the Feast*” comes from this passage. Note too that those around the throne bow down in the presence of God. Bowing is not just for pastors; it is a reverent posture that can be assumed by all worshippers. Appropriate places to bow in the liturgy include:

- At the singing of the first part of the Gloria, when the Trinity is mentioned.
- Before entering the pew when you first come into church, bowing toward the altar since it is the place from the body and blood of the Lord comes.
- As the processional cross passes before you.
- During the words of institution when the words “this is my body” and “this is my blood” are spoken.
- Other appropriate places according to one’s piety.

Chapters 5 The Scroll and the Lamb

5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 And one of the



elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw **a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain**, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and **by your blood you ransomed people for God** from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” 11 Then I looked,

and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, “**Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!**” 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “**To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!**” 14 And



the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

This section continues the rich liturgical picture of the Lamb who was slain. The fact that the Christ is pictured as a slain Lamb (v.6, also v.9) reminds us that the Christian faith revolves around the forgiveness of sins and that the liturgy ought to also. This is why the Divine Service begins with confession and absolution. One wonders how the contemporary churches of Protestantism can read the Bible and still continue with their services that lack Holy Absolution. The book of Revelation is clear that the message of God is all about the forgiveness of sins.

There are other notes of liturgical interest in this section. The image of the golden bowls of incense portraying the prayers of the saints (v. 8) reminds us of the importance of the General Prayer every Sunday and our own daily prayers. Lyrics from the Hymn of Praise, “This is the Feast” make another appearance (vv. 12-13). Notice also that the crowd says “Amen,” (v. 14), a common liturgical exclamation point in the liturgy. Liturgical posture is also prominent in this vision (v.14) as the elders bow down to worship. Even though the folding of hands is the most common (and sometimes the only) physical gesture in Protestant worship, the bowing and/or kneeling of the body is far more common in Scripture and thus makes for a nice gesture in our church service.

Part III

Chapters 6-16

White Robes, Incense and Prostration

Chapter 6 The Four Horsemen and the Seven Seals

Chapter 6 is omitted. It describes the famous four horsemen who ride across the earth and usher in the end times. It also describes a series of plagues and devastations unleashed with the opening of each of the seven seals.

The identification of the four horsemen:

1. **White horse** – the ultimate conquest of the preaching of God’s word to the nations.
2. **Red horse** – the bloodshed of wars that would happen before Christ returns.
3. **Black horse** – the famine that will come before Christ returns.
4. **Pale horse** – the death that will come over mankind before the coming of Christ.

Chapter 7 The 144,000 and the Feast of Victory

*7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. 2 Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the **seal of the living God**, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, 3 saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” 4 And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from **every tribe of the sons of Israel**: 5 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad,*

6 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, 7 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, 8 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. 9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, **from every nation**, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, **clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands**, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and **they fell on their faces** before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." 13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have **washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb**. 15 "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

In this passage John sees the 144,000 (this is a symbolic number representing the complete number of those called by

God to faith – it is $12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10$ – or the number of the Old Testament tribes multiplied by the number of the New Testament apostles multiplied by 10 squared. 10 is significant because it is the number of completeness as it is a combination of the two mysterious prime numbers 3 and 7. This is not intended to be an accountant's numbering of the exact totality of people; instead it is a highly symbolic number representing the church. The point is that the number is complete. It is the number of the church (12) times the number of completion (10). The fact that the holy ones in heaven are grouped according to the tribes of Israel reminds us how prominent the Old Testament is in Christian faith and thus has come to have a prominent role in the liturgy. For example, the high point of the Christian liturgy, the Lord's Supper, is the more perfect version of the Passover meal of the first covenant. Rituals and texts from the Old Testament are rich and fine fodder for New Testament liturgy. The liturgy has grown out of the synagogue worship of Bible times.

Pay attention the next time the story is read from the Gospels of Jesus visiting his hometown of Nazareth. The small part of the synagogue service that we see there is just like the Divine Service of today. Jesus reads the appointed reading of the day and then preaches a sermon on it. Lutheran Visuals has available a video series on the liturgy by Dr. Art Just from the Ft. Wayne Seminary which highlights this connection to Old Testament worship. (For information go to lutheranvisuals.com.)

