

“Walking Together” in Faith and Worship: Exploring the Relationship between Doctrinal Unity and Liturgical Unity in the Lutheran Church

I.

Orthodox Lutherans confess, in the words of the Smalcald Articles, that “the Word of God – and no one else, not even an angel – should establish articles of faith.”¹ They likewise confess, by means of the Formula of Concord, that “only on the basis of God’s Word can judgments on articles of faith be made.”² When our Confessions speak of “God’s Word” in these contexts, they mean, of course, the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.³ It is from the Scriptures, then, that we learn what God wants us to believe and confess.

One of the important things that we know from Scripture, is that God wills there to be a Biblically-based unity in doctrine and practice within his church, in all matters where his Word has spoken:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20, ESV⁴)

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*. (1 Corinthians 1:9-10, NKJV⁵)

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. I appeal to you, brothers, to *watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught*; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord

¹Smalcald Articles II, II:15, *The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 304.

²Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II:8, Kolb Wengert p. 545.

³The Formula of Concord, for example, unselfconsciously jumps back and forth between references to “Scripture,” and a reference to what “has been written for us in God’s Word,” in such a way as to show without any doubt that one and the same thing is being described by both expressions: “Because ‘all Scripture is inspired by God,’ to serve not as a basis for security and impenitence but rather ‘for reproof, for correction, for improvement’ (2 Tim. 3:16)], and because all that has been written for us in God’s Word was written not that it might drive us into despair but rather ‘that by patience and by the encouragement of Scripture we might have hope’ (Rom. 15:4)], there can be no doubt whatsoever that the proper understanding or correct use of the teaching of the eternal foreknowledge of God produces or supports neither impenitence nor despair” (Solid Declaration XI:12, Kolb/Wengert p. 643).

⁴*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles (a division of Good News Publishers).

⁵*The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. (Romans 16:16-18, ESV)

And the unity that God *requires*, is also the unity that God *gives*. As God's Spirit works in the hearts and minds of his people through the means of grace, he himself *creates* and *bestows* the unity in faith and confession that he wills to be preserved among us. It is only by the working of the Holy Spirit that we can believe and say – collectively and individually – that “Jesus is Lord” (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3). And so, when Christians seek with God's help “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3, ESV), they know in faith that this unity is not ultimately a product of their own intellectual efforts or consensus-building skills. It is rooted instead in the Trinitarian reality of “one body and *one Spirit* – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – *one Lord*, one faith, one baptism, *one God and Father* of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6, ESV). When the gospel supernaturally draws us into a union with the Holy Trinity, it also at the same time draws us into a unity of faith and confession with each other.

This does not necessarily mean that the same terminology or mode of conceptualization must slavishly be followed by everyone, or that there cannot be differences in emphasis or in logical presentation among people who still recognize among themselves the kind of doctrinal unity that God requires. A comparison between the epistles of St. Paul and the epistles of St. John or St. Peter – not to mention the epistle of St. James! – will quickly reveal many examples of these sorts of variations, even in the inspired Scriptures. The unity among Christians and churches that God's Word demands, and that God's Word gives when that Word is mutually received in faith, is not, and need not be, an *absolute sameness* in every respect.

This is not an endorsement of the unionistic notion that Christians need to be united only in the so-called “fundamental” articles of faith. We are to be united in all revealed articles of faith. And yet, as C. F. W. Walther wisely notes, “The church militant must indeed aim at and strive for complete unity of faith and doctrine, but it never will attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one.”⁶ So, while our unity is to be in *all* the articles of faith, and not only in the “fundamental” articles, what we should seek to recognize among our brothers and sisters in Christ is a *fundamental* agreement in those articles of faith, and not necessarily an *absolute* agreement in every conceivable way. John P. Meyer elaborates on this:

Those are in fundamental agreement who, without any reservation, submit to the Word of God. When the Word of God has spoken in any matter, that matter is settled. There may be things that some men have not yet found in their study of the Bible; there may be matters with reference to which they have accustomed themselves to an inadequate mode of expression; yet, no matter what their deficiency may be, they are determined to accept the Bible doctrine. Where such is the case, there is fundamental agreement. ... A fundamental agreement is all the church can ever hope to attain here on earth. We are not all equally gifted; one has a much clearer and a much more comprehensive insight into God's doctrines than another. We all strive to grow daily in understanding. Besides, when once we have accustomed ourselves to a faulty or an inadequate expression, it is not only difficult to unlearn the particular phrase and to acquire a proper one, but the inadequate term may tend also to warp our views on other points. Yet, in spite of all such differences, where there is an unconditional willingness to hear what God has to say in his Word, there

⁶C. F. W. Walther, Thesis V., “Theses on Open Questions” (1868).

is fundamental agreement.⁷

We also need to remember that many matters of churchly *practice* are actually matters of *doctrine*. For example, when Jesus commands the church and its ministers to go and make disciples of all nations, he lays out the specific practical actions – the baptizing with water and the giving of instruction – that are fundamentally constitutive of what Christian disciple-making is. We have no *doctrine* of discipleship that is not also a *practice* of discipleship. Likewise, the Sacrament of the Altar, as Jesus instituted it, is not only a *doctrinal* matter of “this is,” but it is also a *practical* matter of “this do.” Our church’s *doctrine* of the threefold sacramental action of consecration, distribution, and reception, is implemented in a very practical way whenever the Lord’s Supper is correctly celebrated.

In those arenas of the life of the church where God’s Word has not spoken directly and explicitly regarding how we must proceed, and what methods we must use, we do, of course, acknowledge the principle of Christian freedom. But this freedom must not be abused in a spirit of pride and arrogance. It must also not be re-defined on the basis of the idolatrous notion of the “autonomy of the will” that has been elevated to an article of faith by post-Enlightenment man, in a sinful distortion of what freedom under God is supposed to mean.

In these matters, the freedom we have is the freedom to seek out and find the best and most faithful way to warn our neighbor against error; the best and most faithful way to confess and apply the message of salvation to our neighbor; and the best and most faithful way to serve our neighbor in love. We do not have the freedom to hide the severity of God’s law under a veil of compromise; to obscure the purity of God’s gospel with a smokescreen of evasion; or to manipulate our neighbor into serving *us* and *our* carnal agendas. St. Paul warns us:

“Everything is permissible” – but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible” – but not everything is constructive. (1 Corinthians 10:23-24, NIV⁸)

And so, while there may not be a divine requirement for unity in everything that is actually *done* in all places and circumstances, there *is* a divine requirement for unity in *purpose* and *motive* in what is done. Whatever we do in the Lord’s name, and for the advancement of his kingdom, we must be doing for the right reasons, as God in Scripture defines those reasons. And what that usually means for Christian brethren – when the doctrine that is intended to be expressed through their respective practices is the same doctrine – is that the practices more often than not usually turn out to be pretty similar too. In most areas of church activity, what will most naturally emerge among those who have a fundamental unity in their confession of faith, is a fundamental unity in practice as well: not an *absolute sameness* in every respect, but a *fundamental* unity. And the closer people are to each other in fraternal cooperation and shared effort, geographically and culturally, the closer will be the similarity in practice. Or at least this is what we would predict, when the “law of love” is operative in such relationships among churches, pastors, and Christians in general.

II.

The Symbolical Books contained in our Book of Concord were prepared by gifted pastors and teachers at times in Christian history when the very heart of the church’s faith was under

⁷ John P. Meyer, “Unionism,” in *Essays on Church Fellowship* (edited by Curtis A. Jahn) (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996), pp. 63-64.

⁸ *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

severe attack. The ancient Fathers, as they composed and promulgated the Ecumenical Creeds, and the Reformers of the sixteenth century, as they composed and promulgated the distinctly Lutheran Confessions, were acutely aware of the fact that almighty God had called them to defend and proclaim the truth of Christ as it is revealed in Holy Scripture, over against the faith-destroying heresies of their respective eras. The Symbolical Books of the church, written by divine vocation and under divine providence in such circumstances, are not just curious historical relics of bygone ages. They are, rather, highly relevant testimonies to God's unchanging truth, for the benefit of the church of all generations:

The Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord clarify, as precisely as human language allows, what the Bible teaches about God, sin, Christ, justification, church and ministry, repentance, the sacraments, free will, good works, and other articles of faith. They identify abuses in doctrine and practice, and most clearly state what Lutherans do not believe, teach, and confess. They are declarations of belief, making clear that Lutherans have convictions which are not open to question. The confessions clarify the Lutheran concern that only the Word be taught. Soon after its initial publication, the Book of Concord became the standard in doctrinal confrontations with Roman Catholics and with Calvinists. Where a Lutheran position seemed unclear or uncertain, the Book of Concord became a reference point for the authentic Lutheran view. Whereas the writings of Luther, as notable as they are, reveal the insights of one man, the Book of Concord expresses the theology of the whole Lutheran movement.⁹

As we would compare these various Creeds and Confessions to each other, we would certainly notice differences among them in form and structure. The logic of the Nicene Creed, for example, is developed in a typically "Greek" way, as it addresses the mystery of three Divine Persons existing as one God¹⁰; while the logic of the Athanasian Creed is developed in a typically

⁹James F. Korthals, "Publication of the Book of Concord – 425th Anniversary," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 227-28.

¹⁰The divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is acknowledged in the Nicene Creed on the basis of the eternal *derivation* of these Persons from the Divine Father, who is the *source* or *fountainhead* of the Godhead. As the Nicene Creed lays it out, the Father is confessed at the beginning of the Creed as the First Person of the Holy Trinity, who does not derive his deity from any other person. The Creed goes on to affirm that the Son is divine because he is "begotten from the Father before all the ages." And the Holy Spirit is confessed as divine because he eternally "proceeds" from the Father, and (as those in the Western tradition would add) from the Son of the Father (Nicene Creed, Kolb/Wengert pp. 22-23). Martin Luther employs this Greek mode of explaining the Trinity when he writes: "The distinction of the Father...is this, that He derived His deity from no one, but gave it from eternity, through the eternal birth, to the Son. Therefore the Son is God and Creator, just like the Father, but the Son derived all of this from the Father, and not, in turn, the Father from the Son. The Father does not owe the fact that He is God and Creator to the Son, but the Son owes the fact that He is God and Creator to the Father. And the fact that Father and Son are God and Creator they do not owe to the Holy Spirit; but the Holy Spirit owes the fact that He is God and Creator to the Father and the Son. Thus the words 'God Almighty, Creator' are found [in the Creed] as attributes of the Father and not of the Son and of the Holy Spirit to mark the distinction of the Father from the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead, again, the distinction of the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the distinction of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son; namely, that the Father is the source, or the fountainhead (if we may use that term as the fathers do) of the Godhead, that the Son derives it from Him and that the Holy Spirit derives it from Him and the Son, and not vice versa" ("Treatise on the Last Words of David," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 15 [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972], pp. 309-10).

“Latin” way, as it addresses the mystery of one God existing in three Divine Persons.¹¹

In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther was, self-evidently, the leader of the “Lutheran” Reformation movement. But he in his person and personality was not that movement. And he was not the only author of the Confessions that emerged from that movement. The multiplicity of authorship that characterizes the Reformation-era Symbolical Books quite naturally resulted in very recognizable differences in style, and in form of presentation, also among the various sixteenth-century confessional documents. But as Hermann Sasse points out, these non-dogmatic differences are not a weakness, but a strength. He writes that

in every living church there must be room for a variety of theological thinkers, provided they are in agreement as to the dogma of the church. Thus, a difference of interest in, or emphasis on, certain points of doctrine, and even a difference of expression, could well be tolerated. Luther always felt that he and his learned friend [Philip Melancthon] supplemented each other. As Melancthon had learned from him, so he had learned from Melancthon. It has great significance for the Lutheran church that its Confessions were not written by Luther alone. As Melancthon’s *Augsburg Confession*, *Apology*, and *Tractatus* are happily supplemented by Luther’s *Smalcald Articles* and *Catechisms*, so even the *Formula of Concord* was written by disciples of Melancthon and of Luther. This variety in expression of one and the same truth gave the Lutheran Confessions a richness which the confessions of other churches do not possess. Nothing is more significant for the Lutheran church’s independence of human authority than the fact that Luther approved of the Augsburg Confession although he clearly stated that he would have written it in a totally different way.¹²

The variations in terminology, structure, and emphasis that one finds among the Creeds and Confessions, do not represent dogmatic divergences. The Symbolical Books are in fundamental agreement with each other. They are important constitutive parts of the harmonious symphony of teaching and confession that has always characterized how God’s truth is faithfully expressed and joyfully embraced by God’s people. The diversity of styles that we see among the various apostolic authors of the New Testament testifies to the fact that God’s Biblical revelation does not come to us in an uninteresting monotone form. Likewise, the Greek and Latin Fathers, and the complementary Confessional traditions of Luther and his disciples, and of Melancthon and his disciples, mutually enrich each other. Together they all enrich the whole church, not *in spite of* their diversity of expression, but precisely *in and through* that diversity of expression.

The Book of Concord points us always to Scripture, as it reverently unfolds and carefully expounds the message of Scripture. Through our common recognition and mutual use of the Book of Concord – in this way and for this purpose – the kind of unity in the church that Scripture requires and creates can indeed be experienced and strengthened among us. This is why the delegates from the (old) Norwegian Synod who had been sent out to investigate the various Lutheran bodies of America – after getting acquainted with the pastors and institutions of the Missouri Synod of that time – issued this report to their church body in 1857:

¹¹In the Athanasian Creed, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all recognized to be equally divine, because they all partake equally in the defining attributes of deity. All three Persons are uncreated, unlimited, eternal, and almighty. All three Persons are accordingly God and Lord. Yet there are not three separate beings who are uncreated, unlimited, eternal, and almighty, but there is only one God and Lord. This is why “we worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity” (Athanasian Creed, Kolb/Wengert pp. 23-25).

