

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



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**“God Has Gone Up With a Shout” – An Exegetical
Study of Psalm 47 for the Ascension of our Lord**

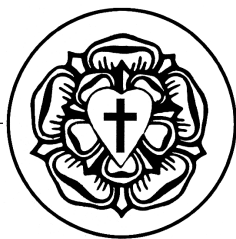
Objective Justification

**Understanding Latin American Religious Culture
and Assumptions**

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

Poems and Book Reviews

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 52, Nos. 2–3 (June–September 2012)

PSALMS 46, 47, AND 48 have related themes of God as Protector, Ruler, Avenger, and Deliverer. Psalm 47 in particular has been associated with the Ascension of our Lord. This is based on the phrase, “God has gone up with a shout” (47:5), reminding one of Christ’s Ascension forty days after Easter, and on the phrase “God sits on His holy throne” (47:8), alluding to Christ’s session at God’s right hand. This exegetical study on Psalm 47 was prepared by the Rev. Mark DeGarmeaux who serves as a professor at Bethany Lutheran College.

On the basis of Christ’s holy life and His sacrificial death in our place (Romans 5:18–19, Galatians 3:13), the Father’s wrath over sin is appeased and He does not impute (count or reckon) sin but declares the whole world righteous or innocent. This truth is demonstrated vividly on Easter morning. The open tomb is the public declaration of absolution or the verdict of not guilty for the world. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Corinthians 5:19; see also Romans 4:5, Romans 5:18–19, and Romans 3:23–24). This is a summary of the doctrine of objective justification, which is the subject matter of the essay written by the Rev. Ronald Pederson, who is pastor of First Lutheran Church in Suttons Bay, Michigan.

In his essay, the Rev. Timothy Schmeling provides an overview of classical Arminianism and its evolution in the American religious context. Prompted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s critique of the American

religious landscape as “Protestantism without the Reformation” and an analysis of the *Formula of Concord* in light of the morphology of Arminianism, the essay joins the call for American Lutheranism to reclaim its classical Lutheran theology. Only in this way can an authentic American Lutheranism truly develop, which is capable of meeting the religious needs of the citizenry of the United States. The Rev. Schmeling is the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Sebastian, Florida.

Hispanic culture has had a profound influence on present-day life in the United States. Hispanics are one of the largest ethnic groups in our country. Understanding the various elements of Hispanic religion and culture will go a long way in efforts to reach Hispanic people with the Gospel and engage them with Jesus as the Savior. The Rev. Herbert Huhnerkoch gives an overview of Hispanic culture and religion in his essay, “Understanding Latin American Religious Culture and Assumptions.” The Rev. Huhnerkoch is a pastor at Peace Lutheran Church in Kissimmee, Florida.

Our Lutheran Confessions maintain that it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree in the teachings of the Scripture. It is not necessary that there be complete uniformity in all rites and ceremonies instituted by men. At the same time, the Confessions encourage Lutheran congregations to continue to employ the historic liturgy of the church. This is the point of the essay entitled, “Walking Together’ in Faith and Worship: Exploring the Relationship between Doctrinal Unity and Liturgical Unity in the Lutheran Church,” written by the Rev. David Jay Webber, who is the pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The two poems for Holy Week, composed by the Rev. Matthew Crick, show the vital importance of Christ’s death and resurrection in the life of the Christian. The Rev. Crick is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in San Antonio, Texas.

Also included in this issue are two book reviews. The book *A Lutheran Looks at Eastern Orthodoxy*, by Robert Koester, was reviewed by the Rev. J. Kincaid Smith, who is a pastor emeritus of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The book *Studying Luther’s Large Catechism*, written by Ryan C. MacPherson, was reviewed by the Rev. Michael K. Smith, who is a professor at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota.

“God Has Gone Up With a Shout” – An Exegetical Study of Psalm 47 for the Ascension of our Lord

Mark E. DeGarmeaux
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Mankato, Minnesota

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TO THE CHIEF MUSICIAN. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

לְמִנְצַחַת לְבַנְי־קָרַח מְזֻמּוֹר ¹

¹ Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples!

כָּל־הָעַמִּים תִּקְעוּ־כָף ²

Shout to God with the voice of triumph! [ESV: songs of joy]

הָרִיעוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהִים בְּקוֹל רָנָה

² For the LORD **Most High** is awesome; [ESV: to be feared; KJV: terrible]

כִּי־יְהוָה עֶלְיוֹן נוֹרָא ³

He is a great King over all the earth.

מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל עַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ

³ He will subdue the peoples under us,

וַיִּדְבֹר עַמִּים תַּחְתֵּינוּ ⁴

And the nations under our feet.

וְלִאֲמִים תַּחַת רַגְלֵינוּ

⁴ He will choose our inheritance for us,

וַיִּבְחַר־לָנוּ אֶת־נַחֲלָתָנוּ ⁵

The excellence of Jacob whom He loves. *Selah.*

אֶת גְּאוֹן יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר־אָהַב סֵלָה

⁵ God has **gone up** with a shout,

עָלָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתִרְוּעָה ⁶

The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

יִהְיֶה בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר

⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises!

זַמְּרוּ אֱלֹהִים זַמְּרוּ ⁷

Sing praises to our King, sing praises!

זַמְּרוּ לְמַלְכֵנוּ זַמְּרוּ

⁷ For God is the King of all the earth;

כִּי מֶלֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֱלֹהִים ⁸

Sing praises with understanding.

זַמְּרוּ מִשְׂכִּיל

⁸ God reigns over the nations;

מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהִים עַל־גּוֹיִם ⁹

God sits on His holy throne.

אֱלֹהִים יָשָׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא קִדְשׁוֹ

⁹ The princes of the people have gathered together,

נְדִיבֵי עַמִּים נֶאֱסָפוּ ¹⁰

The people of the God of Abraham.

עִם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם

For the shields of the earth belong to God;

כִּי לְאֱלֹהִים מְגִנֵי־אָרֶץ

He is greatly **exalted**. (NKJV)

מְאֹד נִעְלָה

A Trilogy of Psalms

Psalms 46, 47, and 48 have related themes of God as Protector, Ruler, Avenger, and Deliverer. These psalms seem to be connected to events during the Divided Monarchy period of Israel and Judah (930-722 BC) and perhaps a little after. The Soncino [Jewish] commentary suggests that they were written after the defeat of Sennacherib (c. 700 BC): “This hypothesis is strengthened by many resemblances

between the phraseology and the language of Isaiah who lived through the crisis and wrote on it."¹ This commentary also considers Psalm 47 to be an expansion of one phrase from the previous psalm: "A poem on the theme of 46:11, *I will be exalted* [אַרְוִים (רַוִּים)] *in the earth.*" The concept of exaltation appears three times in Psalm 47, with the expressions: "Most High," "gone up," and "highly exalted." Delitzsch, on the other hand, connects these psalm texts with the victory of Jehoshaphat over the Moabites (c. 850 BC). Both events are powerful victories of God over the enemies of His people; God alone delivers the people in each case.

Sennacherib, king of the ancient Assyrians who were renowned for fierceness and brutality, was ready to attack Jerusalem. But good King Hezekiah of Judah received words of hope and assurance from the Lord through the prophet Isaiah. The writer of 2 Kings records this promise, and then describes the events that followed.

Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard.'" ...

"Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: '**He shall not come into this city, Nor shoot an arrow there, Nor come before it with shield, Nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, By the same shall he return; And he shall not come into this city,**' Says the Lord. '**For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David's sake.**'"

And that night the Angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place. (2 Kings 19:20, 32-37)

This destruction demonstrates the power of the pre-incarnate Christ, the Angel of the Lord, who is the Lord of hosts Himself, Lord Sabaoth (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת), Lord of the heavenly armies of angels, who

¹ It is interesting that they accept both the authorship of Isaiah and that it was written during the 8th century BC.

defends and protects His people with power and might. It reminds us of Luther's words in *A Mighty Fortress*, based on Psalm 46 (given here in two versions):

Who is this Chosen One?	Ask ye, who is this?
'Tis Jesus Christ the Son,	Jesus Christ it is
The Lord of Hosts is He,	Of Sabaoth Lord,
Who wins the victory	And there's none other God;
In every field of battle.	He holds the field forever.

Jehoshaphat's victory over the Moabites was likewise "a victory without a battle" (Soncino). It is recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:20-30.

²⁰ So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, **Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper."**

²¹ **And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever."**

²² **Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.**

²³ For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, **they helped to destroy one another.**

²⁴ So when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and there were their dead bodies, fallen on the earth. No one had escaped.

²⁵ When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away their spoil, they found among them an abundance of valuables on the dead bodies, and precious jewelry, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much. ²⁶ And on the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berachah, for there they blessed the Lord; therefore the name of that place was called The Valley of Berachah until this day.

²⁷ Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies.

²⁸ So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord. ²⁹ And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel.

³⁰ Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.

Delitzsch also gives good reason why this psalm is appropriate for the Christian festival of the Ascension of our Lord.

Psalms 46 and 47 have the same historical occasion, viz. the victory of Jehoshaphat over the allied neighbouring nations—a victory without a battle and therefore so much the more evidently a victory gained by Jahve. . . .

That overthrow gained for the people of God a long period of rest and honour, not, however, of true and abiding peace; and the Ascension at that time of Jahve, who had fought for His people here below, was not yet the Ascension above the powers that were most dangerous to His people and stood most in the way of the progress of salvation, viz. those powers of darkness, that form the mysterious background of every ungodly occurrence on earth. Accordingly this Psalm has in the course of history acquired a prophetic meaning which far transcends its most immediate occasion, a meaning which the Ascension of Christ has first fully disclosed. . . .

The real and final victory gained by Jahve does not consist in the bloody subjection and sullen confusion of the peoples, but in changing their hearts so that they joyfully worship him. In order to become the God of all peoples in this sense, He has first of all become Israel's God; and Israel also earnestly desires that this design of its election may be attained.²

The tradition of associating Psalm 47 with the Ascension of our Lord is at least as old as Saint Augustine. It is particularly based on the phrase from verse 6: "God has gone up with a shout." Augustine connects this "shout" with the voice of the angels who asked (Acts 1:11):

² Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888), 114-115.

“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?” He also draws on the concept that the disciples would see Christ return as they had seen Him go into heaven, and Jesus’ promise to be with His Church even now while He is seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

His Body is removed indeed from your eyes, but God is not separated from your hearts: see Him going up, believe on Him absent, hope for Him coming; but yet through His secret Mercy, feel Him present. For He who ascended into Heaven that He might be removed from your eyes, promised unto you, saying, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Matt. 28:20. Justly then the Apostle so addressed us, “The Lord is at hand; be careful for nothing.” Phil. 4:5, 6. Christ sitteth above the Heavens; the Heavens are far off, He who there sitteth is near.³

Dramatis Personae

These three psalms are almost like a chorus in a Greek drama. They allude to the story, but they especially reflect on and interpret the significance of the events. The characters of this grand drama are: God, the peoples of the world including the people of God, and those who oppose them. These characters receive various titles in Psalm 47.

God

God’s titles and attributions here include: God, Lord, Most High, Terrible/Feared/Awesome, Great King, Our King, King of all the Earth, God of Abraham, and Highly Exalted.

The title of “King” is recurrent, showing God as the all-powerful ruler of the world. He is called “a great king” and “king of all the earth.” This is in strong contrast to Sennacherib’s boastful claim in Isaiah 10:8, “For he says, ‘Are not my princes altogether kings?’”