The vision of the slain Lamb climaxes with a worship service with people from all tribes and nations (v.9). In keeping with this, the hymns in our hymnal intentionally represent songs from various cultures around the world. Many criticize the liturgy as some sort of traditional German thing. If you check out the hymns in the Lutheran Service

Book you will find hymns from Africa, America, Scandinavia, China, and Germany, just to name a few locales. Likewise the liturgy is often criticized as being ancient and old-fashioned but that is far from the case. The music of the liturgy and the hymns in the Lutheran Service Book represent all 2,000 years of liturgical history.

There are more signs of the liturgy in this section. Again we see traditional liturgical dress (v.9) and liturgical action (waving palm branches). Another liturgical gesture appears in v.11 (falling on their faces). The robes of the saints being washed in the blood of the lamb reminds us again of the prominence of the forgiveness of sins in the Christian faith and liturgy (v.14).

Chapter 8:1-6 The Seventh Seal and the Golden Censer

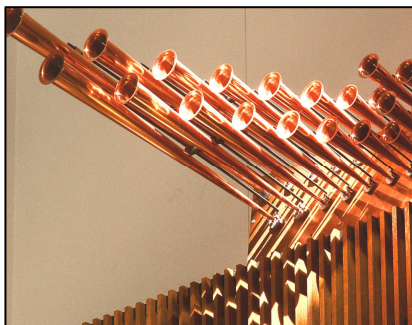
*8:1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was **silence in heaven** for about half an hour. 2 Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, **and he was given much incense** to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the **golden altar** before the throne, 4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.*

The last seal on the book is opened and we are brought to the very end of time. The vision of the saints in heaven has a liturgical feel to it. First there is silence, a common feature in the liturgy, particularly for the evening offices which include times of silence to reflect on the scripture readings and for silent prayer.

Very few Lutheran churches use incense, but it is a prominent feature in the book of Revelation. Incense comes out of Old Testament practice where it was used as a sweet smelling sacrifice to God. Here it is portrayed as a symbol of our prayers rising to God during these last days.

Chapter 8:6-9:21 The Seven Trumpets

Because it does not have much liturgical material 8:6 – 9:21 is omitted. It is the second series of the seven trips around the cycle of the end times, the first being the seven seals. It is the least understood of all the cycles. Some understand it to represent seven different heresies arising in the church before the return of Christ while others think it is just a graphic description of the extent of the wrath of God coming down on a sinful universe.



Chapter 10:1-11 The Angel and the Little Scroll

10:1-11 is also omitted here. It portrays a second scroll that John is to eat symbolizing that he is the one who is to proclaim the final judgment of God (i.e. this book of Revelation). The scroll is both bitter and sweet. It is bitter (Law) because there shall be much tribulation in the end but it is sweet (Gospel) because the end culminates in God's people being taken to heaven.

The Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet

11:1 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out,

*for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. 3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4 These are the two olive trees and the **two lampstands** that stand before the Lord of the earth. (11:5-14 is omitted. It describes the work of the two lampstands and how they were persecuted.) 15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” 16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. 18 The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” 19 **Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.** There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.*

At this juncture John is shown a vision with very clear liturgical imagery. He is shown the temple in heaven and is asked to measure it (11:1). The temple has an altar and worshipers. The point of this vision is to show that at the end of time, the glory of God will be revealed (God dwells in the temple). Unbelievers will be allowed some access to the church (the gentile court outside the temple, v. 2) and they will harshly persecute the believers in the last days of the end times but God's glory is kept safe inside His dwelling place (heaven) and His chosen ones will be taken there to live with Him in safety on the last day.

Whether this vision is telling us that there is an actual temple in heaven is disputed by theologians. It may just be a symbol for the presence of God. Whether or not there is an actual temple in heaven does not change the liturgical emphasis here. God's presence is holy. We will be in God's presence in heaven and it is brought to us even on this side of heaven in the flesh of Jesus (see John 1:14 where it says that Jesus "tabernacled" among us, i.e. dwelt among us – this is the language of the presence of God in the tabernacle and temple) and in the Lord's Supper where He is truly present and tabernacles (dwells) among us (note v.19 where this theme is repeated using the ark of the covenant). This emphasis on the presence of God unmediated in heaven and mediated on earth through the bread and wine calls us to develop liturgies that revolve around the presence of God and do not devolve into the folksy approach that is so common in "contemporary" worship.