¹²Hermann Sasse, *This is my body* (revised edition) (Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), p. 253.

It is a real joy to be able to say, in gratitude to God, that we have invariably got the impression that they are all possessed of the same spirit...: a heartfelt trust in God, a sincere love for the symbols and the doctrines of the fathers, and a belief that in them His holy Word is rightly explained and interpreted; and therefore a sacrificial, burning zeal to apply these old-Lutheran principles of doctrine and order. May the Lord graciously revive this spirit throughout the entire Lutheran church, *so that those who call themselves Lutherans may no longer wrangle over questions settled by the Lutheran Confessions*. May they rather show their true Lutheranism by truly believing that God's Word is taught rightly and without error in the Lutheran Confessions. Otherwise, the Lutheran name is but duplicity and hypocrisy.¹³

III.

Lutheran theology, as it is articulated in the Lutheran Confessions, is fundamentally a *liturgical* theology. This means two things. First, it means that the worship life of the Lutheran Church is an important focal point in discerning what the overall theology of the Lutheran Church actually is. And second, it means that those aspects of Lutheran theology that are not directly a part of the church's practice of worship, still need to be seen according to their connection to what goes on in worship. Lutheranism's liturgy exhibits and implements its theology, and Lutheranism's theology informs and shapes its liturgy.

When we speak in such a way of the church's *liturgy* and of its *liturgical* life, we are not talking merely about the *rites* and *ceremonies* of the church's worship. We are using the term "liturgy" according to the deeper theological meaning that is attached to it in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, where the position of the Lutherans on what properly constitutes the Christian "liturgy" is explained:

But let us speak about the term "liturgy." This word does not properly mean a sacrifice but rather public service. Thus, it agrees quite well with our position, namely, that the one minister who consecrates gives the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as a minister who preaches sets forth the gospel to the people, as Paul says [1 Cor. 4:1], "Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries," that is, of the gospel and the sacraments. And 2 Corinthians 5:20, "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ..." Thus the term "liturgy" fits well with the ministry.¹⁴

We see here a convergence of three important *loci*: the purpose and character of the church's gatherings for worship; the purpose and character of the church's public ministry; and the purpose and character of the church's marks – that is, the means of grace. All three of these things are addressed under the overarching category of the "liturgy." They cannot properly be considered in isolation from each other, as if they were not theologically and practically connected. They belong together. And that theological "togetherness" of worship, ministry, and means of grace is, quite simply, the *liturgical* theology of our church. We are reminded of how the Book of Acts describes the liturgical life of the first Christian congregation in Jerusalem: "Those who accepted [Peter's] message were *baptized*... They devoted themselves to *the teaching of the apostles* and to the

¹³Jakob Aall Ottesen and Nils O. Brandt, "Indberetning fra Pastorerne Ottesen og Brandt om deres Reise til St. Louis, Missouri; Columbus, Ohio; og Buffalo, New York" (1857); in Carl S. Meyer, *Pioneers Find Friends* (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1963), p. 63. Emphasis added.

¹⁴Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:79-81, Kolb/Wengert p. 272.

communal life, to *the breaking of the bread* and to *the prayers*” (Acts 2:41-42, NAB¹⁵).

The Augsburg Confession declares that

one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. As Paul says [Eph. 4:5,6]: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...”¹⁶

The point of comparison here is between a pure and orthodox teaching of the gospel and a right administration of the evangelical sacraments, on the one hand, and human traditions on the other. The point of comparison is *not* between the gospel minimalistically defined and the sacraments on the one hand, and other less important articles of faith on the other – as ecumenically-minded Lutherans often maintain. Such attempts to smuggle into the Book of Concord a demand for unity only in fundamental doctrines, rather than a demand for fundamental unity in all doctrines, are both misguided and anachronistic. This is made clear by the elaborations and clarifications on this matter that are made by the Formula of Concord, which says that “the churches are not to condemn one another because of differences in ceremonies when in Christian freedom one has fewer or more than the other, as long as these churches are otherwise united in teaching and in *all the articles of the faith* as well as in the proper use of the holy sacraments.”¹⁷

But we should take note of the fact that the articles of faith in which the churches are in this way to be united, are the articles of faith that are actively to be *taught* in the churches. We are not speaking here of officially-adopted but seldom-read doctrinal statements, collecting dust on a Lutheran parish library shelf. We are speaking instead of the substantial doctrinal preaching, permeated with the proper distinction and application of law and gospel, that is to be heard regularly from a Lutheran parish pulpit. The Formula of Concord recognizes that

in his immeasurable goodness and mercy God provides for the public proclamation of his divine, eternal law and of the wondrous counsel of our redemption, the holy gospel of his eternal Son, our only Savior Jesus Christ, which alone can save. By means of this proclamation he gathers an everlasting church from humankind, and he effects in human hearts true repentance and knowledge of sin and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. God wants to call human beings to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, to convert them, to give them new birth, and to sanctify them through these means, and in no other

¹⁵*New American Bible (with Revised Psalms and Revised New Testament)*, copyright 1986, 1991, by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

¹⁶Augsburg Confession VII:1-4 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 43.

¹⁷Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration X:31, Kolb/Wengert p. 640. Emphasis added. Martin Luther speaks in a similar way in his 1535 “Lectures on Galatians”: “With the utmost rigor we demand that all the articles of Christian doctrine, both large and small – although we do not regard any of them as small – be kept pure and certain. This is supremely necessary. For this doctrine is our only light, which illumines and directs us and shows the way to heaven; if it is overthrown in one point, it must be overthrown completely. ...we shall be happy to observe love and concord toward those who faithfully agree with us on all the articles of Christian doctrine. ... ‘One dot’ of doctrine is worth more than ‘heaven and earth’ (Matt. 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense against it. ...by the grace of God our doctrine is pure; we have all the articles of faith solidly established in Sacred Scripture” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 27 [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964], pp. 41-42).

way than through his holy Word (which people hear proclaimed or [which they] read) and through the sacraments (which they use according to his Word).¹⁸

Law-gospel preaching is not, of course, simply preaching about the doctrine of the law and the doctrine of the gospel *as such*. Rather, we are to preach about *everything* that we preach about, in a *law-gospel* way. Proper Lutheran preaching – simultaneously evangelical, catechetical, and practical in its character – is described in the Apology, where a comparison is made between a typical Sunday in a sixteenth-century Romanist parish, and a typical Sunday in a sixteenth-century Lutheran parish:

Among the opponents there are many regions where no sermons are delivered during the entire year except during Lent. And yet the chief worship of God is to preach the gospel. And when the opponents do preach, they talk about human traditions, about the devotion to the saints and similar trifles. ... A few of the better ones have begun now to speak about good works, but they still say nothing about the righteousness of faith, about faith in Christ, and about the consolation of consciences. Indeed they rail against this most salutary part of the gospel in their polemics. On the contrary, in our churches all the sermons deal with topics like these: repentance, fear of God, faith in Christ, the righteousness of faith, consolation of consciences through faith, the exercise of faith, prayer (what it should be like and that everyone may be completely certain that it is efficacious and is heard), the cross, respect for the magistrates and all civil orders, the distinction between the kingdom of Christ (the spiritual kingdom) and political affairs, marriage, the education and instruction of children, chastity, and all the works of love. From this description of the state of our churches it is possible to determine that we diligently maintain churchly discipline, godly ceremonies, and good ecclesiastical customs.¹⁹

Let us note the important statement that “the chief worship of God is to preach the gospel,” and that “the righteousness of faith,” “faith in Christ,” and “the consolation of consciences” are identified with this gospel. Sermons that are devoid of such content are not Lutheran sermons. They are not genuinely Christian sermons. But in the same breath, the Apology lists an array of doctrinal and ethical topics that are to be covered in Lutheran sermons. These two emphases can and should guide us and our homiletical practice.

Pastors assure their brother pastors that they are one in doctrine with them, by preaching publicly the doctrine in which they *are* one. And when they preach that doctrine – that doctrine of the gospel – the righteousness of Christ is thereby preached *upon* their listeners, and the indwelling Christ is thereby preached *into* their listeners. In Christ’s justification *of* his people, and in Christ’s mystical union *with* his people, the church is built up in faith and life, and the true unity of the Church, in Christ its Lord and head, is strengthened.

There does not need to be a lock-step uniformity in terminology, with memorized formulas or clichés being repeated unimaginatively from every pulpit. Again, what we have the right to expect from each other is a *fundamental* unity in Biblical truth, not an absolute and rigid conformity in every form of expression that is used. But a fundamental *unity* is what we *do* expect.

Therapeutic sermons that soft-pedal or ignore the articles of faith that Scripture teaches, and that take their cues instead from the realm of popular self-help psychology, are unacceptable. Moralistic sermons that are governed and shaped by the law, in which the gospel does not

¹⁸Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II:50, Kolb/Wengert p. 553.

¹⁹Apology of the Augsburg Confession XV:42-44, Kolb/Wengert p. 229.

predominate, are unacceptable. Sermons that are designed to manipulate the will and emotions, rather than to deliver Christ, are unacceptable. Sermons that are imbued with the personality of a flamboyant preacher, that are filled with jokes and funny stories, and that say very little if anything about God and salvation, are unacceptable:

Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:28, ESV).

And of course, it is not just the *preaching* of pastors to which we should pay close attention, in our desire to remain united in Christ and in his Word. The *administration of the sacraments*, too, is to be done with a proper liturgical conformity to the institution of Christ; with a proper appreciation for the pastoral dimension of sacramental oversight; and with a proper concern for the public confession that is made in conjunction with the sacramental life of the church. We should never create a situation – through carelessness or through deliberate unwarranted innovations – where doubt in the validity or efficacy of a sacrament is caused by our failure to say exactly what we are supposed to say, or to do exactly what we are supposed to do.

This is an especially sensitive point in regard to the Lord's Supper, where there have been so many debates and controversies over the years. If we are serious about maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and if we are concerned about the certainty in faith of those whom we are called to serve, we need to avoid any and all questionable and unedifying speculation about what we can "get away with" in how the Supper might be administered – as well as any and all unsettling experimentation in its administration, flowing out of such speculation. The Formula of Concord offers us a minutely careful exegetical description of what Jesus said and did, and of what Jesus wills his presiding ministers to say and do, in the celebration of this sacrament. This ought to be the final word for us in regard to many of these debates and controversies. Let us pay close attention to what the Formula teaches us:

For the true and almighty words of Jesus Christ, which he spoke in the first institution of the Supper, ...retain their validity and power and are still effective, so that in all places in which the Supper is observed according to Christ's institution and *his words are used*, the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed and received on the basis of the power and might of the very same words that Christ spoke in the first Supper. For wherever what Christ instituted is observed and *his words are spoken over the bread and cup* and wherever the *consecrated* bread and cup are distributed, Christ himself exercises his power *through the spoken words*, which are still his Word, by virtue of the power of the first institution. ...Luther says: "This command and institution of his have the power to accomplish this, that we do not distribute and receive simply bread and wine but his body and blood, as his words indicate: 'This is my body, this is my blood.' So it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that make the bread the body and the wine the blood, beginning with the first Lord's Supper and continuing to the end of the world, and it is administered daily *through our ministry or office*." Likewise, "Here, too, if I were to say over all the bread there is, 'This is the body of Christ,' nothing would happen, but when we follow his institution and command in the Supper and say, 'This is my body,' then it is his body, not because of our speaking or our declarative word, but because of his command in which he has told us to speak and to do and has *attached his own command and deed to our speaking*."²⁰

The doctrine of the public ministry is another area where there have been many disputes

²⁰Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:75, 77-78, Kolb/Wengert pp. 606-07. Emphases added.

over the years. Even if all these disputes have not yet been settled, Lutherans who sincerely subscribe to the Confessions should still be expected to acknowledge together, at the very least, that everything the Confessions do already teach regarding the Biblical doctrine of the ministry does constitute a major component of what they believe regarding the ministry.

Preaching and teaching “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27, ESV), and exercising general spiritual oversight in the church (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7), require a level of pastoral competence that is lacking in most Christians. “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1, ESV).²¹ Officiating at the administration of the sacraments, in the way that God wants this to be done, also involves more than simply performing the mechanics of the rite – which any Christian could conceivably master.

An examination of the faith of adult baptizands, or of the faith of the parents and sponsors of those who are baptized in infancy, is, in ordinary circumstances, an important and necessary component of the proper administration of Baptism – in view of the fact that Jesus links the administration of this sacrament with the duty to teach all that he has commanded (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). This is an aspect of the spiritual care of souls, to which not everyone is called, and for which not everyone is qualified.

And this kind of soul-care and spiritual oversight is particularly necessary for the proper administration of the Lord’s Supper, with which is associated an explicit apostolic warning of potential harmful consequences – spiritual and temporal – for communicants who partake of this sacrament in an unworthy manner (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Admitting communicants to the altar, or declining to admit them, is a serious matter. It is an exercising of pastoral authority over those communicants. John F. Brug reflects the classic Lutheran understanding when he writes:

It is clear that the Lord’s Supper should be administered by the pastor. It is not our practice to have a layman officiate at the Lord’s Supper. Even when congregations were quite isolated and some did not have a pastor present every Sunday, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated only when the pastor was present. Proper administration of the Lord’s Supper involves more than being able to read the right words. It involves pastoral responsibility for the souls of those who attend.²²

In something as important as the faithful and orderly administration of the means of grace – which is itself a matter of New Testament doctrine – a Biblically-based unity and consensus in practice is of the highest necessity. The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope draws together many of the strands of Biblical teaching that pertain to the question of spiritual care in the church, and speaks on behalf of all true Lutherans when it confesses that

The gospel bestows upon those who preside over the churches the commission to proclaim the gospel, forgive sins, and administer the sacraments. In addition, it bestows legal authority, that is, the charge to excommunicate those whose crimes are public knowledge and to absolve those who repent. It is universally acknowledged, even by our opponents, that this power is shared by divine right by all who preside in the churches, whether they

²¹When a “lay reader,” in the absence of a pastor, is asked to conduct a service of the Word and deliver a sermon for a congregation, the sermon should be one that a pastor has either written or approved beforehand. The pastor thereby validates its soundness as an extension of his preaching office, and bears the responsibility for its content.