But at the same time God is called “Lord” [יהוה] and “God of Abraham.” For believers, God is never just the God who is all-powerful, in control, ruling, the God of the First Article. He is always at the same time the covenant God of grace and mercy who delivers His people and comforts them with forgiveness and eternal life, the God also of the

³ Augustine: *Commentary on the Psalms*.

Second and Third Articles of the Creed: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; Maker, Redeemer, and Comforter.⁴

All of this together is what makes Him "awesome" (נֹרָא KJV "terrible," ESV "to be feared") and "Most High" (עֲלִיּוֹן), and "highly exalted" (מְאֹד נִעְלָה). After the Fall, Adam was afraid of God because of his sin, but even after the Promise was given, he had a reverent respect of God because of His mercy and forgiveness. This "fear of the Lord" (יִרְאֵת יְהוָה) is the beginning of wisdom; it is true Christian faith in the God of grace who loves His people (אֱהָב) and chooses our inheritance (יִבְחַר-לָנוּ אֶת-נַחֲלָתֵנוּ), the excellence of Jacob (גְּאוֹן יַעֲקֹב).

The Hebrew word נֹרָא means not only "something to be feared," but also "something that causes wonder and amazement." Translated as "awesome" in the NKJV, it is often used in verses that speak of God keeping His covenant, defending His people (Genesis 28:17; Exodus 34:10; Judges 13:6; Nehemiah 1:5, 9:32; many Psalms). But it does include the concept of causing fear and respect both among God's people and His enemies. The remaining Assyrians fled in fear.

Peoples/Nations/Earth

Three Hebrew words are used for peoples or nations in this psalm. At times, עַם or עַמִּים can be used to distinguish the people of God, but in this psalm it is used more generally. Likewise, גּוֹיִם is often used for the heathen or Gentiles, but this psalm does not make that distinction. The psalmist also makes use of a less frequent word for people: לְאָמִים. It may have the connotation of "common people," those "bound together." It is used mainly in poetry. Here again it is a general term, standing in parallel with עַמִּים. These terms are used quite interchangeably.

But we can discern three different aspects regarding peoples or nations in this psalm. The first is the people of earth as a whole. All peoples are enjoined to shout praise to God: "Oh, clap your hands, **all you peoples!**" and to acknowledge their ruler: The Lord "is a great King **over all the earth.**" "God is the King of **all the earth.**" "God reigns **over the nations.**" "The **shields of the earth** belong to God." God is the Creator. All peoples and nations of the whole earth belong to Him and

⁴ Matthew Henry speaks similarly: "The universal and absolute sovereignty of a holy God would be too terrible for us even to think of, were it not exercised by his Son from a mercy-seat; but now it is only terrible to the workers of iniquity. While his people express confidence and joy, and animate each other in serving him, let sinners submit to his authority, and accept his salvation."

are under His dominion. In the end, all people must acknowledge God as King; the believers do it willingly and joyfully. “Every knee shall bow” (Isaiah 45:23, Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10). This is also recorded after the defeat of the Moabites: “And the fear of God (פַּחַד אֱלֹהִים) was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel” (2 Chronicles 20:29).

A part of this whole group remains enemies of God in their fallen human state. They do not trust in God, or worship and acknowledge Him; in fact they persecute the true believers and they must be subdued. God will subdue (יַדְבֵּר) these peoples (עַמִּים) under us (believers), and the nations (לְאֻמִּים) under our feet. He reigns (מָלַךְ, becomes king) over the nations (גּוֹיִם).

The third aspect is the true believers, those who do acknowledge the Lord (יְהוָה) as the true God. These the psalmist calls “the people of the God of Abraham.” They are gathered in by God (according to the Third Article). The word used here is נִאָּסְפוּ. The Niphal is used, which is usually passive, but can also be reflexive/middle: “they were gathered” or “they gathered themselves together.” Clearly we know that God does the real gathering in and harvesting of souls, but then the “gathered” come together because they are renewed by the Holy Spirit. The Lord gathers (קָבַץ) people so that they might praise His name and rejoice in His victory. “Save us (הוֹשִׁיעֵנו), O Lord our God, And gather us (וְקַבְּצֵנוּ) from among the Gentiles, To give thanks to Your holy name, To triumph in Your praise” (Psalm 106:47).

הוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְקַבְּצֵנוּ מִן־הַגּוֹיִם
לְהַדוֹת לְאֵשׁ קִדְשְׁךָ לְהַשְׁתַּבַּח בְּתִהְלֹתֶיךָ

Isaiah 40:11 also speaks of God gathering the lambs with His arm (זְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה), the same outstretched arm (בְּזֹרְעוֹ יִקְבֹּץ), the same outstretched arm (זְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה) He used to lead them out of Egypt (Exodus 6:6). The expression is also used in the Pentateuch of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Aaron: each was “gathered to his people” (וַיִּאָּסֶף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ). The Church (ἐκκλησία) is by definition those “gathered,” those “called out;” or as the Lutheran Confessions say, “The sheep who hear the Master’s voice” (Smalcald Articles).

The God of Abraham calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies all peoples to share the faith of Abraham. But a question arises: Are the “nations” and “peoples” in general, and particularly the “Gentiles,”

gathered together *with* "the people of the God of Abraham," or do they *become* a true part of "the people of the God of Abraham"? The Jewish Soncino commentary seems to struggle with this issue:

The sense required is "together with the people of the God of Abraham," and the LXX supplies the preposition "with." Less probable is the suggestion to understand words like "to become" before *the people* (so A.V. [KJV] following Ibn Ezra). The mention of *Abraham* links the prophecy of the future with the promise of the past, that he was to become *father of a multitude of nations* (Gen. 17:4). "The obliteration of distinction between Israel and the nations, by the incorporation of the latter, so that the *peoples* become part of *the people of the God of Abraham*, floats before the singer's prophetic eye, as the end of God's great manifestation of Himself" (M[aimonedes?]).

But Saint Paul, the Hebrew of Hebrews and the Christian of Christians, is clear in reminding us that in God's New Covenant there is "neither Jew nor Greek" (Galatians 3:28), that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel" (Romans 9:6), and that Christ "has broken down the middle wall of partition" between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus Himself said, "There will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

Augustine also seems to think that this refers to the gathering-in of all nations to become the "people of the God of Abraham." He cites the conversation between the Jews who said, "We are Abraham's children," and Jesus who said, "If you are Abraham's children, then do the works of Abraham" (John 8:33, 39). Augustine understands that the "princes of the people" include the centurion whose servant Jesus healed. The centurion had said, "I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof," and Jesus concluded, "I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel" (John 7:7, 9).

One other note is that the "princes of the people" (נְדִיבֵי עַמִּים) and the "shields of the earth" (מְגִנֵי-אֶרֶץ) are included in the in-gathering that belongs to God. The parallel helps us understand "shields" as referring to leaders or those who hold the shield to govern and to protect, as also in Hosea 4:18 and Psalm 89:19 ("For our shield belongs to the Lord, And our king to the Holy One of Israel."). The church is gathered from all nations and tribes, and from all classes: "The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:3).

The Plot, The Action

Important action has already occurred, which is the occasion for the writing of the Psalm. A battle and victory have already taken place. An enemy has gathered against Israel, but they have been defeated. The trilogy of Psalms 46-48 is written as a comfort and assurance to God's people, and as a shout of victory and triumph.

Psalm 48 describes the gathering and the defeat of the enemy. The Soncino commentary summarizes this as a reversal of Caesar's boast. *Veni, vidi, vici* (*I came, I saw, I conquered*) becomes *Venerunt, viderunt, fugerunt* (*They came, they saw, they fled*).

- ⁴ For behold, the kings assembled,
 They passed by together.
⁵ They saw it, and so they marveled;
 They were troubled, they hastened away.
⁶ Fear took hold of them there,
 And pain, as of a woman in birth pangs,
⁷ As when You break the ships of Tarshish
 With an east wind.

Likewise Psalm 46 says:

- ⁶ The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved;
 He uttered His voice, the earth melted.
⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
 The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah
⁸ Come, behold the works of the Lord,
 Who has made desolations in the earth.
⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
 He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;
 He burns the chariot in the fire.

Psalm 47 describes some of God's actions both toward the enemies, and toward His believers.

- ³ He will subdue the peoples under us,
 And the nations under our feet.
⁷ For God is the King of all the earth
⁸ God reigns over the nations;
 God sits on His holy throne.

But particularly the description of the triumphant action of the Lord ("God has gone up with a shout") alludes to what had come before that, much like the words of Jesus and Paul: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:13); "He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things." (Ephesians 4:9).

It was particularly because man *could not ascend* on his own, but also because he had *tried to ascend* on his own that God chose to *descend*, to go down to earth, both to destroy and to deliver. At the tower of Babel mankind tried to ascend to heaven and make a name for themselves. This is when God says, **הָבֵה נִרְדָּה**; "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city" (Genesis 11:7-8). The people were not satisfied with the "city of God" (Psalm 46:4) with its river of gladness, the Jerusalem that is above (Galatians 4:26), and so they chose to build an earthly city to become powerful and famous. But we are reminded: "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

And so God descends in judgment and justice to "subdue the peoples under us, And the nations under our feet" (Psalm 47:3).

יְדַבֵּר עַמִּים תַּחְתֵּינוּ

וְלְאֻמִּים תַּחַת רַגְלֵינוּ

The verb **יְדַבֵּר** is the Hiphil imperfect. The root meaning of **דבר** is elusive: perhaps "drive" or "depart"? **דבר** is used most commonly in the Piel, simply to mean "speak." The Hiphil is used only here and in Psalm 18:47 (verse 48 in Hebrew) and its parallel in 2 Samuel 22, with almost the exact same phrase.

"It is God who avenges me, And subdues the peoples under me."

הָאֵל הַנּוֹתֵן נִקְמוֹת לִי וַיְדַבֵּר עַמִּים תַּחְתָּי Psalm 18:47

הָאֵל הַנּוֹתֵן נִקְמוֹת לִי וּמִוֹרִיד עַמִּים תַּחְתָּי 2 Sam 22:48

This is the Song of David after being delivered from his enemies including Saul. 2 Samuel uses **וּמִוֹרִיד** (Hiphil of **יורד**) for **יְדַבֵּר** but with the same meaning: to subdue, to cause to go down. The

Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon suggests a translation of “lead subject” or “put to flight,” and thus many translations use “subdue.” This resounds with the words of the Litany: “to beat down Satan under our feet,” and of course the Protevangelium: “He will bruise your head” (Genesis 3:15).

Such is the double-edged sword of Law and Gospel. God’s judgment on evildoers means deliverance for His people. God subdues the wicked to rescue those who trust and rely on Him. God’s will and purpose is always to save (1 Timothy 2:4). He will have mercy on His enemies if they turn from their evil ways (Ezekiel 33:11). “Jesus Christ shall subdue the Gentiles; he shall bring them as sheep into the fold, not for slaughter, but for preservation” (Matthew Henry).⁵

The psalmist also speaks of this “positive” Gospel activity of the Lord God of Israel. The Lord comes down to deliver His people: “He will choose our inheritance for us, The excellence of Jacob whom He loves” (Psalm 47:4). God’s essential activity is “love;” it is His essence. John simply states, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). The first time the word “love” (אהבה) is used in the Bible is Genesis 22 where God tells Abraham to take “his son, his only son, whom he loves” and sacrifice him on Mount Moriah. The first time it appears in the Gospel of John is in John 3:16.