The Woman and the Dragon

12:1-6 is omitted. It portrays a woman (the church) in the wilderness (persecutions of the end times) who gives birth to a child (the savior). The point of the vision is to show that the church is protected by God in the wilderness of the end times.

Satan Thrown Down to Earth

12:7-17 is omitted. It provides a vision of Satan being conquered by the blood of the Lamb and how he pursues and persecutes the church (the woman in the wilderness).

The Two Beasts

13:5 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. 6 It opened its mouth to

utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

Most of this passage is omitted. Verses 5-6 are included because they show the opposite of true worship: the first beast uttering haughty blasphemous words against God and His name. This first beast could be Satan himself or an emissary of Satan. The second beast (most likely what we know as the antichrist) places his mark on the unbelievers. Many have speculated on what this mark is. We do not know for sure but what is clear is that it is Satan's anti-baptism. The liturgical rite of baptism marks us as God's children. Satan tries to mimic baptism by creating a seal of his own.

The Lamb and the 144,000

*14:1 Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's **name written on their foreheads**. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, 3 and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. 4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.*

Once again we are brought right up to the precipice of the end of time. Of liturgical note is the marking on the foreheads of the children of God. This symbolism is picked up in the liturgy when at baptism, the young child or adult is marked with the sign of the cross on the forehead and upon

the heart. (See 7:1ff. above and commentary on the number 144,000.)

The Messages of the Three Angels

*6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. 7 And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water." 8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." 9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will **drink the wine of God's wrath**, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." 12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"*

This passage depicts the message of the Gospel going out to the ends of the earth even as the end is in sight. Of liturgical note are the unbelievers drinking the wine of God's wrath (v.9). Wine is used both as marker of the elect (receiving the

blood of Christ through the wine of Holy Communion) and as a sign of destruction for the unbeliever (the final judgment is described as God trampling out the wine press of His wrath – the red wine being the blood of the unbelievers.) All through scripture and particularly in the book of Revelation, the many references to wine are pointers to the rite of Holy Communion.

Chapter 14:14-20 The Harvest of the Earth

14:14-20 is omitted. It describes the end of the world in terms of trampling out the winepress.

Chapter 15 The Seven Angels with Seven Plagues

15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. 2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” 5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. 7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, 8 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one

could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

This passage introduces the last cycle of sevens, the seven bowls of God's wrath. There is a liturgical quality to this text. The seven angels carrying the seven bowls of God's wrath come out of the sanctuary in heaven (v.5). The angels are dressed liturgically in white robes and golden sashes (v.6). The sanctuary is the dwelling place of the glory of God as v.8 makes clear. As we have said above, the setting of the final judgment and our eternal home in heaven is a formal one that is more akin to historic liturgical services than the phenomenon of the modern world's "contemporary" worship. And again we see God dwelling in a glorious mansion worthy of the highest form of decoration and praise and not in a folksy cottage that calls for casual furnishings and colloquial tunes.

Chapter 16 The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

16:1-21 is omitted. It depicts the outpouring of the seven bowls of wrath. It continues the temple theme begun in chapter 11 and continued in the last section. There is a curious verse in which the altar of God speaks out (v.7). This only heightens the sense that the altar and temple play an important role in the book, in Christian history and thus should also be prominent in Christian worship. This is what is so alarming when churches like Willow Creek (the model church of the contemporary movement) are proud of the fact that they do not have an altar and other traditional liturgical accoutrements.