²²John F. Brug, *The Ministry of the Word* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), p. 221.

are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops.²³

When the Treatise declares here that “The gospel” bestows this commission and authority on the “presiding” ministers of the church, we know from the context that what it is saying is that *the New Testament revelation* bestows this commission and authority on them.²⁴ Such a ministry, with such liturgical duties entrusted to it, does not exist only on the basis of a human arrangement, only as a matter of practical expediency, or only as a consequence of historical development. It is, as the Treatise says, a matter of “divine right” that such men are called to such work among God’s people.

The various *outward configurations* of the church’s pastoral ministry have indeed developed and changed over time, and exist today in a multiplicity of forms. Spiritual oversight can be and is carried out among God’s people by pastors with comprehensive and general calls, and by pastors with focused and specialized calls; by pastors in parish settings, and by pastors in institutional or mission settings. But the *essence* of the pastoral ministry *more generally considered* – that is, the supervision and care of souls in Word and sacrament, by men who have been properly trained for this work and properly called to this work – is willed and mandated by God for the church of all times and places.

The Apology teaches that “priests...are called to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments to the people. ... For the church has the mandate to appoint ministers, which ought to please us greatly because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it.”²⁵ These are the “spiritual fathers” and “preachers,” who “govern and guide us by the Word of God” and who “watch over” our souls, about whom Luther speaks in his Large Catechism explanation of the Fourth Commandment.²⁶

As far as the pastoral competency of those who are called to a presiding ministry in the church is concerned, the Small Catechism – drawing directly from St. Paul’s pastoral epistles – lays out the God-given requirements for “Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers” in these words:

A bishop is to be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, virtuous, moderate, hospitable, *an apt teacher*, not a drunkard, not vicious, not involved in dishonorable work, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not stingy, one who manages his own household well, who has obedient and honest children, not a recent convert, *who holds to the Word that is certain and can teach, so that he may be strong enough to admonish with saving teaching and to refute those who contradict it.*” From 1 Timothy 3[:2-4,6a; Titus 1:9].²⁷

We see here that the office of spiritual oversight is to be entrusted only to qualified men who have a level of knowledge necessary for comprehensive teaching, for admonition, and for refutation of

²³Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 60-61, Kolb/Wengert p. 340. Emphases added.

²⁴Earlier in the Treatise, we read: “...let us show from *the gospel* that the Roman bishop is not superior by divine right to other bishops and pastors” (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 7, Kolb/Wengert p. 331. Emphasis added.). This statement is then followed by an exegetical discussion of several passages from the Gospels and Epistles (8-11, pp. 331-32). The “gospel” in its narrower meaning, as a reference to the message of God’s grace in Christ, bestows the forgiveness of sins, and does not bestow “legal authority.”

²⁵Apology of the Augsburg Confession XIII:9, 12, Kolb/Wengert p. 220.

²⁶Large Catechism I:158-63, Kolb/Wengert p. 408.

²⁷Small Catechism, Table of Duties: 2, Kolb/Wengert p. 365. Emphases added.

error.²⁸ When congregations honor these standards in the calls that they issue to ministries of liturgical presidency in their midst, this contributes significantly to the unity in doctrine and practice that God wants his church to have. It is self-evident that God's Word is more likely to be preached accurately, and with the proper division of law and gospel, when men who have been carefully trained to preach God's Word accurately, and properly to divide law and gospel, are the ones who are doing the preaching! But it also contributes toward the preservation of trust among brother pastors and sister congregations, and reflects a proper respect for the covenant of fraternal order to which the pastors and congregations of a synod are pledged, when the provisions of that fraternal covenant are consistently followed. And that means, among other things, that the duties of pastoral oversight should be carried out in the various congregations by individuals whose qualifications and credentials are recognized by the church at large – by means of their “clergy roster” status, or their “ordained minister” status.²⁹

IV.

We have already noted that, according to the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran Church teaches that “It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere.” At the same time, in the fifteenth article of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran Church teaches that those “church rites...should be observed that can be observed without sin and that contribute to peace and good order in the church, for example, certain holy days, festivals, and the like. However, people are reminded not to burden

²⁸Another Pauline requirement for an ecclesiastical “presiding minister,” as cited in the Small Catechism, is that he be “the husband of one wife.” Martin Luther understood this to be speaking not only to the question of the *marital status* of a pastor, but also to the question of the *gender* of a pastor. A regularly-called bishop, pastor, or preacher in the church must be someone who either is, or is able to be, married to a woman. A regularly-called bishop, pastor, or preacher may not be someone who either is, or is able to be, married to a man. In his treatise “On the Councils and the Church,” Luther stated that the pastoral responsibility of administering the means of grace – both “publicly and privately” – “must be entrusted to one person, and he alone should be allowed to preach, to baptize, to absolve, and to administer the sacraments.” Luther then added this Scriptural restriction: “It is, however, true that the Holy Spirit has excepted women, children, and incompetent people from this function, but chooses (except in emergencies) only competent males to fill this office, as one reads here and there in the epistles of St. Paul [1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:6] that a bishop must be pious, able to teach, and the husband of one wife – and in 1 Corinthians 14[:34] he says, ‘The women should keep silence in the churches.’ In summary, it must be a competent and chosen man. Children, women, and other persons are not qualified for this office, even though they are able to hear God’s Word, to receive Baptism, the Sacrament, absolution, and are also true, holy Christians, as St. Peter says [1 Pet. 3:7]. Even nature and God’s creation makes this distinction, implying that women (much less children or fools) cannot and shall not occupy positions of sovereignty, as experience also suggests and as Moses says in Genesis 3[:16], ‘You shall be subject to man.’ The Gospel, however, does not abrogate this natural law, but confirms it as the ordinance and creation of God” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 41 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966], pp. 154-55.). “The Public Ministry of the Word,” a doctrinal statement adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 2005, similarly states that “Scripture clearly teaches that women are not to be in the pastoral office, because this presiding office includes the exercise of authority over men (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Also, *when Scripture refers to one who officiates at the Word and sacrament liturgy it speaks in male terms* (1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 4:13). Therefore women shall not read the Scripture lessons in the divine service, preach the sermon, administer Baptism or distribute the Lord’s Supper, for these things are intimately related to the pastoral office (1 Timothy 4:13-14, 1 Corinthians 4:1)” (emphasis added).

²⁹Lutherans have always recognized the legitimacy of a layman temporarily stepping into the office of pastor to perform a necessary pastoral act – such as the baptism of a person near death – when a regular pastor is not at hand. In the case of such a pastoral emergency, “the order yields to the need” (John Gerhard, *Loci theologici*; quoted in C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987], p. 285). But Lutherans should also make sure that it is a genuine need that prompts any departure from the normal, divine order. Cf. Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 67, Kolb/Wengert p. 341.

consciences, as if such worship were necessary for salvation.”³⁰ These two complementary points are repeated, and expanded on, later in the Augustana:

...the canons are not so severe as to demand that rites should be the same everywhere, nor have the rites of all churches ever been the same. Nevertheless, the ancient rites are, for the most part, diligently observed among us. For the accusation is false that all ceremonies and ancient ordinances are abolished in our churches. Truth is, there has been a public outcry that certain abuses have become fused to the common rites. Because such abuses could not be approved with a good conscience, they have been corrected to some extent. ...the churches among us do not dissent from the catholic church in any article of faith but only set aside a few abuses that are new and were accepted because of corruption over time contrary to the intention of the canons... However, it can easily be judged that nothing contributes more to preserving the dignity of ceremonies and to cultivating reverence and piety among the people than conducting ceremonies properly in the churches.³¹

The Apology likewise repeats, and further explains, these points:

...just as the different lengths of day and night do not undermine the unity of the church, so we maintain that different rites instituted by human beings do not undermine the true unity of the church, although it pleases us when universal rites are kept for the sake of tranquillity. Thus, in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's day, and other more important festival days. With a very grateful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances, especially when they contain a discipline by which it is profitable to educate and teach [the] common folk and [the] ignorant.³²

The teaching of the Formula of Concord on the topic of *adiaphora* is also often introduced into this discussion. There we read that

We should not regard as free and indifferent, but rather as things forbidden by God that are to be avoided, the kind of things presented under the name and appearance of external, indifferent things that are nevertheless fundamentally opposed to God's Word (even if they are painted another color). Moreover, we must not include among the truly free *adiaphora* or indifferent matters ceremonies that give the appearance or (in order to avoid persecution) are designed to give the impression that our religion does not differ greatly from the papist religion or that their religion were not completely contrary to ours. Nor are such ceremonies matters of indifference when they are intended to create the illusion (or are demanded or accepted with that intention), as if such action brought the two contradictory religions into agreement and made them one body or as if a return to the papacy and a deviation from the pure teaching of the gospel and from the true religion had taken place or could gradually result from these actions. ... In the same way, useless, foolish spectacles, which are not beneficial for good order, Christian discipline, or evangelical decorum in the church, are not true *adiaphora* or indifferent things. ...

Therefore, we believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every time and place has the right, power, and authority to change, reduce, or expand such practices

³⁰Augsburg Confession XV:1-2 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 49.

³¹Augsburg Confession, Conclusion of Part One: 2-5 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 59; Introduction of Part Two: 1, 6, (Latin) Kolb/Wengert p. 61.

³²Apology of the Augsburg Confession VII/VIII:33, Kolb/Wengert p. 180.

according to circumstances in an orderly and appropriate manner, without frivolity or offense, as seems most useful, beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church.³³

What we see in these Confessional excerpts is a balanced and well-thought-through position on the matter of how the church properly evaluates and understands those ecclesiastical practices – especially in the arena of public worship – that are in themselves neither commanded nor forbidden by God. The first thing we should notice is that decisions about whether or not a certain practice like this will be retained or introduced, are not to be made whimsically, arbitrarily, or independently, apart from careful reflection and fraternal consultation. Such decisions are decisions of “the community of God.” And as the larger church does consider such matters, by means of its various mechanisms of fraternal deliberation, it is to do so with a clear and informed perception of the *purpose* of such practices. If an under-educated individual does not understand the reason for a certain inherited practice, this does not mean that there *is* no reason, and this does not mean that the church would not be hindered in its mission by the removal of the practice.

We can appreciate the systematic presentation of the Formula of Concord in particular regarding the matter of *adiaphora*, as a guide for our own consideration of these matters. An *adiaphoron* is, in principle, acceptable and desirable for use among God’s people when it is beneficial for “good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church.” But before we go any further in applying these criteria to the ceremonial and liturgical issues of our day, we need to make sure that we accurately grasp how the Formula actually intends its use of the term “adiaphora” to be understood. The Concordists themselves do not apply the concept of “adiaphora” as broadly as we often do. Martin Chemnitz provides us with the larger sixteenth-century lexical context for the Formula’s use of this specific term, in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*:

The ceremonies of the Mass are not all of one kind. For some have a divine command and examples of Scripture that they should be done at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, being as it were essential, e.g., to take bread and the cup in the public assembly, to bless, distribute, eat, drink, proclaim the death of the Lord. Some indeed do not have an express command of God, that they must of necessity be done thus in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, nevertheless they are in their nature good and godly if they are used rightly for edification, such as psalms, readings from Scripture, godly prayers and giving of thanks, confession of the Creed, etc. Some are *per se* superstitious and ungodly, for instance the sacrifice of the Mass for the living and the dead, invocation of the saints, satisfaction for the souls in purgatory, the private Mass, consecration of salt, blessing of water, etc. Some ceremonies indeed are adiaphora, such as vestments, vessels, ornaments, words, rites, and things which are not against the Word of God. Things which are of the first kind must of necessity be observed, for they belong to the substance of the Lord’s Supper. Of the things that belong to the second and fourth kind, many which make for the edification of people are observed in our churches without infringing on Christian liberty. The third kind, however, being superstitious and godless, has deservedly, rightly, and of necessity been

³³Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration X:5, 7, 9, Kolb/Wengert pp. 636-37. Let us take note, by the way, that this excerpt from the Formula represents the Lutheran *doctrine* of *adiaphora*. While the *adiaphora* themselves are not matters of doctrine *per se*, we *do* have a doctrine of when, and for what purposes, *adiaphora* are to be used; and a doctrine of how, and on what basis, *adiaphora* are to be evaluated. So, when a certain practice is identified as an *adiaphoron*, this does not bring the theological discussion of that practice to an end. In some ways that is when the conversation begins. Our Biblical and Confessional *doctrine* of *adiaphora* can then be brought to bear on our discussion of the practice in question.

abrogated and done away with.³⁴

Chemnitz divides the various kinds of religious “ceremonies” into four distinct categories. His first category pertains to those ceremonies that are commanded by God, and that therefore cannot be dispensed with. Christian worship is not a matter of Quaker-like mysticism. Jesus has told us physically to *do* certain things in the administration of the means of grace, and this sacramental *doing* is a matter of sacred *ceremony* – that is, outward actions that accompany the spoken Word, according to the Lord’s institution and command. Chemnitz’s third category pertains to those ceremonies that are inherently wrong, and that therefore must not be used. Such ceremonies enact, or invariably testify to, things that God’s Word forbids. But there are also *two remaining categories*, and not just one.