This giving love is what God does for His people. The psalmist says that God “loves Jacob” and “will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob.” These forms all emphasize the concept of divine monergism, the teaching that God is the sole worker of salvation and that He gives it to us through the means of grace. God is the doer, the actor, the effecter of all these good things: He loves us and He chooses our inheritance. This is also in keeping with Jesus’ words: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16).

The holy land is called the pride, גִּבְעוֹת, of Jacob, as being the gracious gift, with which this, the people of divine love, can show itself off. (Also used in Amos 6:8, Nahum 2:3, Isaiah 13:19; Delitzsch.)

On the Last Day He will deliver to us the eternal inheritance, the eternal kingdom of heaven, the greater pride or excellence of Jacob.

⁵ “We are not to suppose that he here treats of that secret providence by which God governs the whole world, but of the special power which he exercises by means of his word; and, therefore, in order that he may be properly called a King, his own people must necessarily acknowledge him as such” (Calvin).

"Then the *King* will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, *inherit* the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34).

Jesus willingly came down to earth, earned our inheritance, and chose us who were "not a people" to be "His special people" (Exodus 19:6; Hosea 1:9-10; Romans 9:25-26; 1 Peter 2:9-10).⁶ And because Jesus lowered Himself—humbled Himself—God has also exalted Him, as summarized by Paul in Philippians 2:8-11.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This exaltation is stated powerfully and succinctly in the psalm: "God has gone up with a shout."

⁶ Ex. 19:6: "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Hos. 1:9 Then God said: "Call his name Lo-ammi,

For you are not My people, And I will not be your God.

10 "Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea,

Which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass

In the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people,"

There it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.'

Rom. 9:25 As He says also in Hosea:

"I will call them My people, who were not My people,

And her beloved, who was not beloved."

26 "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,'

There they shall be called sons of the living God."

1 Pet. 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Resolution

⁵ God has gone up with a shout,

עָלָה אֱלֹהִים בַּתְרוּעָה ⁶

The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

יְהוָה בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר

This “going up” is the key concept of the psalm and of the Ascension festival. The word עָלָה (“ascend” or “go up”) is pregnant for Hebrew speakers. One “goes up” to Jerusalem. The Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) bear the title: שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת. The whole burnt offering (עֹלָה) was something that “goes up” to heaven. In Modern Hebrew, immigration to Israel is called עֲלִיָּה, “going up.” The same term is used in a synagogue custom for calling someone up to the bema to read from the Torah.

While we can connect “going up” to each step of Christ’s exaltation, it particularly applies to His ascension into heaven, and being seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. After His work of atonement, Christ returned to His true heavenly home, His rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Christ’s being seated at the right hand of God is also alluded to in this psalm, for it says “God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.”

מָלַךְ אֱלֹהִים עַל-גּוֹיִם

אֱלֹהִים יָשָׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא קְדָשׁוֹ

The verbs here are simple perfect tense: God ruled; God sat (was king, מָלַךְ; was seated, יָשָׁב). But the context and the Soncino commentary suggest this as an act of ascending the throne after a victory:

Translate “hath become King ... hath taken His seat.” The Psalmist describes the effect of the victory. God had been King of the earth before, but His Sovereignty was confirmed by what He had achieved. Accordingly He seats Himself upon His throne, having established His right to it, to administer the affairs of men and nations. (Soncino)

Christians will see this as a parallel to Christ's return to the right hand of God the Father confessed in the Christian creeds: "He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

He hath obtained the kingdom. The prophet repeatedly informs us that God reigns over the Gentiles; and from this it is easy to gather that he here treats of a new and a previously unheard of manner of reigning (Calvin).

This also gives rise to a traditional symbol for the Ascension of our Lord, the cross (and often a crown) atop the orb, symbolizing Christ as ruler of all.



(<http://makingchrismons.com/templates/crosswcircle.gif>)

Christ once again is exalted, seated on the throne of heaven. From there He rules and governs His holy Christian Church. Jesus promised to prepare a place for us, and now we look forward to living in His dwelling places (mansions) and being citizens of the truly eternal city, the Jerusalem above. This also urges us to keep our minds set on things above, to look forward with joy to His final return when He will gather us in to eternal life.

It must be acknowledged once again that God is "Most High" (עֲלִיּוֹן) and "highly exalted" (מְאֹד נִעְלָה); He has gone up (עָלָה). The title "Most High" (עֲלִיּוֹן) is used first with Melchizedek the priest of God Most High. It can be a simple adjective, it can be joined to the name God or Lord, or it can stand alone as a designation of the true God, "the Highest," as in Gabriel's message to Mary: "The power of the Highest shall overshadow you" (Luke 1:35), and in the Benedictus, the Song of Zacharias: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest" (Luke 1:76).

From this position of authority and power ("All authority has been given to Me"; Matthew 28:18), Jesus continues to direct His Church with grace and authority. Because He sits in the seat of power and authority, He will come again to judge both the living and the dead

(Acts 10:42, 2 Timothy 4:1, 1 Peter 4:5, Nicene Creed), and His kingdom shall have no end (Luke 1:31, Nicene Creed).

He ascended to heaven because He “led captivity captive,” and so that He could give gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers:

⁸ Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.” ⁹ (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:8-13)

He is still “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). He makes intercession for us (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25).

Joy and Acclamation

Because God promised salvation, because Christ fulfilled and completed it, because the Holy Spirit brings it to us through the means of grace—we rejoice! The psalmist commands all the peoples to praise God. For Christians these commands are joyful exhortations, because the renewed Christian gladly and willingly expresses thanks and praise to God, though the old Adam is lazy and reluctant.

Clapping and shouting occur when a king ascends the throne. We use this Psalm to acclaim Jesus ascending the throne in heaven again. The Soncino commentary points to examples in 1 Samuel 10:24 (“All the people shouted and said: ‘Long live the king!’”) and 2 Kings 11:12 (“They clapped their hands and said: ‘Long live the king!’”). Delitzsch describes בְּתִרְוָעָה (from רִוַע) as a “triumphant shouting of the people.”

Trumpets sound the acclamation of victory, as in the days of Jehoshaphat: “So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets (בְּחִצְרוֹת), to the house of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 20:28). The voice or sound of the trumpet (קוֹל שׁוֹפָר)

is "the clear note of the war-trumpets proclaiming victory, with reference to the triumphal festivities in the valley of blessing and the procession homewards with resounding music (2 Chronicles 20:26f)" (Delitzsch). It also is a reminder of the trumpet that shall sound at the Last Day:

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:52, 53, 57)

The tight repetition of the command to "sing" and the word "God" are noteworthy in verses 6 and 7. Neale and Littledale see here a reference to the Trinity in the repetition of God, King, and God, and with each mention an emphatic double command to "sing." The psalm is called a "song" or **מְזוֹמֵר**, the essential root (**זמר**) probably meaning to "sing" or "hum" or "play a reed pipe."

⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises!

זַמְרוּ אֱלֹהִים זַמְרוּ ⁷

Sing praises to our King, sing praises!

זַמְרוּ לְמֶלֶכְנוּ זַמְרוּ

⁷ For God is the King of all the earth;

כִּי מֶלֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֱלֹהִים ⁸

Sing praises with understanding.

זַמְרוּ מִשְׂכִּיל

There are several expressions in this psalm for showing joy and praise: "clap your hands, shout with joy, sing, praise, sound the trumpet." These require hands, lips, and voices, but above all they require the heart and the soul to sing "with understanding." The command in verse 7 includes the word **מִשְׂכִּיל** which can mean a type of psalm, one put together with skill and knowledge, and one that teaches, a "didactic poem." The Messiah in Isaiah 52:13 is said to "deal wisely." The root **שכל** has to do with wisdom, knowledge, and insight.

A Christian's praise of God is not just ecstatic utterances, though it surely includes emotions. Every religion seems to have mystics⁷ who focus too often or too much on emotional impact. Examples are the Greek Orthodox monks on Mount Athos, Sufi Muslims, the whirling

⁷ Gene Veith's *Spirituality of the Cross* has a good discussion of moralism, speculation, and mysticism.

dervishes of Turkey, Buddhist monks, etc. But the psalmist says to sing “with understanding.” Our Lutheran Confessions say that the purpose of hymns and ceremonies is “that the unlearned may be taught” (Augsburg Confession 24:3). We sing to “declare His works” (Psalm 118:17, 145:4, etc.).

Pastor Koren speaks similarly about being disciples (learners) in order to sing God’s praise:

So then the prerequisite for us to rejoice rightly over Jesus’ ascension is that we are His disciples, that is, that we go to His school in which the Holy Spirit is the teacher and the Holy Scripture the textbook, that through the Holy Spirit we have learned and still learn to know Jesus Christ and to hear His Word and to take it to heart, to rely on it and be corrected by it—or in other words: to come to Christ and to believe in Christ our Lord. (Koren: Sermon for Ascension)

Augustine emphasizes singing with the understanding of faith in the true God:

“Sing ye praises with understanding.” He teacheth us and warneth us to sing praises with understanding, not to seek the sound of the ear, but the light of the heart. The Gentiles, whence ye were called that ye might be Christians, adored gods made with hands, and sang praises to them, but not with understanding. If they had sung with understanding, they had not adored stones. When a man sensible sang to a stone insensible, did he sing with understanding? But now, brethren, we see not with our eyes Whom we adore, and yet correctly ... “right in heart,” we adore. Much more is God commended to us, that with our eyes we see Him not. If with our eyes we saw Him, haply we might despise. For even Christ seen, the Jews despised; unseen, the Gentiles adored. (Augustine)

Calvin speaks similarly:

“That is, O every one of you who understandeth!” Dr. Adam Clarke reads, “Sing an instructive song;” and observes, “Let sense and sound go together. Let your hearts and heads go with your voices” is put in the singular number instead of the plural; for he invites to this exercise all who are skillful in singing. He, no doubt, speaks of knowledge in the art of music; but he

requires, at the same time, the worshippers of God to sing the praises of God intelligently, that there may not be the mere sound of tongues, as we know to be the case among the Papists. Knowledge of what is sung is required in order to engage in a proper manner in the singing of psalms, that the name of God may not be profaned, as it would certainly be, were there nothing more but the voice which melts away or is dissolved in the air.

God is most high. God has gone up with a shout. God is highly exalted.

The structure of the psalm seems to be (ABC D ABC):

- an exhortation to praise (v. 1: "clap your hands ... shout to God"),
- an acknowledgment of who God is (v. 2: "the Lord Most High is awesome ... a great King")
 - and what He does (v. 3-4: "He will subdue the peoples ... choose our inheritance");
 - a middle thematic statement (v. 5: "God has gone up with a shout");
- another exhortation to praise (v. 6: "sing praises, sing praises");
 - an acknowledgment of who God is (v. 7: "King over all the earth");
 - and what He does (v. 8-9: "God reigns, sits, is highly exalted").

The psalm closes once again with the declaration that God is "highly exalted." This brings us back to the basic theme of the psalm: "God has gone up with a shout," related also to Psalm 46:10 ("I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!") and Psalm 48:1-2 ("Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised In the city of our God, In His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, The joy of the whole earth").