Part IV – Chapters 17 - 18

Destruction of the Whore, Chasing After Other Gods, Why We Close the Communion Rail

Chapter 17 The Great Prostitute and the Beast

17:1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” 3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. 5 And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.” 6 And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly. 7 But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. 9 This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven

heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; 10 they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are of one mind and hand over their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

15 And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, 17 for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. 18 And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

This section shows us the great whore (v.1) who symbolizes all who have ever stood against the Lamb; thus it is the sum total of all unbelievers. The beast she sits on is the beast from chapter 13 and represents secular power. The imagery of whoring has everything to do with the liturgy. In the Divine Service God joins Himself to us through the bread and wine of Holy Communion. God is a jealous God and does not want us fooling around with the devil and sin. The Lord's table is the place where our marriage to God is consummated and He does not tolerate unfaithfulness.

This imagery of sleeping around on God is helpful for understanding the historic church's position and the position of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's on closed communion. We do not let those who do not discern the body of Christ (I Corinthians 11) commune with us because this is a false communion, that is to say, it would be sleeping around on God. This is serious business for God! He does not want us taking his body and giving it to just any Tom, Dick, Harry or Jane who comes along. Instead we commune only with those who have been properly instructed in Biblical doctrine (that is to say, those who have been confirmed in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod). This is not a fail safe method but is the best means that we have available and thus should be practiced faithfully by all LCMS churches.

Notice how this great prostitute (the false kingdom of Satan) is characterized by similar but opposite things of Christ's liturgy. Satan, the beast on whom the woman sits (v.3) is covered with names (as Christ is identified in Isaiah and elsewhere – *Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Mighty God, etc.*) only his names are blasphemous, i.e. making fun of Christ. Notice too he is a beast whereas Christ is a humble lamb. Christ offers us a cup of forgiveness filled with his blood; the prostitute offers the world a cup of immoralities (v.4). We all receive the sign of the holy cross on our foreheads; the prostitute has the name of abomination on her forehead (v.5). Christ sacrifices his blood for us on the cross and gives it to us freely in Holy Communion; the whore does not give her blood but instead drinks the blood of the martyred saints (v.6).

Chapter 18 The Fall of Babylon

18:1-24 is omitted. There is nothing overtly liturgical in this section. It tells the story of the final destruction of the earth

from the standpoint of the evil and sin in the realm of commerce. All through the Old Testament and also in the words of Jesus, a sign of true faith is how one treats the poor. Commerce is not inherently evil but our sinful flesh has worked a lot of evil in the world of business. John is given a vision of how the world of commerce is destroyed and Satan is no longer able to use it for his selfish gain.

Part V – Chapters 19 - 22

The Lord's Supper, Liturgical Posture and Reverent Attitude in the New Heaven and the New Earth

Chapter 19:1-10 The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

19:1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” 3 Once

more they cried out, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!”

5 And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all

you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.”

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the



glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” 10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

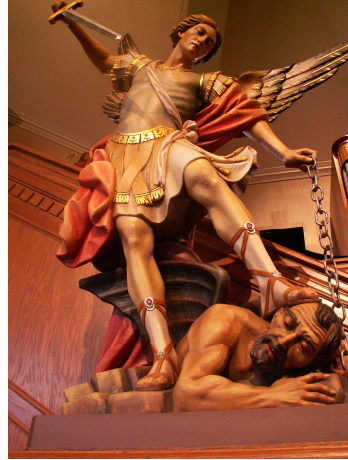
Now the story starts to wind down. Before Satan is finally cast into hell for eternity there is a call for all believers to come to the great wedding feast in eternity. Again we see the use of traditional liturgical terms “Hallelujah,” “Amen” and the traditional postures of bowing and kneeling (vv. 3, 4, 6, 10). The marriage feast of the Lamb in eternity is the fulfillment of the Lord’s Supper here on earth. Contemporary, non-liturgical worship does not intrinsically mean to diminish the prominence of the Lord’s Supper but that is often what happens in practice since the goal of much “contemporary” worship is to equip people for effective daily living rather than bring them into the presence of the Lamb at His supper. Setting the table for such a great meal (the very body and blood of the Lord for the forgiveness of sins) inherently calls for a rich, sophisticated table setting (i.e. liturgy). We the guests at the feast are dressed in white by God (v.8), the lavish white robes of Christ’s righteousness won for us by His death on the cross. Dressed as such by God, it is only natural that the meal will not be a blue plate special or double cheeseburger and fries; it will be more like a fine seven course meal at the Ritz.