Chemnitz’s second category pertains to certain historic usages that admittedly are not, in themselves, commanded by God. But these usages are so well established in the church, and are so widely recognized as serving inherently good and godly purposes in worship, that there would be hardly any conceivable reason why a faithful pastor would want to do away with them – at least if his goal and desire would be to have a worship service that edifies his congregation with the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ. Ceremonies of this category invariably testify to the truth of God’s Word, and always serve the purposes of a proper liturgical theology as based on that Word. Hence the inevitable impression that would be left among informed observers by the removal of such ceremonies, is that those who are removing them are thereby *rejecting* the truth and the proper theology that everyone understands them to represent. And so, even though the Bible does not explicitly command the use of an order of service that employs “psalms, readings from Scripture, godly prayers and giving of thanks, [and] confession of the Creed,” this kind of liturgical format has become, for all practical purposes, virtually “untouchable” in an orthodox church.

In Chemnitz’s *Examination*, the concept of *adiaphora* does not come into view until his fourth category. This category pertains to the kind of ceremonies that can with little fanfare be adjusted or revised, diminished or increased, according to the needs and circumstances of the church. Ceremonial changes of this nature, if they are implemented in an orderly and pastorally-responsible way and with the right motives, will not be a cause of scandal or offense, or give a testimony of heterodoxy to those who witness such changes.

According to this category of genuine *adiaphora*, a pastor can either chant or speak his parts of the service. As he conducts the service, he can wear a white alb, a black talar, or a colored chasuble. He can administer the Lord’s Supper with vessels of silver or gold, of glass or porcelain. Communicants can kneel or stand. They can make the sign of the cross and bow when they are dismissed and depart, or not. The service can be comprised of plainsong canticles, or of metered hymns, or of a combination of both.

However, Chemnitz would not have considered it to be a proper application of the principle of *adiaphora* to revamp totally the whole concept and framework of Christian worship. He would not have considered it to be a proper example of evangelical freedom to get rid of an historically-based order of service that accentuates and underscores the means of grace; and to replace it with a format that arises from, and reflects, the entertainment and variety-show culture, the restaurant and coffee-shop culture, the talk-show and psycho-therapy culture, or the big-business and corporate culture. One of the important points that is made by the Formula is that “useless and foolish spectacles” are not to be counted among the *adiaphora*. They are inherently contrary to the requirement for “evangelical decorum” that applies to any Lutheran worship service. Frivolous

³⁴Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), pp. 524-25.

gimmicks that are introduced into the worship services of a church, for the deliberate purpose of creating a casual and unserious atmosphere, are beyond the pale of what is acceptable. They offend the pious, and disrupt the larger unity of the church.

It is often thought that such things should be done by a church that is interested in outreach, so that any unbelievers who might be present, and who might be “put off” by too much reverence, would not be made to feel uncomfortable in worship. But unbelievers *should* actually feel a little uncomfortable in a gathering that honors the First Commandment, and that is comprised of worshipers who humbly recognize the holiness of the God whom they are therein enjoined to *fear, love, and trust* above all things. Pastors and worship leaders who intentionally try to craft a service that does not reflect and promote the fear of God, love for God, and trust in God above all things – whatever their motive may be – are thereby sinning against the First Table of the law.

The Epistle to the Hebrews gives us this instruction: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28, NIV). In the New Testament era, God does not prescribe for his people a detailed ritual – such as he did for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. But even in the New Testament era, there still is such a thing as “acceptable” worship. And this means that there is *also* such a thing as *unacceptable* worship. Worship that is irreverent is unacceptable. Worship that is not permeated by sound Biblical doctrine, and that does not convey sound Biblical doctrine in its songs and texts to those who are present, is also unacceptable.

Christians do not gather chiefly for the purpose of telling God what they think or how they feel, but for the purpose of listening in faith to what God has to tell them, and for the purpose of learning from God how to respond to his Word – in prayers of petition, praise, and thanksgiving that have been molded and shaped by that Word. As St. Paul writes: “Let *the word of Christ* dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16, NIV). In keeping with this emphasis on the centrality of Christ’s word in worship – and in the ceremonial and hymnic forms that are used in worship – the Augsburg Confession declares that

the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns, added for the instruction of the people, are interspersed here and there among the Latin ones. For ceremonies are especially needed in order to teach those who are ignorant.³⁵

The Apology likewise affirms that

we do not abolish the Mass but religiously retain and defend it. Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord’s day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, after they have been examined and absolved. We also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things. ... Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies. We keep the Latin for the sake of those who learn and understand it. We also use German hymns in order that the [common] people might have something to learn, something that will arouse their faith and

³⁵Augsburg Confession XXIV:1-3 (Latin), p. 69.

fear.³⁶

...we gladly keep the ancient traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquillity... We can claim that the public liturgy in the church is more dignified among us than among the opponents. ... Many among us celebrate the Lord's Supper every Lord's day after they are instructed, examined, and absolved. The children chant the Psalms in order to learn them; the people also sing in order either to learn or to pray.³⁷

None of this should be taken to mean that there is one and only one order of service that every Lutheran church or church body must follow. There is more than one way to worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. The Confessors of our church knew this, not only as a matter of Scriptural doctrine, but also by their own experience. Luther and Melancthon – who authored several of our Confessional documents – were, of course, members of the church in Wittenberg, in Electoral Saxony. In its public worship, the church of Wittenberg employed an order of service that was based on the ancient and medieval Latin Mass. This description of a typical service in Wittenberg – written by an unsympathetic observer – comes from the year 1536:

At the seventh hour we returned to the city church and observed by which rite they celebrated the Liturgy; namely thus: First, the Introit was played on the organ, accompanied by the choir in Latin, as in the mass offering. Indeed, the minister meanwhile proceeded from the sacristy dressed sacrificially [i.e. in traditional mass vestments] and, kneeling before the altar, made his confession together with the assisting sacristan. After the confession he ascended to the altar to the book that was located on the right side, according to papist custom. After the Introit the organ was played and the *Kyrie eleison* sung in alternation by the boys. When it was done the minister sang *Gloria in excelsis*, which song was completed in alternation by the organ and choir. Thereafter the minister at the altar sang "Dominus vobiscum," the choir responding "Et cum spiritu tuo." The Collect for that day followed in Latin, then he sang the Epistle in Latin, after which the organ was played, the choir following with *Herr Gott Vater, wohn uns bei*. When it was done the Gospel for that Sunday was sung by the minister in Latin on the left side of the altar, as is the custom of the adherents of the pope. After this the organ played, and the choir followed

³⁶Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:1, 3, Kolb/Wengert p. 258. Joseph Herl reminds us that among the early Lutherans, "the Lord's Supper was the center around which all other services revolved. Except for a few areas in the south that were influenced by the Swiss Reformation, the Supper was offered every Lord's day and holy day throughout Lutheran Germany. Several practices highlighted the importance of the sacrament: 1. Private confession before each reception of the sacrament was required in nearly all Lutheran territories. ... This practice not only assured the pastor that communicants were prepared for the sacrament, but also enabled him to count the communicants before consecrating the bread and wine. Thus the problem of what to do with the body and blood of Christ that remained after all had communed was avoided, as only enough for the announced communicants was consecrated. 2. The traditional vestment for Mass, the chasuble, was retained in many Lutheran churches. 3. With few exceptions, the Consecration, as it was called in the sixteenth century, was always sung. This practice was new with Luther; prior to his time in western Christianity, the priest said the Consecration softly so the people could not hear it. 4. Many Lutherans retained the Elevation, in which the priest raised the consecrated body of Christ aloft for the people to view. 5. In many Saxon churches, according to a contemporary report, the ringing of the Sanctus bell at the consecration of the bread and cup was retained into the eighteenth century. 6. Only ordained pastors distributed the sacrament. 7. Some churches used a houseling cloth to catch any crumbs that might fall from the host while it was being distributed. It was carried by an assistant and held underneath the chin of each communicant" ("Seven Habits of Highly Effective Liturgies: Insights from the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries," in *Thine the Amen: Essays on Lutheran Church Music in Honor of Carl Schalk* [edited by Carlos R. Messerli] [Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2005], pp. 144-45).

³⁷Apology of the Augsburg Confession XV:38-40, Kolb/Wengert p. 229.

with *Wir glauben all an einen Gott*. After this song came the sermon, ...delivered on the Gospel for that Sunday... After the sermon the choir sang *Da pacem domine*, followed by the prayer for peace by the minister at the altar, this in Latin as well.

The Communion followed, which the minister began with the Lord's Prayer sung in German. Then he sang the words of the Supper, and these in German with his back turned toward the people, first those of the bread, which, when the words had been offered, he then elevated to the sounding of bells; likewise with the chalice, which he also elevated to the sounding of bells. Immediately communion was held. ... During the communion the *Agnus Dei* was sung in Latin. The minister served the bread in common dress [in a cassock?] but [he served] the chalice dressed sacrificially [i.e. in mass vestments]. They followed the singing of the *Agnus Dei* with a German song: *Jesus Christus [unser Heiland]* and *Gott sei gelobet*. After the sermon the majority of the people departed. ... The minister ended the Communion with a certain thanksgiving sung in German. He followed this, facing the people, with the Benediction, singing "The Lord make his face to shine on you, etc." And thus was the mass ended.³⁸

Jacob Andreae, a coauthor of the Formula of Concord, was from Tübingen, in the Duchy of Württemberg. The church of Württemberg did not use an order of service that was based on the Latin Mass. But it also did not use a "made-up" service that was invented from scratch by the Reformers of that region, without historical roots. Rather, the Württembergers used an order of service that was based on the medieval Preaching Service. Andreae himself, together with colleagues from the theological faculty at Tübingen, described this service in their 1577 correspondence with the Patriarch of Constantinople:

The All-Holy Communion is celebrated among us today with a minimum of ceremonial. The church assembles at an appointed time. Hymns are sung. Sermons are preached concerning the benefits of Christ for mankind. Again, hymns are sung. An awesome exhortation is read, which in part explains the words of institution of the Most-Holy Supper, and in part demands that each person should prepare for a worthy communion. A general but sincere confession of sins is made. Forgiveness is publicly pronounced. With devout prayers we ask the Lord to make us partakers of the heavenly gifts and benefits. The Words of Institution of the sacrament are read, after which the congregation approaches with reverence and receives (offered by the holy minister) the body and the blood of Christ. Again we give thanks to God in prescribed words for the heavenly gifts. Finally, the holy minister of God says the blessing over the assembled congregation, and all are dismissed to go to their homes.³⁹

These two orders of service were certainly different from each other. In the sixteenth century and later, most Lutherans followed an order of service similar to that of Wittenberg. The "Common Service," familiar in American Lutheran history, is an heir of this "majority" tradition. But some Lutherans in the sixteenth century and later followed an order of service similar to that of Württemberg. Wittenberg used a fuller and more elaborate ritual, with a richer ceremonial. Württemberg used a more streamlined and simplified ritual, with a minimized ceremonial.

But, what these orders of service had *in common* was that they were both rooted in the

³⁸Wolfgang Musculus, Travel Diary; quoted in Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 195-96.

³⁹Jacob Andreae, Martin Crucius, and Lucas Osiander, Correspondence with the Patriarch of Constantinople (1577); in George Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982), p. 144.

earlier tradition of the church's worship, and therefore testified to Lutheranism's continuity with the church of all ages; they both focused the attention of the worshipers on the means of grace, and faithfully conveyed the means of grace to the people; and they were both serious and dignified in spirit, without any frivolous or irreverent elements. There was, then, a *fundamental* agreement between them in form and presentation, even as they reflected – in what they each taught and confessed – a fundamental agreement also in the underlying doctrine and practice of the churches that worshiped by means of these orders.⁴⁰

V.

Among the articles of faith that are to be taught in and through the liturgy and its ceremonies, is the essential point of Lutheran ecclesiology that “one holy church will remain forever” – to quote again from the Augsburg Confession. This is why the Reformers are so adamant in demonstrating and defending their unity with the church of the apostles and ancient Fathers, and their adherence to the evangelical teachings of the apostles and the Fathers.

Some Lutherans, in their anti-Roman polemics, actually end up sounding like Mormons in their seeming willingness to agree with the Romanist accusation that the Lutheran Reformers established a “new” church that was not in continuity with the church of pre-Reformation times. But this is heresy! We should absolutely refuse to be tarred by this. In our desire to preserve and confess the doctrinal unity on this point that God wants us to have, we will do what we can – in the testimony that we give with our lips, and in the testimony that we give *with our ceremonies* – to refute this accusation, and to show forth in word and deed that it is not true.

If there would be a weighing and an evaluating of *old* ceremonies, and of potential *new* ceremonies, Lutherans would be expected to embrace a “preferential option” for the *old* ceremonies. An old ceremony and a new ceremony may each be able, with equal effectiveness, to teach and reenforce a certain Scriptural truth. But the old ceremony, by its very *oldness*, is also able to teach and reenforce the fact that this Scriptural truth is what faithful Christians of all times have believed. The *newness* of a new ceremony severely diminishes the ability of such a new ceremony to impress upon people a sense of the *oldness* of the doctrine that it is devised to symbolize.

There is indeed a catholic and historic spirit in true Lutheranism that is lacking in Calvinism, and in the various Protestant sects within Christendom that Calvinism has spawned over the centuries. Sasse reminds us that

Lutheran theology differs from Reformed theology in that it lays great emphasis on the fact that the evangelical church is none other than the medieval Catholic Church purged of certain heresies and abuses. The Lutheran theologian acknowledges that he belongs to the same visible church to which Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine and Tertullian, Athanasius and Ireneaus once belonged. The orthodox *evangelical* church is the legitimate continuation of the medieval Catholic Church, *not* the church of the Council of Trent..., which renounced evangelical truth when it rejected the Reformation. For the orthodox evangelical church is really identical with the orthodox catholic church of all times. And just as the very nature of the Reformed Church emphasizes its strong opposition to the

⁴⁰Since 1933, world Lutheranism has been able to claim for itself yet another type of historic liturgical service. The Ukrainian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, which then existed in the Galicia region of Poland (now Ukraine), published in that year an order of the Divine Liturgy that was based on the historic Byzantine Rite of Eastern Christendom. This rite is used now in the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, which preserves the legacy of the former Ukrainian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession.

medieval church, so the very nature of the Lutheran Church requires it to go to the farthest possible limit in its insistence on its solidarity and identity with the Catholic Church. It was no mere ecclesiastico-political diplomacy which dictated the emphatic assertion in the Augsburg Confession that the teachings of the Evangelicals were identical with those of the orthodox catholic church of all ages, and no more was it romanticism or false conservatism which made our church anxious to retain as much of the old canonical law as possible, and to cling tenaciously to the old forms of worship.⁴¹

It does not surprise us, then, that there is a noticeable convergence between some of the outward forms of the Lutheran Church, and some of the outward forms of the Catholic Church – and indeed of any other church (Anglican or Orthodox) that, like ours, deliberately cultivates an identity of “connectedness” to the historic church of past centuries.