Kretzmann's summary is quite good:

He is greatly exalted, since He conquers with the power of His majestic mercy, through the Word of His grace. There can be no doubt, from the entire song, that the reference is to Jehovah-God, to the Messiah, in the exaltation following His deep humiliation. This exaltation was particularly emphasized before men in His visible ascension, followed by His sitting at the right hand of God, His heavenly Father. As a consequence

and fruit of this exaltation He is continually adding new members to His spiritual Israel, to the congregation of believers, from all nations and peoples of the world, all of which unite in singing His praises, world without end. (Kretzmann)

This theme of exaltation fills our Ascension celebration. Consider the hymns we sing: “Crown Him with many crowns;” “The Head that once was crowned with thorns/ Is crowned with glory now.” The theme is also directed to us, to keep us heavenly-minded with hymns such as “Draw us to Thee,” and “On Christ’s Ascension I now build.”

1. Draw us to Thee in mind and heart,
On heav’nly things attending;
In spirit hence let us depart,
To Thee, O Lord, ascending.

2. Draw us to Thee, O Christ, and guide
Our erring feet to heaven;
If Thou, O Lord, with us abide,
Light to our path is given.

3. Draw us to Thee, O Thou whose love
The angels praise adoring;
Receive our souls to Thee above,
Thy name in death imploring.

4. Draw us to Thee, grant us to rise
To yon abodes of glory;
On Thee to rest our joyful eyes,
And fall in praise before Thee.
(ELH 581)

1. On Christ’s ascension I now build
The hope of mine ascension;
This hope alone has ever stilled
All doubt and apprehension;
For where the Head is, there full well
I know His members are to dwell
When Christ shall come and call them.

2. Since He returned to claim His throne,
Great gifts for men obtaining,
My heart shall rest in Him alone,
No other rest remaining;
For where my Treasure went before,
There all my thoughts shall ever soar
To still their deepest yearning.

3. O grant, dear Lord, this grace to me,
Recalling Thine ascension,
That I may ever walk with Thee,
Adorning Thy redemption;
And then, when all my days shall cease,
Let me depart in joy and peace
In answer to my pleading.
(ELH 392)

The Ascension of our Lord is a holiday quickly forgotten, even by regular churchgoers. In many European countries it is still a national holiday, but in America we don't have even that reminder. But we do still confess our Lord's Ascension every time we use the Apostles' or Nicene Creed. Because this event focuses our minds on "things above," we are wise to make the most of it, either on the day itself or the Sunday following. It is our promise of a heavenly home, so that we may live where Christ now lives, where He is preparing a place for us.

Perhaps a fitting close is simply to read the two collects for Ascension.

Grant, we beseech You, almighty God, that just as we believe Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind to heaven ascend, and continually dwell with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

O Jesus Christ, almighty Son of God, You are no longer in humiliation here on earth, but are seated at the right hand of Your Father, Lord over all things: We beseech You, send us Your Holy Spirit; give Your Church pious pastors, preserve Your Word, control and restrain the devil and all who would oppress

us; mightily uphold Your kingdom, until all Your enemies have been put under Your feet, that we may hold the victory over sin, death, and the devil; through You, who live and reign with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. [LSQ]

Some themes from the Trilogy of Psalms 46-48

Psalm 46

God is our refuge, strength, help
 God will help the city of God
 God makes desolations
 God makes wars cease; breaks the bow, cuts the spear, burns the chariot
 God is exalted (אָרוֹם) among the nations; exalted in the earth

Psalm 47

God is awesome, great King
 Over earth, over nations, over peoples
 God is Most High (עֲלִיּוֹן), gone up (עָלָה) with a shout, highly exalted (נִעְלָה)

Psalm 48

God is great, greatly to be praised
 In the city of our God
 Beautiful in elevation (נוֹרָה), the joy (מְשׁוֹשׁ) of the whole earth is Mount Zion,
 God is in her palaces
 God breaks the ships of Tarshish
 City of the Lord of hosts
 God will establish it.
 Her towers, her bulwarks, her palaces
 God will be our guide even to death.

He ascended after He first descended:

He has returned to His heavenly abode after descending to overthrow Assyria. The idea of His intervention in the earthly

domain is often conveyed in Scripture by the word descend, as e. g. in Gen. 11:5, 7. (Soncino)

The ascension of God presupposes a descent, whether it be to bear witness to Himself by giving promises (Gen. 17:22, Judg. 13:30) or to execute judgment as a conqueror (7:8, 68:19). So here: God has descended in order to fight for His people. The latter return to the holy city, and He to His royal throne, which is aloft upon Zion and, higher still, in heaven above. (Delitzsch)

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Musical setting: Ralph Vaughan Williams "O Clap Your Hands."

Objective Justification

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JUSTIFICATION IS THE CENTRAL DOCTRINE of the Christian Church. It is the article on which the Church stands or falls. Luther says:

The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all church doctrine and raises up our conscience before God. Without this article the world is utter death and darkness.... The doctrine of justification must, as I frequently urge, be diligently learned; for in it all the other articles of our faith are comprehended. And when that is safe, the others are safe too.¹

Luther of course did not mean that the Gospel is all that is necessary for church fellowship. Some liberals use this Luther quote to support “gospel reductionism.” Luther did not mean that the other doctrines do not matter as long as you keep the Gospel. The doctrine of justification is held up by props, and if one gives way, before long the whole thing tumbles down which has been demonstrated many times in church history.

Christian doctrine is like a pyramid. On the very pinnacle of that pyramid is the doctrine of justification. With a few exceptions, all

¹ Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, Vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 703.

doctrines either lead up to or down from the doctrine of justification. They are all either antecedent or consequential to the doctrine of justification. (To be sure not everyone will agree on the exact placement of every doctrine. Different opinions on the arrangement of doctrines are normally acceptable as long as there is agreement on the doctrines themselves and the analogy of faith).

What is the best title for the doctrine we are considering today? “Objective justification” is the most familiar title in our circles.² Francis Pieper used both “objective justification” and “objective reconciliation” as did our forefathers in the Synodical Conference. Our Catechism adds for explanation “general or objective justification.” Probably the main reason objective justification has been preferred is because it corresponds well with its counterpart, subjective justification.

Another title that has been used in our circles, almost interchangeably with objective justification, is “universal justification.” At first glance there seems to be no real difference between the two. Yet objective justification could be a term that Calvinists would accept. They would most definitely reject universal justification because that would fly in the face of their belief in limited atonement, but they could conceivably believe that God has objectively forgiven the sins of the elect. Siegbert Becker explains:

If justification is universal, it must of necessity be objective. For if the sins of all men have been forgiven in the heart of God, then men are forgiven by God whether they believe it or not. On the other hand, however, at least hypothetically, justification could be objective without being universal.³

The most popular title these days on the internet blogs⁴ is universal, objective justification, or simply UOJ. It’s probably the most orthodox but may be a bit long. For us I am not sure it makes much difference

² Siegbert Becker writes, “A theologian is free to use the terms or to avoid them. They are useful theological tools for those who understand the doctrine, but for those who do not understand they often only add to the confusion.... To debate about the use of the terms before we settle the simple question, ‘Has God forgiven the sins of all men?’ would therefore be a waste of time. If we could agree on the answer to that question the terms would cause us little difficulty.” (S.W. Becker, “Objective Justification” [essay delivered at the Chicago Pastoral Conference, Nov. 9, 1982], 1. <<http://www.wlsessays.net/node/130>>).

³ Siegbert W. Becker, “Universal Justification,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Winter 1986:1 <<http://www.wlsessays.net/node/142>>.

⁴ One example is Gregory Jackson’s Blog: <<http://ichabodthegloryhasdeparted.blogspot.com/>>.

whether we call it objective justification or universal justification or universal, objective justification. We all know what we are talking about.⁵ So for the sake of simplicity and familiarity we will use the title **Objective Justification**.

Definition

There are different ways of expressing the Gospel. The Gospel is like a diamond. It has many sides and angles that show a different aspect of its beauty. One expression of Gospel that is sometimes neglected is Christ's active obedience. There is much comfort derived from Christ's active obedience. Our life is never what it should be. Our past sins can come back to haunt us too. But Jesus fulfilled the Law in our place. He lived a perfect, sinless life and now He offers us His perfect record to claim by faith. When we do that God does not see our sins but Christ's perfect life instead.

Not only did Christ live a perfect life in our place (active obedience), but He also suffered the punishment for our every misdeed (passive obedience). Both were necessary for our salvation. Objective justification is built on both Christ's active and passive obedience. It ties everything together. It focuses on the end result, the bottom line, the sum total, the outcome of everything that Jesus has accomplished for our salvation. It answers the all-important question: What did Christ accomplish by His life, death, and resurrection? Objective justification says that because Christ lived a perfect life, died for the sins of the world, and rose again from the dead, the sins of the world are forgiven. The definition of objective justification is simply this: because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection God has forgiven the sins of all people, forgiven the sins of the world, whether they believe it or not. Former ELS Seminary President Dr. Wilhelm W. Petersen writes:

It is on the basis of Christ's redemptive work that God the Father has declared the world forgiven and this declaration is apart from and prior to faith. Our faith has absolutely nothing to do with this universal declaration. We have been forgiven whether we believe it or not. True, the forgiveness will not benefit us unless we believe it, but the fact remains that we have been declared forgiven.⁶

⁵ We are blessed in our WELS-ELS fellowship where all our clergy agree that sins of world are forgiven in Christ.

⁶ Wilhelm W. Petersen, "The Birth that Gave Rebirth to the Doctrine of Justification," 1983 Synod Convention Essay, *Synod Report*, 1983, 48.

There is one very important matter we need to include when we consider objective justification. When we say the sins of the world are forgiven, it is very important that we remember that the basis of this forgiveness is Christ and His atoning sacrifice. When we do that we distinguish ourselves from the universalists.

God did not forgive the sins of the world simply because He decided one day to overlook the sins of the world. It was not like what a parent might say to their child, “What you did was wrong but I will let you by this time—but if it ever happens again...” No, there was a cost. God is a holy and just God who cannot overlook sin. His justice demands that every single one of our sins be punished but that punishment was suffered by another, the God-man Jesus Christ. The sins of the world were all funneled down on Jesus and He suffered and died; He shed His blood in our place. Some universalists will agree that the sins of the world are forgiven but they leave Christ and His atoning sacrifice out of it. They reject Christ’s atoning sacrifice because they assume that this would make God into something unbecoming of Him, a blood-thirsty tyrant, and that this makes Christianity into a “blood religion” that only ignorant and un-enlightened people believe.

Objective justification tells us that the sins of the world are forgiven. But there was someone who was not forgiven by God’s grace, and that was Jesus. There was no mercy, no forgiveness for Him. Though He was essentially innocent, He became guilty, guilty of the world’s sins imputed to Him. For as Apostle Paul says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21)⁷. And St. Peter writes, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

Scripture

What does the Bible say? We learned in seminary, “Whatever is not scriptural is not theological.” And when we examine the Scriptures we find that this doctrine is very clearly taught. The *sedes* for objective justification is 2 Corinthians 5:19: “That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.” Not to count their sins against them can mean nothing else than to forgive their sins. Siegbert Becker writes, “The only possible antecedent

⁷ All Scripture references are taken from the NIV 1984.

of ‘their’ in that sentence is ‘the world,’ and the world certainly includes all men.”⁸

St. Paul is also very clear when he writes in Romans 3:22–24, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” A key word here is “all.” All have sinned and all those sinners are justified—there is no difference, St. Paul says. Richard Balge writes, “All have sinned. The verb ‘justified’ has the same subject, ‘all.’ The verdict of righteousness applies to ‘all,’ because ‘all’ have sinned. Yes, ‘when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son (Rom 5:10).’ All sinners, all enemies, all justified, all reconciled.”⁹

Another passage from Scripture in support of objective justification is Romans 5:18: “Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification¹⁰ that brings life for all men.” In his commentary on this verse the 17th-century Lutheran dogmatician John Gerhard writes, “By raising [Christ] from the dead, [God] absolved him from our sins which had been imputed to Him, and therefore He also absolved us in Him, that Christ’s resurrection might thus be the cause and the proof and the completion of our justification.”¹¹

Again Paul writes in Romans 4:5, “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Who is justified? The “wicked,” “the ungodly” or “the unbeliever” are all legitimate translations.