Chapter 19:11-21 The Rider on a White Horse

19:11-21 is omitted. It shows a picture of our hero, Jesus Christ, riding a white horse and destroying the enemies of the church.

Chapter 20 The Thousand Years, Defeat of Satan and Final Judgment

20:1-15 is omitted. It details the thousand years of peace before the judgment on Satan. (We are in those thousand years now. They began when Christ said “it is finished.” Satan was defeated and tied up by the word of the Gospel. He will be let free in the waning moments of this age before he is forever locked up in hell.)



Chapter 21 The New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these

words are trustworthy and true.” 6 And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for



murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” 9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me **the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.** (vv. 12 -17 are omitted – more details on the heavenly Jerusalem) 18 The wall was built of jasper, while the city was **pure gold**, clear as glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with **every kind of jewel**. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were **twelve pearls**, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. 22 **And I**

saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

We are the people of God, the New Jerusalem (Philippians 3:3). We are adorned as a bride for her husband in the flowing white clothes of the forgiveness of Christ (v.2). Christ the Groom comes to us at His supper. I have worked with hundreds of brides through the years and every one of them paid close attention to every detail of the wedding day and prepared themselves meticulously to be perfect in every way for the groom. We ought to approach the liturgy of the Lord's wedding banquet the same way and pay close attention to all the details rather than taking an informal and "contemporary" approach to the worship of God. (See also Matthew 22:11-14 the parable of the man with no wedding garment).

The radiant glory of God (vv. 11-12) reminds us that the tendency in this day and age to view God as a "best friend" leads to informal contemporary worship (with Starbucks cups in hand) is not exactly befitting the true God. The description of God and the accompanying worship dress, postures and songs imply that even though God befriends us in Christ, He ought to be worshipped in reverence and a gravity that pop culture fails to express. The lavish description of the holy city reminds us of this.

Chapter 22 The River of Life and the Promised Return

*22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from **the throne of God and of the Lamb** 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and **his servants will worship him**. 4 They will **see his face**, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. 6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.” 7 “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.” 8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, **I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel** who showed them to me, 9 but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. **Worship** God.” 10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11 Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.” 12 “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. 13 **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.**” 14 Blessed are those who **wash their robes**, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and **that they may enter the city by the gates**. 15 **Outside are the dogs** and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and*

*murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." 17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. 18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. 20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.***

The parting picture of the book is similar to the setting of the divine service. Just as the center of heaven is the throne of God so too the chancel has the altar of God in the center from which His presence emanates in the true body and blood of his Son (v. 1). Worship in heaven is rich and glorious and so our worship forms on earth ought also to be such (v. 3).

Even though our culture blurs distinctions (between male and female, child and parent – e.g. children’s “rights,” human and animal, etc.), according to the Bible it is proper to make distinctions. The unbelieving dogs are kept out of the liturgy of the Supper (vv. 14-15). They do not understand that the body and the blood of the Lord are truly present in the liturgy. We ourselves are dogs according to our sinful flesh, but we have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ and are welcome to the Supper. We need to bring unbelievers to church but that does not mean that we dumb

down the liturgy to imitate the pagan culture in which we live. The church service is not intended to be organized around the purpose of evangelism. The church service is the wedding supper for the ones properly fitted with the clothing of Christ's righteousness. Evangelism is better done one-on-one in informal settings. Too many churches today are patterning their worship after the pleasing sounds of our pop culture in order to please people. This is not the way of Scripture. As we have seen in the book of Revelation, the worship of Christ with its robes, bowing, prayers, etc., is peculiarly different than everyday life

This section also makes it clear that worship is not optional (v.9). It highlights ritual action and dress (v.8, 14) and illustrates the poetry that characterizes the liturgy (v.13, note the parallelism, i.e. saying the same thing with different words).

Conclusion

The book of Revelation clearly shows us the appropriateness of an ordered, and liturgical approach to worshipping and revering the *Lamb who was slain*. The very last words of the book are liturgical in nature. Just as the book began, so it ends in a liturgical prayer and a benediction. May God's blessing be upon you as you continue to grow in appreciating the liturgical forms found in this mysteriously awesome book and in all of Scripture.