We do have an obligation to confess the pure and whole truth, and thereby to cultivate our unity with other Lutherans who with us confess this truth. And this means that in our ceremonial usages, we will not employ customs and practices that testify to, and teach, the *distinctive errors* of “the papist religion.” Neither will we employ customs and practices that testify to, and teach, the distinctive errors of Protestant sectarianism, and that would make people feel in our worship services as if they were in a typical Baptist or Evangelical church and not in a Lutheran church.

But returning to the matter at hand, not everything that is *in* Rome is *of* Rome. We need not refrain from ceremonially accentuating those articles of faith that we actually do to some degree still share with Rome.⁴² In fact, since the Protestant Evangelical movement poses much more of

⁴¹Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), pp. 102-03. Emphases added.

⁴²In his treatise *Von der Wiedertaufe*, Martin Luther writes: “It is our confession that in the papacy there are the right Holy Scriptures, the right Baptism, the right Sacrament of the Altar, the right keys for forgiveness of sins, the right preaching office, the right catechism – such as the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed. ... Now if Christianity exists under the pope, it must be Christ’s true body and members. If it is His body, then it has the right Spirit, Gospel, Creed, Baptism, Sacrament, keys, preaching office, prayer, Holy Scriptures, and everything that Christianity should have. Therefore we do not rave like the ‘enthusiasts’ that we reject everything in the papacy” (quoted in Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972], pp. 49-50). In addressing those who are still in the Roman Church, Luther also says: “It is true, I admit, that the church in which you sit derives from the ancient church as well as we, and that you have the same baptism, the sacraments, the keys, and the text of the Bible and gospels. I will praise you even further and admit that we have received everything from the church *before* you (not *from* you). ... We do not regard you as Turks and Jews (as was said above) who are outside the church. But we say you do not remain in it but become the erring, apostate, whorelike church (as the prophets used to call it), which does not remain in the church, where it was born and brought up. You run away from this church and from your true husband and bridegroom (as Hosea says of the people of Israel [Hos. 1:2]) to the devil Baal, to Molech and Astaroth” (“Against Hanswurst,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 41, p. 207. Emphases added.). Specifically in response to the accusation that certain Lutheran liturgical customs are “Roman Catholic” and should not be used, C. F. W. Walther writes: “Whenever the divine service once again follows the old Evangelical-Lutheran agendas (or church books), it seems that many raise a great cry that it is ‘Roman Catholic’: ‘Roman Catholic’ when the pastor chants ‘The Lord be with you’ and the congregation responds by chanting ‘and with thy spirit’; ‘Roman Catholic’ when the pastor chants the collect and the blessing and the people respond with a chanted ‘Amen.’ Even the simplest Christian can respond to this outcry: ‘Prove to me that this chanting is contrary to the Word of God, then I too will call it “Roman Catholic” and have nothing more to do with it. However, you cannot prove this to me.’ If you insist upon calling every element in the divine service ‘Romish’ that has been used by the Roman Catholic Church, it must follow that the reading of the Epistle and Gospel is also ‘Romish.’ Indeed, it is mischief to sing or preach in church, for the Roman Church has done this also... Those who cry out should remember that the Roman Catholic Church possesses every beautiful song of the old orthodox church. The chants and antiphons and responses were

a threat to our existence in America than does the church of Rome at this time in history, we should probably accentuate even more than in the past those sacramental and incarnational distinctives of our confession that set us apart from the enthusiasm and rationalism of American Evangelicalism. At the very least, we certainly would not deliberately try to make ourselves look and sound like the Evangelicals, by adopting the distinctive usages and ceremonies of the Evangelicals. Such a way of proceeding would directly threaten the unity in doctrine that God wants the orthodox to maintain among themselves, and together to show forth to the world.

In part (ostensibly) for the sake of outreach and evangelism, and in part also to overcome their own feeling of being foreign misfits in the New World, this tactic was tried in the past by many American Lutherans, in the first half of the nineteenth century. And it was an unmitigated disaster. Over time the Confessional convictions of these Lutherans had been diminished and weakened through the internal influence of Pietism and Rationalism. And under the external influence of Puritanism and Revivalism, they finally sought to reshape themselves into the image of what was then the popular piety and spirituality of American Protestantism. All the while, of course, they thought that they were still Lutherans. But in the sense in which the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church define what Lutheranism is, they were not. William Julius Mann recounted this sad history in 1855:

Gradually a desire manifested itself to gain popularity for the Lutheran Church in this country. The hard dogmatical knots of the old Lutheran oak were to give way under the Puritan plane. The body was deprived of its bones and its heart, and the empty skin might be filled with whatever was most pleasing, if only the Lutheran name was retained! The statement of the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession, that "unto the true unity of the Church it is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men, should be everywhere alike," was most extensively used, and in the desire to make the Lutheran Church as much as possible like others, her leaders were much more ready to adopt foreign elements than to retain her own distinctive features. Thus the Liturgy, the ancient lessons of the Gospels and Epistles, the festivals of the Church Year, the gown, and other usages were given up, in order that as little as possible might be seen of these Lutheran peculiarities. Hoping to gain others, they lost themselves. The Lutheran Church had given away her own spirit, her own original life and character.⁴³

August L. Graebner wanted to make sure that the more recently-arrived Lutheran immigrants, in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, would learn the lessons of this tragic history, so that it would not be repeated among them and their descendants. On the occasion of the publication of a new Lutheran Agenda in the English language in 1881, he therefore said:

...it appears to be our duty to aid in spreading a knowledge of the rich treasures of our Lutheran church among those in our country who are unacquainted with German. ... A good

brought into the church long before the false teachings of Rome crept in. This Christian Church since the beginning, even in the Old Testament, has derived great joy from chanting... For more than 1700 years orthodox Christians have participated joyfully in the divine service. Should we, today, carry on by saying that such joyful participation is 'Roman Catholic'? God forbid! Therefore, as we continue to hold and to restore our wonderful divine services in places where they have been forgotten, let us boldly confess that our worship forms do not tie us with the modern sects or with the church of Rome; rather, they join us to the one, holy Christian Church that is as old as the world and is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (*Der Lutheraner*, Vol. 9, No. 24 [July 19, 1853], p. 163).

⁴³William Julius Mann, "Blätter aus dem Wanderbuche," *Der Deutsche Kirchenfreund*, Vol. VIII (1855), pp. 386 ff.; quoted in Adolph Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. I (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), pp. 354-55.

liturgy, the beautiful Lutheran service form part of those treasures. Church usages, except in the case when the confession of a divine truth is required, are indeed *adiaphora*. But they are nevertheless not without an importance of their own. Congregations that adopt the church usages of the sects that surround them, will be apt to conform to their doctrines also, more easily and quickly than those that retain their Lutheran ceremonies. We should in Lutheran services, also when held in the English language, as much as possible use the old Lutheran forms, though they be said to be antiquated and not suiting this country. We will mention here the words of a pious Lutheran duchess, Elisabeth Magdalena of Brunswick-Luneburg. Her court-chaplain [Hieronymus] Prunner relates as follows: "Although her ladyship well knew that the ceremonies and purposes of this chapter (at which Prunner officiated) must have the appearance and repute of popery with some people, she still remembered the instructions which that dear and venerable man, Luther, had once given to her father [Joachim II, Elector of Brandenburg] concerning such ceremonies. I remember in particular that her ladyship several times told me that she did not desire at these present times to begin discontinuing any of those church usages, since she hoped that so long as such ceremonies continued, *Calvinistic temerity would be held back from the public office of the church.*"⁴⁴

We should value our Lutheran ceremonies, as testimonies to, and reminders of, our distinctive Lutheran doctrine. So too should we value our Lutheran hymns, as teachers and inculcators of our distinctive Lutheran doctrine – especially for the sake of the impressionable youth of the church. Our Lutheran fathers accordingly said this in 1916:

The songs of Lutheran children and youth should be essentially from Lutheran sources. The Lutheran Church is especially rich in songs and hymns of sound doctrine, high poetical value and fitting musical setting. They express the teachings and spirit of the Lutheran Church and help one to feel at home in this Church. Of course, there are songs of high merit and sound Biblical doctrine written by Christians in other denominations also, and some of these could and should find a place in a Lutheran song treasury. But the bulk of the songs in a Lutheran song book should be drawn from Lutheran sources. We should teach our children to remain in the Lutheran Church instead of to sing themselves into some Reformed sect.⁴⁵

As much as is possible, the aesthetic character of the *location* and *environment* of worship should also reflect, and harmonize with, the character of the worship that is taking place there, and should be an aid in teaching the faith that is taught in that worship. According to Frederick H. Knubel, the Lutheran Church

is justified in recommending a liturgy to its people because she has a definite faith to express. It is a distinctive faith, and is great enough to mould all of life. The places of worship are also places for the proclamation of that faith. Everything connected with the sanctuary and with the mode of worship should be shaped so as to express most clearly, most beautifully, and most effectively what the Church confesses to be the truth. It is evident therefore that greatest care is necessary so that the building and that which takes

⁴⁴August L. Graebner, book review of *Church Liturgy for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, *The St. Louis Theological Monthly*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (August 1881), pp. 77-78. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁵Introduction, *Lutheran Hymnary, Junior* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1916), pp. xii-xiii. See also C. F. W. Walther, "Methodist Hymns in a Lutheran Sunday School" (1883), in Matthew C. Harrison, *At Home in the House of My Fathers* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Lutheran Legacy, 2009), pp. 331-32.

place within it shall be in harmony with the faith of the Church.⁴⁶

VI.

In the midst of all the discouragements that surround us in our increasingly post-Christian society, a Lutheran pastor can be greatly tempted to turn away from that which is pure and true, and to embrace instead that which seems to work more quickly and effectively in filling the pews of a church. But the kingdom of God – the spiritual kingdom of faith and forgiveness – is not enduringly built by such compromises and evasions. In our fraternal love for each other, we should remind each other of this. And in so doing, as we sustain each other in our weakness, we will, by God's grace, be endeavoring thereby to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We can also derive at least some comfort from the knowledge that these temptations are not new, and that they have been endured by our brother pastors in America and elsewhere, under the cross, for many generations. George Henry Gerberding penned these still relevant words over a century ago:

...in almost every community there are distractions and vexations from those who claim to have a superior grade of piety. Because of the skepticism that permeates our atmosphere; because faith in Christ, in His Word, His church, and His means of grace, has been so utterly weakened, if not lost; because faith in man, in self, in one's own ability to make himself acceptable to God, has grown to such colossal proportions, therefore extremes meet and fanaticism joins hands with rationalism. Immersionists, revivalists, sanctificationists, Adventists, and healers of every hue, name, and grade, are abroad in the land. They invade the school-house, the barn, and the woods. They spread their tents on the common and on the vacant lot in village, town, and city. Each one offers a new way of salvation. All cry: "Lo, here is Christ," or, "Lo, there." They all claim that the church which teaches the old doctrines and walks in the old ways is a failure. They unsettle the minds of the uninformed and the unreflecting. They bring heartache and sorrow to the earnest pastor. All this skepticism, uncertainty, and experimenting has unfortunately unsettled only too many pastors in the churches around us. These pastors themselves have lost faith, more or less, in the divinely ordained means of grace. They are casting about for new means and methods by which to reach and hold men. They are experimenting with all sorts of novelties and attractions. Their churches and services are becoming more and more places of entertainment. They try to outbid and outdo each other in sensations calculated to draw. And so the church, like Samson of old, is shorn of her locks, and is degraded to make sport for the Philistines of the world. No true Lutheran pastor can stoop to such prostitution of his office and of his church. But he suffers from the misdeeds of others. His people are influenced by their surroundings. Some are drawn away from him, others make trouble in his own church. And so he is caused to grieve for the hurt of Joseph, and sighs, "for the hurt of my people am I hurt" (Jer. viii. 21).⁴⁷

In 1929, Paul E. Kretzmann refuted the claim that was already being made then, that Lutheran hymns are too hard to sing:

We must take note also of a most deplorable tendency of our times, namely, that of

⁴⁶Frederick H. Knubel, Introduction to *A Manual on Worship* (Revised Edition) by Paul Zeller Strodach (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. x.