Finally, a passage we all know well. It is a passage we sing in our liturgy every Sunday where John the Baptist tells us in no uncertain terms whose sins are forgiven in Christ. In John 1:29 he points to Jesus on the banks of Jordan and says, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Jesus is not just a picture of a man with long hair and a beard hanging on the wall. He is objective justification personified. When we think of Jesus that is what we should think of: “The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

⁸ Becker, “Objective Justification,” 4.

⁹ Richard D. Balge, “Justification—A Brief Study” (essay delivered at the Wisconsin Association of Lutheran Educators, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Oct. 26, 1984), 1.

¹⁰ The Greek word used here for justification is a forensic act, a declaration of innocence, an acquittal in God’s courtroom.

¹¹ J. Gerhard, *Annotationes in Epistolam Rom.*, ed. Jenae 1666, 156.

Luther and the Confessions

Some make the claim that objective justification is something new, not taught by Luther or the Lutheran Confessions. And to be sure the term objective justification or any derivative of it is not found in Luther's writings or in the Lutheran Confessions. But yet it is clearly taught in both.

Luther writes:

Even he who does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it.... He who does not accept what the keys give receives, of course, nothing. But that is not the key's fault. Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel is not true or effective. A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king's fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it.¹²

Luther also writes, "One should preach the forgiveness of sins in his name. This is none other than to preach the Gospel, which announces to all the world that in Christ the sins of the whole world are swallowed up, that he died to take our sins away from us and that he rose to devour them and wipe them out, so that all who believe this have such hope and assurance."¹³

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession says that refusing to believe that our sins are forgiven is the same as accusing God of being a liar.¹⁴ Melancthon writes, "If anybody, therefore, is not sure that he is forgiven, he denies that God has sworn to the truth; a more horrible blasphemy than this can not be imagined."¹⁵

Again Luther writes in the Large Catechism under the fifth petition: "Therefore there is here again great need to call upon God and to pray: Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses. Not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness before we prayed or ever thought

¹² Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Volume 40, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 366f.

¹³ St. L. 11, 693.

¹⁴ Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 190:62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 196:94.

about it). But this is to the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness.”¹⁶

One of the clearest statements in the Book of Concord on objective justification is recorded in the Formula of Concord, on the doctrine of election: “That through Christ the human race has truly been redeemed and reconciled with God and that by his innocent obedience, suffering, and death Christ has earned for us ‘the righteousness which avails before God and eternal life.’”¹⁷

Faith

Each doctrine is one complete whole but it can also have different sides and angles. And it has been necessary for the church to dissect a doctrine in great detail in order to keep the whole undefiled and to expose false doctrine as Martin Chemnitz has done in his classic *The Two Natures of Christ*.

Scripture teaches that there is only one Christ but that the one Christ also has two natures: God and man. The Athanasian Creed says, “Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Essence; but by unity of Person.”

The same could be said of the doctrine of justification. There is only one justification. But yet when we examine the Scriptures we see that there are two sides to that one justification: objective justification and subjective justification.

Scripture uses justification in the objective sense as we have seen. Again Paul says in Romans 3:22–24, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Here Paul is clearly using justification in the objective sense. He says “[all] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” If you interpreted this verse to refer only to those who believe the Gospel (subjective justification), you would have to conclude that the Bible teaches universalism. And nowhere is it taught in Scripture that “all” will come to faith. Likewise the same could be said of Romans 5:18: “Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for

¹⁶ Ibid., 432:88.

¹⁷ Ibid., 619:15.

all men.” Again “all” is used both for the condemnation of men and for the justification of men.

Scripture also teaches a subjective justification. Again the apostle Paul writes in Romans 3:28, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” In this passage he does not use the word “all” but “a man” is justified by faith.” Only those who believe the gospel are justified subjectively. But faith always has an object and that object is Christ Jesus and the objective justification he achieved.

Both objective and subjective justification need to be taught together. If you leave one or the other out no one will be saved. Former WELS President Mischke writes:

A word of caution may, however, be in place. It may be well to remind ourselves not to divide “objective” and “subjective” justification as if they were two totally different things which can be treated in isolation from one another. They are rather the two sides of the same coin, and there can be no “saints” or salvation without faith. To teach otherwise would indeed be universalism.¹⁸

Both objective and subjective justification need to be taught together for anyone to be saved. Paul writes in Romans 5:1–2, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” Subjective justification clings in faith to objective justification—“by faith we gain access into this grace.” What is “this grace” that faith gains access into? It is something else. It is outside of us. It is Christ’s objective justification.

The sins of the world are forgiven in Christ but that does not mean that the whole world will be in heaven or that everyone is a Christian. In order for us to benefit from objective justification faith in the Savior is necessary. The writer to the Hebrews says, “For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Hebrews 4:2).

Faith is necessary but only as the empty hand that receives the forgiveness of sins. Faith is not what brings the forgiveness of sins into existence. Our faith is not like some kind of magical genie that brings the forgiveness of sins into existence. The forgiveness must already be

¹⁸ C.H. Mischke, *The President's Newsletter WELS*, June 1982.

there before there can be faith. If it were not already there what is faith to believe?¹⁹ Ylvisaker writes in *Grace For Grace*:

The controversy on the doctrine of absolution soon brought out the fact that the real difference between the Norwegian Synod and its opponents lay in the question: What is the Gospel? The opponents, in accordance with the errors of Pietism, made the Gospel conditional on man's faith in such a way that without faith there was in reality no Gospel either,—as if without the seeing eye there would be no sun.²⁰

The Norwegian Synod Church Father Herman Amberg Preus also writes the following in his essay “The Justification of the World:”²¹

According to his new gospel the professor²² must preach that through his suffering and death Christ has only accomplished so much that God has now become *willing* to let his wrath cease and to be reconciled and to loose, confer grace, forgive, justify and open access to salvation, but that in actuality he can only do and does all this if man on his part fulfills the condition placed on him by God, namely that he *is supposed to believe*. And the thing which is thus supposed to be believed does not become this that God already *has* done this and *is reconciled* but that

¹⁹ Jon Buchholz writes, “We must understand that faith doesn't create anything new. Faith doesn't bring anything into existence that doesn't already exist. Faith doesn't cause something to happen. Faith simply grasps—trusts—something that already is in place. Faith grasps the objective reality of God's completed salvation in Christ” (“Justification Expounded by Scripture,” an essay delivered at the 58th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Assembled at Martin Luther College New Ulm, Minnesota, July 26, 2005).

²⁰ S.C. Ylvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace* (Mankato, Minnesota: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), 161.

²¹ The question also comes up: Who was first to use the term objective justification in America? It may have been H. A. Preus. Even though rationalism had begun to make inroads in Norway the Norwegians had been nurtured in Lutheran orthodoxy for the better part of two centuries. S. Becker has an interesting comment: “In Scandinavia it is customary on the part of some to ridicule universal justification with the remark, “The damned lie in hell with their forgiven sins” (“Objective Justification”). Also the Norwegian Synod was dealing with the “absolution controversy” which they brought before the Synodical Conference seeking their advice and support.

²² The professor Preus speaks of is Professor August Weenaas, President of Augsburg College, Conference of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, which later became The United Church.

God will do it and *will be reconciled* when he sees the obedience and the good quality in man, that he believes. . . .

Besides, if the blessed message that God is not angry but has forgiven people must not be proclaimed to people before they have already come to faith, then people surely have no forgiveness to believe in and with which to comfort themselves, even if they wanted to and could believe. Thus, therefore, according to Professor Weenaas' teaching, the manner of people believing their sin's forgiveness becomes an impossibility.²³

Preus goes on to say the professor gives faith an un-evangelical meaning.

H. A. Preus was right. Our faith does not bring the forgiveness of sins into existence. On the contrary it is the forgiveness of sins that brings our faith into existence. Our Catechism has a name for it: the means of grace. St Paul writes, "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? . . . Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:14, 17). And as Luther writes in the Small Catechism, the explanation of the Third Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."²⁴ We also sing in one of our hymns:

Jesus gives us true repentance,
By His Spirit sent from heaven;
Whispers this transporting²⁵ sentence,
"Son, thy sins are all forgiven."

²³ H. A. Preus, "The Justification of the World," trans. Pastor Herbert Larson, February 13, 1874, <<http://www.christforum.org/Papers/preuspapers.html>>.

²⁴ ELS Catechism 2001, The Creed, 128.

²⁵ Pastors and many laymen have had the opportunity to share the Gospel with a dying person and have witnessed the faith generating power of the means of grace. Some time ago I was called to the deathbed of a man who was very uncertain about his salvation. He was very restless. It was clear to me that he did not need to hear the Law. So I shared the Gospel with him. I told him that in Christ all his sins are forgiven. I quoted several Gospel Bible passages. He grabbed my hand and squeezed it tight for a long time. "Really Pastor, really Pastor?" he said. "Yes," I said, "that's what the Bible says, 'your sins are forgiven too.'" Again and again he squeezed my hand and said "Thank you pastor, thank you pastor." No, I didn't tell him that he had to decide to accept Jesus' forgiveness. That would have changed everything. I just whispered that transporting sentence, the Gospel, the means of grace and faith was generated in his heart.

Faith He grants us to believe it,
Grateful hearts His love to prize;
Want we wisdom? He must give it,
Hearing ears and seeing eyes.²⁶

In human relationships one person sins against another person. Sometimes the person sinned against forgives the other person. Whether that person believes or accepts the forgiveness has nothing to do with the fact that he is forgiven. The person who sinned had no part in the other person forgiving him. The forgiveness came from the heart of the person sinned against. Walther writes, “You have quite grievously insulted some one: The recollection of your act torments you and you desire pardon and the restoration of friendship with the person you have insulted.... The insulted party must tell you that he has forgiven you.... ‘Your action was indeed abominable but all has been forgiven; cheer up (he says to you) we want to be friends again.’ Then you will know, do you not?—that he has forgiven you. Our case with God is identical with this.”²⁷

We sinned against God. The whole human race sinned against God. God says, “I forgive you: I forgive the whole human race.” That is the Gospel pure and simple. Just as it is in human relationships when one person sins against another person, God says to the whole world, “I forgive you.” You may not believe it but that doesn’t change what God has determined in His heart.

We sinned against God and He says to us, “I forgive you.” In fact God conveys those words to you in a very direct and personal way through His called servant at every communion service when the pastor says to you, “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”²⁸ For as Luther says in the Small Catechism, “Confession consists of two parts: one, that we confess our sins, the other, that we receive absolution or forgiveness, from the pastor or confessor as from God Himself, and in no way doubt, but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.”²⁹

²⁶ TLH 358, “Lamb of God, We Fall Before Thee,” vss. 3–4.

²⁷ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), 184.

²⁸ TLH, 16.

²⁹ ELS Catechism 2001, *The Office of the Keys and Confession*, 196.

Conclusion

In the end objective justification is about something very practical, something very subjective, something very devotional. It is about the certainty of salvation. Probably no one could say it better than Siegbert Becker:

Wherever men teach that faith comes first as a condition that must be fulfilled or a work that must be done or even as a fact that must be recognized before forgiveness is bestowed or becomes real, men will be trained to look into their own hearts for assurance rather than to the words and promises of God. If my sins are forgiven only if I first have faith then I have no solid foundation on which to rest my hope for eternal life. I must then know that I have faith before I can know that my sins are forgiven....