⁴⁷George Henry Gerberding, *The Lutheran Pastor* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1902), pp. 123-24.

preferring the shallow modern “Gospel anthem” to the classical hymns of our Church. The reference is both to the text and to the tunes in use in many churches. On all sides the criticism is heard that the old Lutheran hymns are “too heavy, too doctrinal; that our age does not understand them.” Strange that the Lutherans of four centuries and of countless languages could understand and appreciate them, even as late as a generation ago! Is the present generation less intelligent or merely more frivolous?⁴⁸

And in 1932, Walter E. Buszin, then of the (little) Norwegian Synod, rebuked much of American Lutheranism – and perhaps some of the Norwegian Synod’s own brand of Americanized Lutheranism – in these words:

The reason why so much that is un-Lutheran in spirit and expression is sung in our churches is because there are some in our circles who no longer appreciate the beauty of the Lord as it is expressed so beautifully and so nobly in the Lutheran hymn. It is stylish to join in with the crowd and crowds like what is rather trivial. It is hard to be different and somewhat separate; unionism is in the air and distinct Lutheranism is unpopular; this spirit is reflected in the music which some of our own circles prefer. Some of the sectarian bodies have been forced to realize that they have lost out through their shallow music; but there are people in our circles who insist on learning through their own experiences and not through the experience of others. This is certainly a foolhardy attitude, but what makes the situation all the more serious is the fact that it affects not only an individual here and there, but the Church at large.⁴⁹

Even the idea of using a projection screen in worship and as a supplement to preaching, with film clips and other images, was first floated in American Protestantism about 80 years ago. And it was rejected as un-Lutheran by Kretzmann. In a review of a book published in 1932 by The Westminster Press – which advocated this – Kretzmann noted that

The scope of this book is more exactly shown by its subtitle: How to Use Motion Pictures and Projected Still Pictures in Worship, Study, and Recreation. The author rightly says: “With the addition of motion-pictures, projected still pictures, prints, photographs, models, maps, school journeys and reproduced sound, the educator has set out to stimulate a wealth of experiences to be used in the classroom to facilitate the understanding of the verbal symbols in books” (p. 14). We should like to emphasize the words “in the classroom” and add “in the church hall,” because visual education has proved an invaluable aid in the work of our parish-school, Sunday-schools, young people’s societies, and the various auxiliary organizations of the congregation. Every pastor who desires to have accurate information concerning the use of visual education helps will be glad to use the information contained in this book. We cannot endorse the larger part of Chapter V, on “The Use of Visual Aids in Worship,” because *the doctrinal and expository sermons of the Lutheran Church will rarely require, in most cases not even permit, the use of pictures*. There are other dangers connected with the indiscriminate use of visual aids, especially if the emotional element is stressed.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Paul E. Kretzmann, *Magazin für evangelisch-lutherische Homiletik und Pastoraltheologie*, Vol. 53, No. 6 (June 1929), pp. 216-17.

⁴⁹Walter E. Buszin, “Music in the Church, School and Home” (convention essay), in *Report of the Fifteenth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod* (1932), p. 40.

⁵⁰Paul E. Kretzmann, book review of *Screen and Projector in Christian Education* by Paul H. Janes, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 1933), p. 79. Emphasis added.

VII.

Lutherans should certainly be concerned about outreach to the lost. Indeed, a Lutheran who does not want to find ways to confess Christ to his unchurched neighbors, or who is not eager to bring the gospel to people who do not yet know their Savior, is not much of a Lutheran. But a commitment to preserve pure doctrine through the use of pure worship forms is not in any way incompatible with this concern. In fact, it is more compatible with this concern than are those shortsighted pragmatic tactics that seek to lure unbelievers into the church by worldly “bait and switch” deceptions.

The advice and encouragement that we need, to reach out to a fallen world as *Lutherans* – *which is what we are!* – is also not new. It is the same advice that has been given for many generations, to pastors who wish to remain faithful to their Lord and to their calling. Over a century ago, John Schaller wrote these words of encouragement in the specific context of promoting cross-cultural outreach and church-planting on the part of German-American Lutherans, among their English-speaking fellow citizens:

The first care, then, of all who work in the field of English Mission, pastors and laymen alike, ought ever to be that they steadfastly adhere to the biblical doctrine in all its parts. Lutheran hymns, Lutheran liturgies, Lutheran prayers, above all Lutheran sermons ought to be heard wherever our missionary work is carried on. True Lutheranism need not fear any criticism. It has stood the test of centuries, and no modern weapon of offence will subvert it. It is an impregnable fortress. Be not afraid, then, to show its beauties to all who come to hear. They expect to be treated to something new in our churches, and they ought not to be disappointed. To follow the example set by sectarian clergymen, to sermonize on anything else rather than upon questions of doctrine, or to fill the hearers' ears with weak generalizations and pasture them on fine, poetic language alone, would be worse than folly. To make a good impression, to effect some real, living good, solid meat must be offered, which alone can satisfy the soul's desires. Emphasize doctrine, if you would accomplish your aim. Else why should we expend money and labor, only to do what others may do as well? ... Having laid a good foundation, we may hope to build up congregations [that are] really Lutheran. Having sown good, living seed, we may look forward to a rich harvest. We shall reap the first-fruits; they will ripen before our eyes. Our English congregations will give proof of spiritual life. In the great battle against worldliness we shall find them fighting shoulder to shoulder with their elder German sisters. From them, streams of living waters will flow, and their influence will be widespread. For is not this promised as a certain effect of THE WORD?⁵¹

Lutheran pastors who look with envying eyes upon the large numbers in attendance at the heterodox churches of our land, and who think that their own attendance will increase if they imitate the worship practices of those churches, need to realize that such churches *worship* the way they do because they *believe* the way they do. The theology of Arminian churches in particular requires them to devise techniques of persuading and enticing people to make a “decision” to turn their hearts toward God, and to follow Christ. The praise songs that one finds in such churches, which “market” God as one who is available and able to satisfy the felt needs of religious seekers, fit exactly with the false doctrine of such churches.

Even when such songs do not explicitly teach this false doctrine, one should notice that in the majority of cases they do not teach very much sound doctrine either. Most of the time, the words of praise songs are not really being used to teach much of anything. With mantra-like

⁵¹ John Schaller, “Danger Ahead!”, *Lutheran Witness*, Vol. 10, No. 8 (Sept. 21, 1891), p. 58.

repetitions of innocuous phrases from the Bible, wed to a musical style that appeals directly to the physiological pulsations of the human body, the words of such songs are being used instead to manipulate the will and the emotions of those who sing them. How can Lutherans imitate any of that, and still remain Lutheran? The Revivalists and Pentecostals who invented the genre of the praise song knew exactly what they were doing, governed as they were by their sincerely-held but erroneous doctrines of original sin and free will, conversion and faith. As we put the best construction on the actions of Lutherans who introduce such songs into their churches, we would have to say that they naively do not know what they are doing.⁵²

What goes on in the popular Evangelical megachurches of our day is not theologically neutral. Heterodox people go to heterodox churches because they like the heterodoxy that they find there. They like churches where the focus of attention is on them: on entertaining them, and on satisfying their needs as they define those needs. We should be saddened by their embracing of such heterodoxy, and we should wish and pray that they would be turned away from this wrong thinking. But if such heterodox Christians visit an orthodox Lutheran service, and decide that they do not like it, the fundamental problem is not in the orthodox service. The fundamental problem is in the heterodox visitors. Indeed, the orthodox evangelical doctrine that is embedded in a Lutheran service is actually their only hope, if they would only believe it instead of the fluff that they currently believe. It should not be discarded for their sake. It should instead be preserved and accentuated for their sake – and for the sake of the Lutherans who come regularly to their own church, to be renewed regularly in their orthodox evangelical faith by this orthodox evangelical doctrine.

It is the considered opinion of the present essayist that a full-bodied liturgical service, which preserves the intended flow and rhythm of the liturgy, and which is accompanied by purposeful ceremonial ornamentation, actually recommends itself to the church as a better instrument for congregational worship, *and for outreach*, than a more “low-church” option. We do have to admit

⁵²Critics of so-called “contemporary worship” in the Lutheran Church often see many historical parallels between this phenomenon and the approach and attitude of the Pietists. But there are actually more and greater historical parallels between the thinking of “contemporary worship” advocates and the agenda of the Rationalists. Joseph Herl recounts that “Calls for liturgical reform written from a Rationalist perspective began to appear in the 1780s. They called for drastic modifications to the traditional liturgy or even wholesale abandonment of it. ... Johann Wilhelm Rau argued in 1786 that the old formulas were no longer usable because the expressions in them were in part no longer understandable and in part objectionable. Fixed forms in general were not good, and even the Lord’s Prayer was meant only as an example to follow and not as a prayer to be repeated. Some said that liturgical formulas served to ease the task of the pastor and preserve order in the service. But [according to Rau] the advantages were specious: very few pastors had so little time left over from other duties that they could not prepare a service, and in Dortmund (for example) no liturgical formulas were prescribed, without disruption to the service. Each pastor used his own self-written order or spoke extemporaneously. According to Rau, the most important abuses to curb were the too-frequent use of the Lord’s Prayer, the making of the sign of the cross, the Aaronic benediction, chanting by the pastor, the use of candles on the altar, private confession, the use of the appointed lectionary texts for sermons, and various superstitious practices surrounding communion, such as carrying the houseling cloth to catch crumbs that might fall and referring to the ‘true’ body and blood of Christ. ... Peter Burdorf, writing in 1795, argued that repetition in the liturgy weakened the attention of the listener and the impact of the form. The current liturgy did not hold people’s attention, nor did the sermon. ... Some liturgy was necessary for public services to be held, but it should be as simple as possible in order to meet the needs of contemporary Christians. Rationalist writers backed up their words with deeds and produced a number of new liturgies written with the above concerns in mind. Luther Reed...offered the opinion that these liturgies ‘ranged in character from empty sentimentality to moralizing soliloquy and verbosity.’ ... Hymns were rewritten as well with a view to removing ‘superstition’ and outdated theology. ... This, then, was the situation around the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1817, the three hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, Claus Harms published his anti-Rationalistic Ninety-Five Theses, which marked the beginning of a revival of Lutheran theology and liturgy that was to continue for more than a century” (*Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism*, pp. 127-29).

that in some corners of conservative Lutheranism in America, a way of conducting the service has developed that can fairly be called “boring.” Ministers plod through the texts of the printed order with little sense of the grandeur and pageantry of the liturgy, or of the organic and logical flow of the successive parts of the service. The flow of the service is also broken up by the frequent insertion of wordy rubrical announcements about what is coming next, what page things are on, and so forth.

Many today have proposed that this “boring” way of conducting the service be replaced by an “entertaining” way of conducting it – either by substituting for the church’s liturgy a locally-produced flashy concoction each week; or by seeking to “enliven” the service, and make it more “meaningful,” through a stronger intrusion of the pastor’s personality into the conducting of the service. In contrast, we would propose that this “boring” way of conducting the service be replaced instead by an *intriguing* way of conducting it – that is, by a way of leading the Lord’s people in the worship of almighty God that testifies to the fact that something special and other-worldly is there taking place.

Any unchurched guests who may be present for such a sacred gathering would not be expected to be able to grasp everything that is going on. A desire to change the liturgy so as to make it immediately understandable in all respects to first-time visitors is a misguided desire. As Christians over time mature in their faith, the liturgy should be something that they *grow into*, and not something that they quickly *grow out of*. But first-time visitors, even if they are unbelievers, can still be *intrigued* by a *well-done* liturgy that they do not immediately understand in all particulars. They can tell that something special and other-worldly is indeed taking place – something unlike anything else they have ever experienced – and this can draw them back again, to learn more.

On the basis of the natural knowledge of God, even an unbeliever would sense that if there is a God to be worshiped, those who do worship him will be serious about it. To the extent that a public worship service can serve an evangelistic purpose, then, the best way for it to do so, is for that service to exude an attitude of joyful yet sublime reverence, and deep respect for all that is holy. An unregenerated person, in his spiritual darkness, does not yet know where to find God. But he does at least know that if God can be found anywhere, it will likely not be in a setting or atmosphere of frivolity and silliness. As we set our evangelistic sights on the unbelieving nations, with a desire to introduce to them the true worship of the true God, we are to be guided by the exhortations of the Psalmist:

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! (Psalm 96:2-9, ESV)

An example of how a well-done liturgy can indeed make a salutary life-long impact on those who witness it, is given in the reminiscences of Jacob Aall Ottesen Stub, as he recalls the experiences of his early childhood in services of Holy Communion conducted by his grandfather, a well-known nineteenth-century Norwegian Synod pastor:

My sainted grandfather, Jacob Aall Ottesen, always celebrated the Communion, robed in the colorful, and, as it seemed to me, beautiful vestments of the Lutheran Church. ...he wore the narrow-sleeved cassock, with its long satin stole, and the white “ruff,” or collar. ...he also wore the white surplice or cotta. As he stood reverentially before the altar with its

lighted candles and gleaming silver, the old deacon, or verger, placed over his shoulders the scarlet, gold embroidered, silk chasuble. This ancient Communion vestment was shaped somewhat like a shield. As it was double, one side covered his back and the other his chest. Upon the side, which faced the congregation when he turned to the altar, was a large cross in gold embroidery; upon the other was a chalice of similar materials. As a child I instinctively knew that the most sacred of all observances of the church was about to be witnessed. As grandfather turned to the altar and intoned the Lord's Prayer and the words of consecration, with the elevation of the host and the chalice, I felt as if God was near. The congregation standing reverentially about those kneeling before the altar, made me think of Him who, though unseen, was in our midst. I forgot the old, cold church, with its bare walls, its home-made pews, and its plain glass windows. I early came to know some words of that service, such as: "This is the true body, the true blood of Christ"; "Forgiveness of sins"; "Eternal life." I venture that all who, like me, early received such impressions of the Lord's Supper, will approach the altar or the Communion with a reverence that time will but slowly efface.⁵³