In times of temptation when I am no longer aware of my faith, when my heart tells me that I am an unbeliever, I have no place to turn for assurance if faith must come before forgiveness. But if forgiveness comes first, if it is always there, if it is true whether I believe it or not, I do not need to know whether I have faith or not before I can cling to God's promise. I know that my sins are forgiven whether I feel forgiven or unforgiven. I know that my iniquity is pardoned whether I believe it or not. And when I know that, then I know also that I am a believer. John teaches us that when he writes, "Brethren, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things."³⁰

Finally, the whole life of a Christian is to look to Jesus—to look to the Christ outside of us not the Christ in us—to look to "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." For as St. Paul says in Colossians 3:1-3, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." In the Lord Jesus all our needs will be met in this life too. Again the Apostle Paul writes, "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). LSQ

³⁰ Becker, "Objective Justification," 13.

Understanding Latin American Religious Culture and Assumptions

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WHAT A LASTING IMPACT FOR my pastoral ministry, when 36 years ago the assignment committee of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary sent me out as the 1975 Latin American vicar! This meant first learning Spanish by immersion for six months at a language school in Guadalajara, Mexico, then spending a few months in Juarez, Mexico, waiting for a visa to Colombia, and finally working in Medellin, Colombia. What a memorable and significant year! Every call the Lord gave me since has been affected by the experience. With the exception of the 10 years spent in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, where my personal contact with Hispanics was extremely limited, it has been my joy to minister at least part time to those whose primary language is Spanish.

After seminary I was assigned to Cutler Ridge Lutheran Church in Miami, Florida, a location which provided the opportunity to begin work on behalf of the WELS among Cuban-Americans in Little Havana. (Subsequent missionaries to Miami moved this embryonic work forward and after many intermediate renditions the current Hispanic ministry takes the form of Divine Savior Lutheran in Doral, Florida, a growing bilingual congregation with a school of over 400 students.) After teaching Spanish and the Word of God for two years at California Lutheran High School and then spending a brief respite on a farm back in Minnesota, in 1988 I entered the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, serving Mexican-Americans as a part of Christ the

King Lutheran Church in Bell Gardens, California. Most recently it has been my joy to work among the largely Puerto Rican community in Kissimmee, Florida. (Only lately did I realize that this sequence of calls has given me the opportunity to work with the three major single-country Hispanic populations in the United States – Mexicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans.)

Of these three groups, Mexicans comprise far and away the largest segment of Hispanics in the 48 contiguous states (64%), followed by Puerto Ricans (9%), and Cubans (3.5%). (All other Central and South America Hispanics together comprise the other 23.5%.) The statistics from the 2010 US census reveal phenomenal growth in numbers of Hispanics in the past ten years. There were 43% more in 2010 than 2000. Hispanics now comprise 16.3% of the overall US population—just under 50,000,000 people. California and Texas lead the way with populations which are 37.6% Hispanic, largely Mexican-American. Arizona is 29.6% Hispanic, again mostly Mexican-American. Florida is 22% Hispanic, with Puerto Ricans dominating central Florida and Cuban-Americans leading the way in south Florida and Tampa Bay. There are Hispanics in every state. In the Midwest the percentages range anywhere from 4% in Michigan, and 5% in Iowa and Minnesota, to 6% in Wisconsin and 16% in Illinois. (See Appendices A & B for Hispanic populations in cities, towns, and states served by the ELS.)

Though I am no great authority on the cultural traits which these groups share in common or the unique cultural issues which divide them, I hope that some observations I have made through the years and the research done in preparation for this paper will provide you with something useful for your ministry.

Hispanic Cultural Roots

We might think that all Hispanic Americans have the same culture. We would be wrong. Hispanics are far from a homogeneous group. Each country and area of origin has its distinctive qualities. There are even vocabulary usage differences from one country to the next. In addition to these variations, second- and third-generation American Hispanics, no matter where they originate, tend to become Americanized. Unless they expend some real effort, they begin to lose the cultural traditions which their parents worked hard to instill in them.

In general we can say that Latin American culture has its roots where all cultures have theirs—the Garden of Eden and the fall into sin, the subsequent dispersion after the flood, the scattering which took

place after the Tower of Babel and all the subsequent cultural development of a divided world. Sin brought separation—from God and from other people. The world after the Tower of Babel was divided not only by language, but by the resulting cultural gap.

After many centuries God poured out the Holy Spirit on the New Testament church and showed powerfully his ability to overcome the language barrier by moving the apostles to “speak in other tongues [languages] as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4; NIV 84). Later, through the Apostle Paul, God made it clear that it was also within his will and ability to overcome cultural barriers. Paul wrote, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22; NIV 84). Paul learned about and adjusted to the people to whom he reached out with the gospel. Still today, a part of becoming all things to all people is to be observant and learn the things about people which we might want to know or become or adapt to in order to reach them with the gospel.

Today, then, we turn our attention to Hispanic religion and culture in particular, not just to understand them, but to attempt to become more adept at bridging whatever barriers there may be between us and this large portion of the American population. Though knowing the Spanish language is a great help, it is not absolutely necessary, since much of the Hispanic population is bilingual and much of the adjustment has more to do with culture than language.

History of Latin American Religion and Culture

To some degree understanding the current culture of Latin America means having some grasp of the unique place that people from the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal) had in the history of the settlement of central and South America, especially as compared to areas settled by other Europeans.

The settlement of the Western Hemisphere began in the Indies (as the area was called by Spanish explorers). Its settlement by Latinos¹ extends back at least a century further than the settlement of North America. As evidence of this, just consider the founding dates of several major western hemisphere cities: Santo Domingo, 1494; San Juan, 1508; Havana, 1515; San Salvador, 1525; Guadalajara, 1533; Lima, 1535;

¹ Though there is no certainty about the distinction between “Latino” and “Hispanic,” it seems that “Latino” may have the broader meaning of the two (those of Latin descent), embracing at least also the Portuguese language and culture, whereas “Hispanic” includes only the influence of Spain.

Buenos Aires, 1536; Santiago, 1541; and then finally after all this and almost a century after the first settlements, Saint Augustine, Florida, 1565.² By contrast, we accept that the first official Anglo settlement in America was Jamestown in 1607.

What was happening in Latin America a century before North America began to be settled? Colonization! It lasted for more than three centuries, twice as long as in North America. During these centuries the *conquistadores* (conquerors), who were sent as representatives of both the Spanish government and the Roman Catholic Church, were charged with carrying out the *repartimiento* (partitioning) of lands into many *encomiendas* (trusts). These enormous inland estates with tens of thousands of Indians living on each of them produced great wealth for their Spanish conquerors. As part of the agreement with the Roman church, these *conquistadores* agreed to make arrangements to at least try to convert the Indians to Catholicism. The *conquistador* fortunate enough to become an *encomendero* (trustee) would have at least one village over which he was lord. As an example, Hernán Cortés oversaw a plantation comprising a population of one hundred thousand Indians.

Encomiendas were originally granted only for one lifetime. However, as years went by, fathers began to pass them on to their sons. Some of these *encomiendas* remained in a family for centuries. An estate in Bolivia was not sold and divided until the first half of the 20th century.³

Because Spanish women were not a significant part of the early colonization, men tended to take indigenous women as wives. Hence, Latin America became an area with a huge *mestizo* or *mezclado* (mixed) population which continues to this day. Because of this, even today those called “Hispanics” range from pure Spaniards to those who have little or no biological connection to Spain at all, sharing only the language and culture.

The template of the Latin American colony was that of life centered in the community in a setting where the climate permitted outdoor assembly most of the time. Hence, we see one of the great elements of Latin American culture being the town square with its daily activity.

In the center (of the Hispanic village) was the rectangular plaza, perhaps the most perdurable feature that Spain brought to America, perhaps more important to everyone than the Spanish language itself. In the United States, where rapid growth

² Gernán Arciniegas, *Latin America: A Cultural History*, tr. Joan MacLean (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1967), 130-131.

³ *Ibid.*, 125.

became a stampede, where there was no time for anything but joining the rush westward, the main artery was a “Broadway” or a “Main Street,” a freeway. In Spanish America the colony sat down. The plaza was the setting for the fairs, the center of life and leisure, the stage for religious and civil functions. In the shade of the trees on the plaza petty plots were woven, politics was conducted, justice and injustice were done, and people dreamed. The fruits of the earth were sold and butchers spread their awnings. The two buildings on the colonial plaza directly opposite each other—the church and the town hall—were the principal symbols present there.⁴

Yes, the central square of the city was the center of life, including church and government, and at least before independence was gained, those in authority were not democratically elected, rather benevolent father figures. This explains the following Hispanic attitude:

Generally speaking, Latin Americans are taught from an early age to accept authority from their parents and elders . . . and are more apt to rely on authority structures to deal with uncertainty than to attempt to find other types of solutions. Historically, this likelihood may derive from the *patrón* relationships common on Latin American plantations and ranches. . . . *Patrones* were expected to take a personal interest in the welfare of workers and their families, addressing them by first names, caring for them when they were ill, participating or contributing to their celebrations, and so on. Often the *patrón* served as godfather for the children of the royal workers.⁵

From all this colonial history we can glean some common elements which still linger, at least to some degree, in Latin American culture to this day.

1. Roman Catholicism became and remains the predominant religion.
2. Government and religion were closely intertwined, at least up to the time of independence.

⁴ Ibid., 136–137.

⁵ Richard L. Wiseman and Robert Shuter, *Communicating in Multinational Organizations* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publication, 1994), 79.

3. People whose lives were governed essentially by feudal lords tended to develop a reliance on authority figures, relying less on independent thought.
4. City squares, as government and church centers, served to draw together the community in a spirit which endures to this day.
5. Natives were not placed on reservations. They were assimilated into the society at large.

Roman Catholicism and the Religion of the Hispanic World

During the period of the *encomiendas*, the Roman Catholic missionary tried to come close to the Indian and to win his confidence insofar as he did not endanger his own soul in so doing. It was generally agreed that the missionary might adopt the language, the dress, and the customs of the catechumens to the extent that they did not conflict with Christianity.⁶ The reality was that the missionaries to a great degree adapted Catholicism to fit the practices of the indigenous peoples and African slaves. (E.g. *Santería* merges the Yoruba religion brought from Africa with Roman Catholic and native Indian traditions.) Significant among the adaptations were the so-called miraculous appearances of the virgin Mary in almost every area of Latin America. In part this was a purposeful plan to attract the natives by using astounding signs. The most famous appearance of the virgin was that of Our Lady of Guadalupe to the native Juan Diego on December 9, 1531, in what is now Mexico City, the site of the great cathedral of Guadalupe. How convenient that each nation or area had its own Virgin Mary appearance! All of this together worked to make Roman Catholicism the religion which basically saturated and had almost absolute influence and power in Latin America.

I can still recall the day in 1976 on which Missionary Roger Sprain and I were conducting a Sunday evening Bible class in a storefront in the small village of La Estrella, just outside Medellín. The local Catholic priest, who held much power over the people, began to walk through the streets shouting that the people should not go to listen to us. The reality was that some people came anyway, but there was great pressure not to.

The pressure to remain Roman Catholic is far less for the American Hispanic. Nonetheless, the common opinion that American Hispanics are still mostly Roman Catholic is to a large extent true. In a 2007 scientific survey of Hispanic Americans by Pew Research (see Appendix C),

⁶ Arciniegas, 148.

68% still identified themselves as Roman Catholic. 20% identified themselves as Protestants with most of those being Pentecostal. When you add the Pentecostals to the 54% of Hispanic Catholics in America who identified themselves as charismatic, you realize that more than half of Hispanic Christians prefer some kind of identifiable Holy Spirit experience. The Pew Research seems accurate when it concludes, “By an overwhelming majority (82%), Hispanics cite the desire for a more direct, personal experience with God as the main reason for adopting a new faith. Among those who have become evangelicals, nine-in-ten (90%) say it was this spiritual search that drove their conversion. A majority of evangelical converts (61%) say the typical Catholic mass is not lively or exciting, although only about one-in-three (36%) cite that as a reason for their conversion.”⁷

One thing which this research seems to show is that we should not conclude that Hispanic Americans are so difficult to reach with a message different from that of Roman Catholicism, that it is virtually impossible to have success among them. Many of them are searching for something more meaningful. True, too many of them follow emotionally after the “spiritual experience” offered by the Pentecostals, but the true spiritual experience of Word and Sacrament also has great impact. In Puerto Rico, for example, Lutheranism has been quite successful and therefore a good number of those who resettle on the mainland search out Lutheran congregations. Unfortunately many of these are liberal Lutherans and need to be “untaught” when they discover our churches.

Personally I enjoy the challenge of building interest in sound doctrine and good Lutheran liturgical worship, albeit with a twist of “Latin” flavor. Former Roman Catholics seem to be ready in many cases to focus on the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. At the same time they enjoy an atmosphere where, in addition to singing great Lutheran hymns, they are able to sing and play the hymns and other good Christian music with a “Latin” sound. Only recently we added some traditional Puerto Rican rhythm instruments to the service, something which has been well received.

Family (Familia) and Community (Comunidad)

A large part of reaching out to Hispanics is to recognize that traditionally the Hispanic family is a close-knit group and the most

⁷ *Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion*, 2007, Pew Research Center. <http://pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Demographics/hispanics-religion-07-final-mar08.pdf>.

important social unit. The term *familia* usually goes beyond the nuclear family. The Hispanic “family unit” includes not only parents and children but also extended family and to some degree even the community of Hispanics. In most Hispanic families, the father is the head of the family, and the mother is responsible for the home. Individuals within a family have a moral responsibility to aid other members of the family experiencing financial problems, unemployment, poor health conditions, and other life issues. Three or more generations are often living together in one home.⁸

Elders have an honored status in the Hispanic family. Family members look to them for advice. An individual who becomes sick will turn first to family members, especially elders, for support, comfort, and advice. Women are revered, often protected, because the solidarity of the family unit depends on their well being.

Historically, in all but the wealthiest homes, children share not just bedrooms, but beds. Even today, Hispanic immigrant families believe that young children should sleep with siblings and/or parents.⁹ Discipline seems never to involve any form of spanking. Children are simply taught right from wrong and perhaps hear stories from their parents which they are supposed to apply to themselves and learn how to behave. Hispanic families instill in their children the importance of honor, good manners, and respect for authority and the elderly. Preserving the Spanish language within the family is a common practice in many Hispanic homes.

Family ties are so strong that when someone travels to another town or city to study or for a short visit (e.g., vacation, business, medical reasons), staying with relatives or even with friends of relatives is a common practice. Families often gather together to celebrate holidays, birthdays, baptisms, first communions, graduations, and weddings.

I would like to share a little story about *familia* which occurred on May 28 of last year in our congregation. Beatriz, mother and grandmother of the household, had suffered a stroke in early April. She temporarily lost the use of her right side, but with prompt administration of a wonder drug and quick care, she recovered almost completely. After her hospitalization and subsequent multi-week stay in a nursing care center, she was to return home on Saturday, May 28. Her daughter invited lots of people—family, friends and church family—to be at the

⁸ Ann W. Clutter and Ana Claudia Zubieta, “Understanding Latino Culture,” The Ohio State University Extension, Family and Consumer Sciences Fact Sheet. 2009, <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/5237.html>.

⁹ http://www.ehow.com/about_6632752_child-rearing-practices.html.

home to welcome Beatriz back to the fold. She planned hymn singing, prayers, and testimony from Beatriz about what the Lord had done in her life. She prepared lots of food. There were even brief videos emailed from extended family and friends in Puerto Rico who were unable to be present in person.

When I first heard of this plan, I thought that maybe Beatriz would not be too thrilled to have the house filled with people upon her return home from a long recovery. I was wrong. She cherished the experience and seemed elated that so many turned out to show their love and concern in her hour of need. She was reassured that she was loved.

Generally, the strong Hispanic family provides a great opportunity for a pastor to become part of the family at times like this. Weddings and *quinceañera* celebrations (religious ceremony and celebration for a girl on her 15th birthday who is officially entering womanhood) are also good. Building a relationship with a Hispanic family often means that you are building a relationship with a wider network even beyond the immediate family. And fortunately there is always plenty of time to get to know people, since family events tend to develop slowly and last for hours.

Hospitality (Hospitalidad)

Closely associated with the tight-knit Hispanic family is opening the home to others. Though the family is indeed tight-knit, there is plenty of room for strangers. The phrase “*mi casa es su casa*” is in fact very true.

It is for this reason that I have found that canvassing and visiting in Hispanic non-gated neighborhoods to be much more productive these days than canvassing in general. There is almost universal hospitality shown. Many times I am invited in, asked to sit down and offered food and drink. This invitation I graciously accept, because it is expected. In some cases I know I may be experiencing the beginning of a more lasting relationship.

True, not every contact will be productive. No matter how hospitable people may be, they may not be interested in what I have to offer. However they will not say this to my face. Hence, another characteristic somewhat related to Hispanic hospitality is the polite promise. It seems that even more than people in general, Hispanics seem unwilling to offend in any way. They would rather make a promise they do not intend to or cannot keep than offend. They will say, “Yes, we will see you at church,” when in fact they are not planning to come.

Formality and Familiarity

The Spanish language contains the polite and familiar forms of “you” for a reason. The language reflects what the culture still demands. When meeting someone for the first time or speaking with an elder, you must be very polite and formal. A firm handshake is a common practice between people, as when meeting and saying good-bye for men or women. However, after friendships are established, things change. Hugging begins! A hug and a light kiss on a cheek are common greeting practices between women, and between men and women who are close friends or family. At church on Sundays there are almost always three hugs—one upon arriving, one after church ends, and one after the social time. This is reminiscent of the Christian greeting mentioned in Romans 16:16, “Greet one another with a holy kiss,” although Hispanic men never greet each other this way. Just a firm handshake!

In informal settings, conversations between Spanish speakers may be loud, fast, and adorned with animated gestures and body language to better convey points. The physical distance between Hispanics conversing is closer than in other cultures.

Something to keep in mind as a pastor is that when teaching a Bible class or in any teaching opportunity, it is good to pay individual attention to each learner. Greet each member of the class individually and hand papers to each one individually rather than passing them down the row. This seems like a small thing, but it is good etiquette and a small part of building the close relationship we hope for as pastors.

Personal Appearance and Behavior

Hispanics usually give great importance to and place great value on looks and appearance as a sense of honor, dignity, and pride. Formal attire is commonly worn to church, parties, social gatherings, and work. Athletic shoes and jeans, however, are becoming more popular among Hispanic men and women, particularly in non-formal settings.

It is probably common knowledge that Hispanics tend to be more relaxed and flexible about time and punctuality than we are. For instance, people who are invited to a 6 p.m. event may not begin to arrive until 7 p.m. or later. When my wife and I are invited to events, we still like to arrive on time, but usually find that nothing actually begins until later. Such is life within the Hispanic community, where not being on time is the socially acceptable behavior. (I must say, however, that I have had no problem beginning our Sunday worship promptly at 12 p.m. each Sunday.)

Building Confidence (*Confianza*)

Closely linked to family values and hospitality is the concept of building *confianza* or confidence. I suspect we all realize that to be a pastor of a flock always involves building a relationship with the flock no matter whom we serve. We need to gain the confidence of the people we serve, helping them know that we love them and will be there for them in their hour of need and their time of joy.

Building this confidence is doubly important in the Hispanic community, because whether we like it or not, we do not have an automatic connection that Hispanics tend to have with each other. The cultural gap needs to be bridged and the only way to bridge it is to show genuine concern over a long period of time.

Certainly one part of building *confianza* can be learning to speak Spanish. Just a week ago a young man who began attending our church about a month ago told me how much he values my effort to reach out in the Spanish language in an area where many people would say, “This is America. We speak English here.” He is bilingual. So is his wife. Both use English on the job. Both speak English well. Yet, he also feels a sense of *confianza* with someone who takes the time and makes the effort to offer worship in the language of his childhood, the language in which God speaks to them and they to God.

Nonetheless, even if we cannot speak the language, we can try to build *confianza* simply by being welcoming and friendly to Hispanics in our neighborhood. We can offer programs like English as a Second Language classes to serve the community. We can do Hispanic heritage events. Consider the following list of ideas from a website called “Ethnic Harvest.”

*Ideas from “Ethnic Harvest”*¹⁰

- English as a Second Language (ESL) classes
- Friendship Evangelism – building relationships
- Attend a program presented by ethnic people on their site
- Invite an ethnic church or organization to present a program on your site
- Share a meal with an ethnic church or organization
- Do a physical work project in the community, or to benefit an elderly or disabled person or a family of recent immigrants

¹⁰ <http://www.ethnicarvest.org/index.htm>.

- Share a meeting or special event of your youth group, women's group, men's group
- Plan a picnic or outing together
- Share a film series
- Plan a special class in your Sunday School; invite ethnic leaders to speak
- Pulpit exchange with an ethnic church (of our fellowship, of course)
- Exchange correspondence, tapes, or pictures

Major Hispanic Celebrations and Holidays

<i>Miércoles de Ceniza</i> (Ash Wednesday beginning of <i>Cuaresma</i> - Lent)	Celebrated in the typical fashion with ashes on the forehead on Ash Wednesday.
<i>Semana Santa</i> (Holy Week)	Especially Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday are celebrated.
<i>Cinco de Mayo</i> (May 5)	Really a Mexican celebration of the outnumbered forces of Mexico defeating the French at Puebla on May 5, 1862. Now generally celebrated across America in honor of Hispanic ancestry.
<i>Día del Padre</i> (Father's Day)	Same as our Father's Day. Celebration of family.
<i>Las fiestas de San Juan</i> (St. John the Baptist festival) (June 24 in Puerto Rico)	Honors their patron saint, John the Baptist. Parades, dances and food. At the end of the celebration people walk backward into the ocean and fall into it.
<i>Posadas Mexicanas</i> (9 days before Christmas)	Traditional celebration in Mexico in which people reenact Mary and Joseph's search for lodging in Bethlehem.