⁵³Jacob Aall Ottosen Stub, *Vestments and Liturgies* (n.d.), pp. 3-4. The catholic liturgical spirit of the (old) Norwegian Synod was a faithful reflection of the classic piety of orthodox Lutheranism, from its purest era, before that piety was largely eclipsed under the influence of Pietism, Rationalism, and Calvinism. Rudolf Rocholl gives us an intriguing glimpse into the world of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century orthodox Lutheran worship: "According to the Brunswick Agenda of Duke Augustus, 1657, the pastors went to the altar clad in alb, chasuble, and mass vestments. Sacristans and elders held a fair cloth before the altar during the administration, that no particle of the consecrated Elements should fall to the ground. The altar was adorned with costly stuffs, with lights and fresh flowers. 'I would,' cries [Christian] Scriver, 'that one could make the whole church, and especially the altar, look like a little Heaven.' Until the nineteenth century the ministers at St. Sebald in Nuremberg wore chasubles at the administration of the Holy Supper. The alb was generally worn over the Talar, even in the sermon. [Valerius] Herberger calls it his natural *Säetuch* [seed-cloth], from which he scatters the seed of the Divine Word. The alb was worn also in the Westphalian cities. At Closter-Lüne in 1608 the minister wore a garment of yellow gauze, and over it a chasuble on which was worked in needlework a 'Passion.' The inmates and abbesses, like Dorothea von Medine, were seen in the costume of the Benedictines. The 'Lutheran monks' of Laccuna until 1631 wore the white gown and black scapular of the Cistercian order. Still later they sang the Latin Hours. The beneficiaries of the Augustinian Stift at Tübingen wore the black cowl until 1750. The churches stood open all day. When the Nuremberg Council ordered that they should be closed except at the hours of service, it aroused such an uproar in the city that the council had to yield. In 1619 all the churches in the Archbishopric of Magdeburg were strictly charged to pray the Litany. In Magdeburg itself there were in 1692 four *Readers*, two for the Epistle, two for the Gospel. The Nicene Creed was intoned by a Deacon in Latin. Then the sermon and general prayer having been said, the Deacon with two Readers and two Vicars, clad in Mass garment and gowns, went in procession to the altar, bearing the Cup, the Bread, and what pertained to the preparation for the Holy Supper, and the Cüster [Verger] took a silver censer with glowing coals and incense, and incensed them, while another (the *Citharmeister*?) clothed and arranged the altar, lit two wax candles, and placed on it two books bound in red velvet and silver containing the Latin Epistles and Gospels set to notes, and on festivals set on the altar also a silver or golden crucifix, according to the order of George of Anhalt in 1542. The *Preface* and *Sanctus* were in Latin. After the Preface the communicants were summoned into the choir by a bell hanging there. The Nuremberg *Officium Sacrum* (1664) bids all the ministers be present in their stalls, in white *Chorrocken*, standing or sitting, to sing after the *Frühmesse* [Morning Mass], 'Lord, Keep Us Steadfast.' The minister said his prayer kneeling with his face to the altar, with a deacon kneeling on either side. He arranged the wafers on the paten in piles of ten, like the shewbread, while the *Introit* and *Kyrie* were sung. The responses by the choir were in Latin. Up to 1690 the Latin service was still said at St. Sebald's and St. Lawrence's [in Nuremberg]. Throughout this (eighteenth) century we find daily Matins and Vespers, with the singing of German psalms. There were sermons on weekdays. There were no churches in which they did not kneel in confession and at the Consecration of the Elements" (*Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland* [1897], pp. 300-02; quoted in Edward T. Horn, "Ceremonies in the Lutheran Church," *Lutheran Cyclopedia* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899], p. 83).

We know that as a preacher, Pastor Ottesen, throughout his life, clearly and consistently confessed the church's faith. But Pastor Ottesen confessed the church's faith also as a liturgical celebrant. In chant and song, through gesture and symbolism, he confessed the church's faith in the holiness of God, in the grandeur of God's grace, in the sweetness of the gospel of Christ, and in the dignity and mystery of Christ's sacrament. He made this good liturgical confession not only in what he said, but in *how* he said it; and in what he *did*, as he said it. In these ways, Ottesen did his part "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Those who attended services at the sister congregations of Ottesen's church, elsewhere in the synod, and who were led in prayer and devotion by Ottesen's brother pastors in those sister congregations, would no doubt have seen and heard the same sort of things that Ottesen's little grandson saw and heard. And they, too, never would have forgotten what they saw and heard.

We close with these inspired and inspiring words from St. Paul the apostle: "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be *like-minded toward one another*, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with *one mind* and *one mouth* glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6, NKJV). Amen.

David Jay Webber
Phoenix, Arizona
The Confession of St. Peter, January 18, 2012

ADDENDUM I

Excerpted from C. F. W. Walther, "Explanation of Thesis XVIII, D, *Adiaphora*, of the book *The True Visible Church*," in *Essays for the Church* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), Vol. I, pp. 193-94.

We know and firmly hold that the character, the soul of Lutheranism, is not found in outward observances but in the pure doctrine. If a congregation had the most beautiful ceremonies in the very best order, but did not have the pure doctrine, it would be anything but Lutheran. We have from the beginning spoken earnestly of good ceremonies, not as though the important thing were outward forms, but rather to make use of our liberty in these things. For true Lutherans know that although one does not *have* to have these things (because there is no divine command to have them), one *may* nevertheless have them because good ceremonies are lovely and beautiful and are not forbidden in the Word of God. Therefore the Lutheran Church has not abolished "outward ornaments, candles, altar cloths, statues and similar ornaments" [Ap XXIV], but has left them free. The sects proceeded differently because they did not know how to distinguish between what is commanded, forbidden, and left free in the Word of God. We remind only of the mad actions of Carlstadt and of his adherents and followers in Germany and in Switzerland. We on our part have retained the ceremonies and church ornaments in order to prove by our actions that we have a correct understanding of Christian liberty, and know how to conduct ourselves in things which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God.

We refuse to be guided by those who are offended by our church customs. We adhere to them all the more firmly when someone wants to cause us to have a guilty conscience on account of them. The Roman antichristendom enslaves poor consciences by imposing human ordinances on them with the command: "You must keep such and such a thing!"; the sects enslave consciences by forbidding and branding as sin what God has left free. Unfortunately, also many of our Lutheran Christians are still without a true understanding of their liberty. This is demonstrated by their aversion to ceremonies.

It is truly distressing that many of our fellow Christians find the difference between Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism in outward things. It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when a person sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the deluded American denominations just so they won't accuse us of being Roman Catholic! Indeed! Am I to be afraid of a Methodist, who perverts the saving Word, or be ashamed in the matter of my good cause, and not rather rejoice that they can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them?

It is too bad that such entirely different ceremonies prevail in our Synod, and that no liturgy at all has yet been introduced in many congregations. The prejudice especially against the responsive chanting of pastor

and congregations is of course still very great with many people – this does not, however, alter the fact that it is very foolish. The pious church father Augustine said, “Qui cantat, bis orat – He who sings prays twice.”

This finds its application also in the matter of the liturgy. Why should congregations or individuals in the congregation want to retain their prejudices? How foolish that would be! For first of all it is clear from the words of St. Paul (1 Cor. 14:16) that the congregations of his time had a similar custom. It has been the custom in the Lutheran Church for 250 years. It creates a solemn impression on the Christian mind when one is reminded by the solemnity of the divine service that one is in the house of God where the children of God, in childlike love to their heavenly Father, also give expression to their joy in such a lovely manner.

We are not insisting that there be uniformity in perception or feeling or taste among all believing Christians – neither dare anyone demand that all be minded as he. Nevertheless, it remains true that the Lutheran liturgy distinguishes Lutheran worship from the worship of other churches to such an extent that the houses of worship of the latter look like lecture halls in which the hearers are merely addressed or instructed, while our churches are in truth houses of prayer in which Christians serve the great God publicly before the world.

Uniformity of ceremonies (perhaps according to the Saxon Church order published by the Synod, which is the simplest among the many Lutheran church orders) would be highly desirable because of its usefulness. A poor slave of the pope finds one and same form of service, no matter where he goes, by which he at once recognizes his church.

With us it is different. Whoever comes from Germany without a true understanding of the doctrine often has to look for his church for a long time, and many have already been lost to our church because of this search. How different it would be if the entire Lutheran church had a uniform form of worship! This would, of course, first of all yield only an external advantage, however, one which is by no means unimportant. Has not many a Lutheran already kept his distance from the sects because he saw at the Lord's Supper they broke the bread instead of distributing wafers?

The objection, “What would be the use of uniformity of ceremonies?”, was answered with the counter question, “What is the use of a flag on the battlefield?” Even though a soldier cannot defeat the enemy with it, he nevertheless sees by the flag where he belongs. We ought not to refuse to walk in the footsteps of our fathers. They were so far removed from being ashamed of the good ceremonies that they publicly confess in the passage quoted: “It is not true that we do away with all such external ornaments.”

ADDENDUM II

Excerpted from Paul E. Kretzmann, *Christian Art in the Place and in the Form of Lutheran Worship* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 395-96.

Divine worship in the Christian Church is not an *adiaphoron*. The Lord expressly commands that His Word be heard, John 8, 47. He has only severe censure for those who forsake the Christian assemblies, Hebrews 10, 25. He expressly enjoins public prayer, 1 Timothy 2, 1. 2. 8. He graciously promises His divine presence at such assemblies, Matthew 18, 20. He records with approval the public services of the early Christians, Acts 2, 42-47.

But though He has prescribed the *general* content of public worship, though He is present in the sacramental acts of divine service, declaring and appropriating to the believers the means of grace, and though He graciously receives the sacrificial acts of the assembled congregation, in confession and prayer and offerings, He has not commanded a definite form or order of divine service. It is a matter of Christian liberty whether a congregation wishes one or many prayers, one or several hymns, one or two sermons or homilies, whether the chief assembly be held in the morning or in the evening, whether the service be held on Sunday or on a ferial day.

To argue from these facts, however, that it is a matter of complete indifference as to how the form of Christian worship is constituted would be bringing liberty dangerously near to license. The Lord says: “Let all things be done decently and in order,” 1 Cor. 14, 40; and again: “Let all things be done for edification,” v. 26. It cannot really be a matter of indifference to a Christian congregation when the order of service used in her midst shows so much similarity to a heterodox order as to confuse visitors. One may hardly argue that such *adiaphora* do not matter one way or the other, when it has happened that a weak brother has been offended. And a Lutheran congregation cannot justly divorce herself, not only not from the doctrinal, but also not from the historical side of its Church. It is a matter of expediency, as well as of charity and edification, that every Lutheran pastor and every Lutheran congregation have outward significant symbols of the inner union, of the one mind and the one spirit.

In addition to these facts, there is the further consideration that the outward acts of the Church,

commonly known by the appellation “the liturgy,” have a very definite significance, which, in many cases, renders the acts of public service true acts of confession of faith. And the symbolism of many of the Lutheran sacred acts, if correctly performed, is such that the beauty of these treasures of our Church may be brought to the joyful attention of our congregations.

This is true especially of the morning worship in the Lutheran Church, commonly known as The Service or The Communion. For this is not, as some people have supposed, a haphazard combination or a fortuitous conglomeration of heterogeneous material, but an artistic unit with definite and logical parts, a “spirituo-psychological, well-ordered, and articulated whole,” as [Friedrich] Lochner says [*Der Hauptgottesdienst*, 41]. The order of service is a beautiful work of art, presenting a gradual climax of such wonderful dignity and impressiveness that the mere presence in such a service should result in the edification of the faithful.

ADDENDUM III

Excerpted from J. Madsen, *The Proper Communion Vestments* (n.d.);
an English abridgement of P. Severinsen, *De rette Messeklæder* (1924).
(edited for style by David Jay Webber)

The Reformation came and stirred up much of ancient date. Zwingli did away with the vestments, considering them – together with Altar, Candles, Crucifixes, and Organ – to be an expression of ungodliness. The South Germans followed him generally and constructed the Service, not along the ancient Order of the Communion, but on that of the Preaching Service of the Middle Ages.

It was different in Wittenberg. Luther built the Communion Service on the Order of the Mass, and he retained the Communion vestments, which were considered an entirely neutral matter – doing neither evil nor good. It is not improbable that to this came the consciousness that it would seem strange to appear before the altar in ordinary dress – therefore the accustomed vestments might well be retained. In the Order of the Mass of 1523 Luther says that the vestments may be used unhindered, when pomp and luxury are avoided...

This position was, however, the very opposite of that of the Fanatics, who maintained it as a law of God that these things and many others – where Luther allowed full liberty – should be prohibited. This placed Luther in the peculiar position that he was forced to emphasize liberty in these matters by emphasizing the liberty to continue the use of the ancient Communion vestments. This is what he does in his writing *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, which writing is from the fall of 1524. ... In the Confession of the Communion (in 1528) – essentially against the same movements – he insisted on the same liberty, and in the German Mass of 1526 he retained the vestments, candles, and altar.

It was in full agreement with this that Bugenhagen retained the ancient vestments of the Church in the services in all the different countries where it became his duty to revise and order the services anew. ...

This plainly shows the mind of the parish priest of Wittenberg, the great Reformation practician Bugenhagen. When the South Germans in 1536 came to Wittenberg to close the Wittenberg Concord, they were therefore greatly shocked by the Communion Service on Ascension Day. Wolfgang Musculus from Constance confided to his journal: There were pictures in the church, candles on the altar, and a priest in “papistic” clothes! The Introit was played on the organ while the choir sang in Latin – as was the custom of earlier days – while the priest having the celebration proceeded from the sacristy wearing vestments. They (the South Germans) complained to Bugenhagen...

The general conception of these things was that the use of the Communion vestments was typically and distinctly Lutheran as over against the black gown of the Calvinists. ...

To form an idea of the richness of the vestments (*Gewandtracht*) used in a German Lutheran church in the days of the strict Lutheran orthodoxy, we will go into the church of St. Nicolai in Leipzig about year 1650 (Paul Gerhardt, 1607-1676): The alb is used with amice, maniple and parure, which latter the sexton's wife must take off to launder and put on again. Then there is a surprising collection of chasubles for many varied occasions. For ordinary Sundays there are five: one green satin, one red patterned velvet, one dark red smooth velvet, one red satin, and one violet-brown velvet. Besides this there are sixteen most elaborate ones for festivals: For Advent one green velvet with Christ's Entry in embroidery, for New Year one of gold cloth, for the Presentation one of white satin with a crucifix embroidered, for Palm Sunday one green with palm leaves, for Holy Thursday one of green satin, for Good Friday one of black velvet with a crucifix, for Easter Day (No. 2) one with a crucifix of pearls, for Whitsunday one of brown-red velvet with the Trinity in pearls and stones, and so on. There still remains a collection of “very old ones.” At the administration of the Sacrament four boys hold the Sacramental cloths, over which the Sacrament is handed to the communicants who pass the celebrating priests. The boys are in black cassocks with surplices over; but on festival days the boys wear

“special cassocks of crimson velvet” donated by a widow.

Rationalism sold this whole collection in 1776. ... The surplice, however, continued in use in Leipzig.

The Evangelical churches in Nuremberg received orders in 1797 to deliver their collection of chasubles to the city treasury as a contribution to the taxes. In the churches of St. Sebald and St. Lawrence, the collection contained eighteen chasubles of very elaborate design, and many of them ornamented with pearls. There were also some Dalmatics. ... The surplice was abolished in 1810, as it had already been in 1798 in Ansbach, to save laundry expenses. (This certainly is the way of Rationalism in all its modifications.)

...

In Sweden all the Communion vestments were retained. Archbishop Laurentius Petri would not have it otherwise. Charles IX was of a different turn of mind and in the parliament of 1618 made an attack on the Communion vestments. The leading churchmen would not hear anything of this, however. They remarked in their reply to the king that some of the old customs were retained at the Reformation so that everything in the churches might be done decently and in order, and also to show liberty in these indifferent matters. It was but fitting that a poor priest celebrating the Holy Communion should also have a fitting garment and not his outworn clothes, making him a laughing stock for people. Everyone would know that it was not done to follow the pope. That decided it – as far as Sweden is concerned.

In the inventory of the Cathedral Church at Westeraas in 1620 are mentioned: a number of copes, chasubles, dalmatics, albs, humeralia, stoles, and cinctures. It shows that the alb was worn with all its belongings. The surplice was worn at all churchly acts outside of the Communion.

The Danish Reformation was very like that of Wittenberg. The question of vestments was not up at all – neither with regard to the Romanists nor the Evangelicals mutually. ... Hans Tausen (later Bishop) states in 1531 that he has so far observed all the usual ceremonies of the Mass and left all unchanged with regard to vestments, candles, elevation, etc. The *Ordinants* – the revised Order of the Danish Service, which bears the personal marks of Bugenhagen and Luther – prescribes “the usual Communion vestments, but the priest shall, when there is no Communion, close the service before a desk and not at the altar, neither shall he again put on the chasuble after the sermon” (Rørdam, *Danish Church Laws*).

The Bishop of Lund, Frantz Wormordsen, published, on this basis, an Altar-Book, *Handbook for the Proper Evangelical Mass* (Malmo, 1539). In it we find the following, defending and explaining: “The priest and the altar should be clothed with the usual vestments, clean and orderly – not for any service that we can render God by it, nor that there in any manner is any special holiness in it in regard to the use and effect of the Sacrament. But this shall be done as a good, proper, and fitting custom, as an honor, not to God, but to the Christian congregation, and as a service of unity. So must everything in the Christian congregation be done honestly, decently, and in order – were it for nothing else than for the sake of the angels of God who are there present amongst us.” ...

Rationalism impoverished the services in the use of the vestments as in everything else, but nothing was ordered discontinued. A later time, with a new spiritual revival, has also revived a new interest in the services of the sanctuary, and a renewed desire to revive the truly historic and beautiful service of the Lutheran Church of an earlier day. An intelligent Lutheran knows very well that while these things have an historic and oecumenic interest, and do not fail in inciting the devotional atmosphere of the Church Universal, they have nothing to do directly with the church of the Pope – only insofar as the popish church also is part of the Church Universal. ...

The Lutheran and the Roman churches parted ways after the Reformation, but both continued the ancient and historic use of the chasuble. ... The colors used for the Chasubles in the after-Reformation period were many. Numerous examples are found in the ancient churches – indeed a variegated collection... The material generally is silk, gold-cloth, gold-brocade. What applies to Denmark, applies equally to Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Many ancient treasures are preserved in Iceland. ...

Lutheran customs were naturally criticized by the Reformed – but the times were conservative. Halle, however, was somewhat of an unquiet, restless corner. *A Legal Dispute About the Sabbath* was published in 1702 by a lawyer, Candidate Konrad Ludwig Wagner. Professor Johann Samuel Stryk, who was *Praeses*, gave it his sanction by an introductory *Programma* about the unfortunate observance of feast days, which he declared ought to be abolished. ... Both men are forerunners of the period of Enlightenment (Rationalism). It is, according to the opinion of Wagner, a question whether it was right to continue to make use of the old “catholic” churches. No pictures should be tolerated. Crucifixes are idols. The church steeples remind us that we live among the Babylonians. The use of church bells should be discouraged, and the same applies to music. He has little use for the ordinary hymns. Chanting should by all means be prohibited. To decorate the altar and pulpit with velvet is a remnant from the days of Popery – as is the idea of using black in Lent! ... Is the observance of all this not an absolutely unnecessary luxury?

Then he comes to the Communion vestments, which, he declares, are without a doubt from the days of Popery. They have been invented by the priests in order to be different from other people and thus secure

authority. Chasubles, copes, girdles, collars, cassocks, cloaks with big sleeves – it all comes from the same common source, the Pope. ... He (Wagner) advises that everything distinguishing the priest be abolished, but that if nothing else is, the chasuble must be, since it is manifestly from the days of the Pope. ... From this he proceeds to attack the texts of the Church Year, which also are “Papistic.” ...

After a couple of years things seem to have become quiet regarding this particular matter until Christian Gerber – after his death – appeared on the scene (in 1732) with his *Historie der Kirchen-Ceremonien in Sachsen*. The author died in 1731 as parish priest in Lockwisch, a little south of Dresden, and his son published the book. Gerber was a Pietist with Reformed sympathies... He (Gerber) is much offended at the use of the Communion vestments. He tells how he, as a young priest in Schönberg, was obliged to use the Communion vestments because the patron of the church demanded it. He then goes on to say that during the 40 years he had been at Lockwisch he had never used the Communion vestments belonging to the church, and the congregation did not miss them any more. He then proceeds to treat the question of altar candles, which he thinks are an unreasonable Papistic remnant that certainly ought to be abolished.

...Gerber's book...found...sympathetic readers, for instance Bishop Peder Hersleb. Neither is it improbable that this book of 1732 has some connection with what happened in many of the lands under the king of Prussia in 1733. Stryk and Wagner had encouraged the princes to legislate against the ceremonies of the church and the temptation was big enough where the prince was Reformed, to take hold of the “Papistry” among the Lutherans.

It was a Reformed king who declared the war against the Communion vestments of his Lutheran subjects. The royal house of Brandenburg, Prussia, was Reformed, while the population was largely Lutheran. The condition had already caused trouble, of which the experience of Paul Gerhardt bears ample proof. The war against the Communion vestments was declared by the peculiar soldier-king, Frederick William I, who ruled in a very autocratic fashion. Through a Decision of 1733 he “prohibited the remnants of Popery in the Lutheran Church: copes, Communion vestments, candles, Latin song, chants, and the sign of the cross.” Many priests sanctioned this step, but conservatism was also very strong. Many complained and counted the whole event a “betrayal of genuine and pure Lutheranism.” Many reports were also given of the disappointments of the congregations.

The brutal king repeated the decision in 1737, with the addition: “Should there be those who hesitate or who desire to make it a matter of conscience, we wish to make it known that we are ready to give them their demission.” At least one priest was discharged for refusal to submit. ...

In a supplement [to V. E. Löscher's *Unschuldige Nachrichten*] of 1737, page 81, we find the following: ... These things are admittedly not of any inner necessity, but they have become no insignificant mark of our church, and must therefore be safeguarded under these circumstances. The king gives to the Papists and the Jews full liberty in matters of worship. Should then the Evangelical Lutheran Christians not be able to obtain the same protection and liberty from their *Landesvater* – their king? ...

One might think that the Pietists, with their dread of externalism, would wholeheartedly support the royal command. This is, however, not the case, for their chief city, Halle, was among those who protested against the royal dictatorship. The Danish Hallensian, Enevold Ewald, shows no sympathy in his account of the event. He says: “Some obeyed the royal decision, but a number of places protested, for instance, Königsberg, Pomerania, Magdeburg, Halle, etc. This led to a repetition and strengthening of the royal command in 1737. A number of priests chose to be dismissed from their office rather than make submission.”

...

Frederick [William] I was succeeded in 1740 by his son Frederick II. Immediately on ascending the throne, he issued a cabinet order allowing the churches and their priests full liberty in the matter of religious services. A number made use of the liberty granted. The Communion vestments were restored in Berlin and other places. A number of Prussian churches, such as the Maria Church in Danzig and the Cathedral Church of Brandenburg, possess even today the greatest collections of Communion vestments in Christendom. They are possibly not in use now. Some years of prohibition put the vestments out of use in many places, and the time of Frederick II was the time of Rationalism. ... The time of Frederick II was not a time for pious sentiment. Rationalism flourished, and it had an infinite dread of all that was “mystic” or that was handed down from the “Middle Ages.” The use of the Communion vestments was decidedly “catholic” to the mind of Rationalism. Rationalism completed what the Reformed king of Prussia had begun.

The white surplice or alb is still in use in Leipzig and the surrounding country; in a couple of churches in Berlin, for instance, the Church of St. Nicolai where Paul Gerhardt was the parish priest; in Lausitz; in Weimar; in Königsberg, in Old Württemberg, and probably in other places. The chasuble was still used in Dresden in the early part of the nineteenth century. It was discontinued in Nuremberg in 1810, and about the same time in Hannover, Grimma, and Lübeck. At the outbreak of the Great War [World War I] there was probably no church in Germany where the chasuble was in use. Its use is retained by the Lutheran Slovaks.

Taken as a whole the German Lutheran priest appears at the present time in the black Calvinistic

cloak handed him by the Reformed king of Prussia. The whole affair proved one tremendous defeat – a colossal yielding and giving up of typical Lutheran ways and customs. The condition was reached through protests and objections on the part of the Lutheran population, and through dismissals and threats of dismissal from office on the part of the king. And the force of the tyrant was superior.

It should always be remembered that the Calvinistic *blackness* of the clergy in the present-day German Lutheran churches – and in her daughters – is not only not Lutheran, but is a remnant and constant reminder of a period of the greatest helplessness and degradation of the German Lutheran people. The brutal Prussian king, followed by the overwhelming power of Rationalism, did accomplish one thing (insofar as externals are concerned). They shifted the German branch of the Lutheran Church, and her daughter churches, from her natural position among the great historic communions of Christendom, to a place among the sectarian, Calvinistic denominations. Her place there has so far been one of continued yielding in order to make herself acceptable. Lutheran in theory and increasingly Reformed in practice...

The original and typical apparel of the German Lutheran – as of all Lutheran clergy when officiating in the sanctuary – is not that of *blackness and gloom*, but the festive apparel of the historic church through the ages. We of Scandinavian ancestry cannot be too grateful for the better conditions prevailing in the Mother-Countries [of Scandinavia]. ...

While these humiliations passed over the Lutheran church in Germany, things went peacefully and very dignified in the Scandinavian countries. ... But the spirit of Rationalism spread its chilling and deadening influence everywhere. It also passed over the Northern countries. Voices were raised in Denmark requiring “reform.” Some took up the battle against the liturgy of the Church – because it was “antiquated” and “meaningless.” Up to this time the Danish service had retained all the essential features of the beautiful and devotional service of the Reformation period, but Rationalism had no use for it and succeeded only too well in getting the greater part of the Liturgy eliminated from the services of the church – creating a havoc which to the present day has but partly been overcome.

War was also started against the Communion vestments, but on this point no success was gained. The common people would not sanction the discontinuance of these ornaments of the service. Voices from all sorts and conditions of the people defended the continued use of these ancient heritages of the early days of Christianity. The attacks also seemed to neutralize themselves to a great extent by being directed at various objects. Some took up the battle against the candles on the Altar, arguing that it was more reasonable to place the money in the “school-fund” (how like the rationalistic mind! ...). Others wanted to retain the candles, but suggested that the Communion vestments be sold to provide the means by which to buy candles. There is no doubt that great neglect prevailed in many parishes where a virtually indifferent clergy was in office, but it was all of a temporary nature. Others would come into their places and restore what had been torn down. The general consciousness was a deep desire to maintain the ancient appurtenances of the services of the church.

The leading Rationalist in Denmark, court preacher Christian Bastholm, was a decided enemy of the traditional services, as well as of the vestments, which he calls “ridiculous ornaments.” Many and various opinions could be quoted as examples of the lack of spiritual perception of things having to do with spiritual matters. Probst Jensen in the Karlabo parish does not know “why the white vestments should be retained – except that it does not confine one to the use of black, which color we are not accustomed to ascribe to the Angels of Light.”

In spite of all the confusion the old was not discontinued anywhere, and a consciousness settled more and more that the Communion vestments should be retained, and, wherever lacking, should be restored.

In 1803 a royal decision was issued declaring that the Communion vestments were necessary accessories of the altar and should be included in the regular inventory of all the churches. Another decision of September 1811 makes it obligatory on all patrons of churches “to provide new Communion vestments when the old ones are worn out.” This actually put an end to the devastating work of Rationalism [in Denmark].

...

What has been said of Denmark applies equally to Norway and in a slighter measure to Sweden, where conservatism was so much stronger. Through the changes and the chances of the period of Rationalism, the historic and oecumenical character of the Lutheran Church of Scandinavia had been preserved.

*This essay was prepared for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod West Coast Pastors' Conference in Yelm, Washington, February 7-8, 2012, and was delivered at that conference in absentia. It was published in **Lutheran Synod Quarterly**, Vol. 52, Nos. 2-3 (June-September 2012), pp. 195-248.*