<p><i>Nochebuena</i> Christmas Eve</p>	<p>This is the middle of Christmas celebration in much of Latin America. Puerto Ricans do “parrandas” (binges) this time of year, singing traditional Christmas music at houses of friends and family, gathering even more singers and moving on to another place. These groups are called “trullas” (commotions). I am told that this kind of celebrating goes on well past January 6.</p>
<p><i>Dia de los Reyes</i> January 6</p>	<p>The wise men festival is the real gift-giving time in Hispanic Christmas celebration. In Puerto Rico the children wait for the three kings in the same way children in America wait for Santa. Children leave grass and water for the camels.</p>

How Hispanics Function in Organizations

I was somewhat intrigued with a section of the book *Communicating in Multinational Organizations* which addressed how Hispanics tend to function in corporations, because the conclusions seemed to offer some insight into how Hispanics might tend to function when it comes to church government. The book contained the following observations:

Although many Latin Americans now are employed by large organizations, personal relationships remain far more central to organizational life than they are in the United States and other industrialized countries.¹¹

The legacy of the *patrón* system from colonial days is a view of authority as more absolute and potentially whimsical, creating a greater dependence of subordinates on the goodwill of superiors. Highly centralized decision making and authoritarian delegation—of tasks but not authority—are widespread expectations, although certainly not invariably the case. At the same time, compliant subordinates often expect protection and favors from their superiors, leeway in completion of work-related task, exceptions to company policies, soft-pedaled criticism, even promotions.¹²

¹¹ Wiseman and Shuter, 80.

¹² Ibid.

I have been watching for this attitude lately and believe I have noticed to some extent that there is a tendency to want to defer decisions to me as the pastor, particularly among the older Hispanics. This may be confirmed by the following study:

Hofstede's (1984) multinational study of four Latin American cultural traits:¹³

- **Power distance** – prefer to be directed by those with legitimate authority over them rather than make their own decisions.
- **Uncertainty avoidance** – less inclined to accept the uncertainty of “make a personal decision” and more inclined to rely on certainty imposed from authority. (This may explain why Catholicism thrived since the Christian life was imposed by “rules” rather than gospel motivation.)
- **Individualism** – Latin American countries get low scores. The members tend to conform more than those in individualistic societies. “In Latin American organizations, it is inappropriate not to ask about someone’s family.”
- **Palanca** – a relationship as a tool to obtain some objective. Basically a favor granted not based on assessment, but on relationship (a throw back to the *patrón*.) “By establishing contact with adequately powerful others, individuals transcend institutional rules, procedures and scarcity.” (When you blur these lines you end up with unsavory versions called bribes.) “The quality of interpersonal bonds is evaluated according to, among other aspects, the degree of *confianza* that exists between human elements.”

Case Study – Ethnic Church Planting – An Hispanic Church¹⁴

Americans who attend Hosanna experience (in Seattle) are in for some surprises. For instance, the church offers meetings almost every night of the week, and all day on Sunday! The 1 p.m. Sunday service usually lasts until about 3:30 p.m., followed by food and fellowship until the evening service begins at 6 p.m. The evening service lasts until almost 9 p.m., when people finally go home! Most Americans are not accustomed to the long services and constant togetherness. In fact, one

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Nancy Kruger, “Case Study: An Hispanic Church—Cultural Differences,” *Ethnic Church Planting: A Documentation of the Work of Dr. Chris Thomas*, <http://www.ethnicarvest.org/links/articles/krugerhisp.html>.

of the first things that most Hispanics recognize about the Americans they meet is their individualism. Latinos enjoy lots of togetherness. As one member put it: "We're always like a big neighborhood where everybody does everything as a unit. We like being together!" In this church, the same people always sit together, and it does appear to be a truly "networked" community!

Another difference is that in the Latin church, children typically stay in the service with their parents. This can be quite disruptive to the worship of Americans who are accustomed to the practice of sending children to the nursery (or Sunday School)! But again, this is consistent with the cohesiveness of the family and the close bonds between children and their parents (especially mothers).

Latin people are typically emotional and, unlike most Americans, they are open and honest with others about their feelings and weaknesses. They are insightful, and will pick up on everything, making first impressions very important for them. A great deal of acceptance is needed, especially as a newcomer to this culture. If acceptance is not there, verbalized or not, they will know it. Many have become wary, having experienced past rejection as they have tried to adapt to American culture. One member told me, "One bad experience is enough. It is hard to trust people once you've been ripped off."

Many immigrants from Latin America are not drawn as quickly or easily to the Gospel because they have heard about Jesus for years in a rigid, conditional or apathetic way. Christianity, for them, has most likely not been presented in a way that was meaningful to them, or it might have been quite a distorted version of the Gospel message. Dr. Thomas, again, stresses the fact that "with people of other cultures, (in most cases) it takes a *long time* to help a person to really understand Christianity and the meaning of salvation." Time and patience, lots of prayer, and an acute sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit are important (in fact, essential!) in ministry among Latin Americans.

Since Latin American people from Catholic background have always celebrated communion every week, it is important to them that communion is offered every week. As Josie Lopez said, "We must do all we can to identify with the culture!"

Conclusion

American Hispanic culture has deep historical roots, particularly in colonial days.... The Roman Catholic Church still wields great influence, but that is changing especially among Hispanics in

America.... The traditional strong family is a positive thing, but does bring with it the challenge of breaking into the family and achieving a level of *confianza*.... The tendency of Hispanics to express emotions makes Pentecostalism and charismatic worship appealing to many. Nonetheless, patient teaching of the Word and Sacrament, where we know the Holy Spirit is at work, finds a home with some. Then, too, offering worship styles which provide participation in “Latino” ways certainly helps bridge the gap.... The tendency to lengthy social family gatherings offers time for bonding with the flock.... Even though Hispanics are very formal when meeting others for the first time and show great respect to others, they are also a warm and friendly people, who quickly embrace and welcome friends.... Understanding these and other elements of Hispanic religion and culture can go a long way in our efforts to make friends for Jesus in the Hispanic community. (LSQ)

Appendix A: Hispanic populations in states served by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

(Sorted by actual numbers of Hispanics/state)

<i>State</i>	<i># of congregations</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>% Hispanic</i>	<i>Hispanic population</i>
California	6	37,253,956	37.6	14,007,487
Texas	2*	24,145,561	37.6	9,078,731
Florida	9	18,801,310	22	4,136,288
Illinois	1	12,830,632	16	2,052,901
Arizona	3	6,392,017	29.6	1,892,037
Pennsylvania	1	12,702,379	6	762,143
Washington	5	6,724,540	11	739,699
Massachusetts	2	6,547,629	10	654,763
Oregon	10	3,831,074	12	459,728
Michigan	9	9,883,640	4	395,345

Indiana	3	6,483,802	6	389,028
Utah	1	2,763,885	13	359,305
Ohio	3	11,536,504	3	346,095
Wisconsin	22	5,686,986	6	341,219
Minnesota	31	5,305,925	5	265,296
Missouri	4	5,988,927	4	239,557
Iowa	20	3,046,355	5	152,317
Totals (avg %)	132	179,925,122	(12.66)	36,271,939

*Counting new mission in Austin TX area

Appendix B: Hispanic Population Percentages by ELS Congregation Location

(According to the 2010 Census for the census tract in which each church is located.)

Congregation	%	Congregation	%
Ft Mohave AZ	16	Naples FL	20
Lake Havasu City AZ S/N	11-20	Port St. Lucie FL	16
Scottsdale AZ	3	Sebastian FL	6
Bell Gardens CA	97	Sebring FL	9
Bishop CA	27	Vero Beach FL	6-16
Irvine CA	9	Winter Haven FL	9
Irvine (Korean) CA	56	Lombard IL	21
Ukiah CA	40	Hobart IN	14
Windsor CA	29	Portage IN	15
Kissimmee FL	46	Ames IA	3
N Lakeland FL	15	Calmar IA	2
S Lakeland FL	8	Forest City IA	5

Congregation	%
Indianola IA	1
Lake Mills IA	1
Lake Mills IA Lime Creek	1
Lawler IA	1
New Hampton Jerico IA	4
New Hampton IA	4
Newton IA	2
Northwood IA	1
Northwood Somber IA	1
Parkersburg IA	1
Riceville IA	1
Scarville Center IA	3-5
Scarville IA	3-5
Thompson IA	5
Thornton IA	1
Waterloo IA	2
Waukon IA	1
Brewster MA	1
Burlington MA	1
East Jordan MI	2
Frankenmuth MI	2
Hillman MI	1
Holland MI	19
Holton MI	3
Midland MI	2
Rogers City MI	1
Saginaw MI	7
Suttons Bay MI	7
Albert Lea MN	21
Apple Valley MN	2

Congregation	%
Audubon MN	1
Bagley MN	1
Belview MN	1
Belview Rock Dell MN	8
Clara City MN	3
Cold Spring MN	5
Cottonwood MN	5
East Grand Forks MN	9
Farmington MN	5
Gaylord MN	17
Golden Valley MN	2
Grygla MN	1
Hartland MN	2
Hawley MN	1
Lengby MN	1
Luverne MN	3
Manchester MN	2
Mankato MN	2
North Mankato MN	3
Oklee MN	1
Princeton Bethany MN	2
Princeton MN	2
Rogers MN	2
Roseau MN	1
Saint Peter MN	2
Tracy MN	2
Trail Mt. Olive MN	1
Trail MN	1
Ulen MN	1
Cape Girardeau MO	1
Carthage MO	16

Congregation	%	Congregation	%
Jefferson City MO	1	Tacoma WA	9
Osage Beach MO	6	Yelm WA	6
Piedmont MO	1	Amherst Junction WI	2
Bowling Green OH	5	Bloomer WI	1
Deshler OH	6	Cottage Grove WI	3
Weston OH	9	Eau Claire WI Ascension	2
Grants Pass OR	5	Eau Claire WI Concordia	1
Gresham OR	27	Eau Claire WI Pinehurst	2
Hood River OR	27	Elderon WI	3
Klamath Falls OR	8	Green Bay WI	1
Medford OR	12	Iola WI	1
Myrtle Creek OR	4	Madison WI Grace	3
North Bend OR	5	Madison WI Holy Cross	6
St. Helens OR	3	Madison WI Our Saviour	6
Sutherlin OR	4	Marinette WI	2
The Dalles OR	12	Menomonie WI	2
Irwin PA	1	Okauchee WI	2
Austin TX	10	Omro WI	3
San Antonio TX	25	Oregon WI	3
West Jordan UT	9	Portage WI	5
Lakewood WA	7	Shawano WI	2
Mount Vernon WA	6	West Bend WI	2
Port Orchard WA	5	Wisconsin Dells WI	5

Appendix C: Executive Summary of Pew Research of Hispanic Religious Trends in America¹⁵

Chapter 1: Religion and Demography

More than two-thirds of Hispanics (68%) identify themselves as Roman Catholics. The next largest category, at 15%, is made up of born-again or evangelical Protestants. Nearly one-in-ten (8%) Latinos do not identify with any religion. Differences in religious identification among Latinos coincide with important differences in demographic characteristics. For example, Catholics are a more heavily immigrant population than evangelicals. Given current demographic trends, Latinos are projected to become an ever-increasing segment of the Catholic Church in the U.S.

Chapter 2: Religious Practices and Beliefs

For the great majority of Latinos, regardless of their religious tradition, God is an active force in everyday life. Most Latinos pray every day, most have a religious object in their home and most attend a religious service at least once a month. By significant majorities, Latinos who identify with a religion believe that miracles are performed today just as they were in ancient times. Amid this overall religiosity, important differences emerge among Latinos of different religious traditions and between Latinos and their non-Hispanic counterparts.

Chapter 3: The Renewalist Movement and Hispanic Christianity

Renewalist Christianity, which places special emphasis on God's ongoing, day-to-day intervention in human affairs through the person of the Holy Spirit, is having a major impact on Hispanic Christianity. Among Latino Protestants, renewalism is three times as prevalent as it is among their non-Latino counterparts. A majority (54%) of Hispanic Catholics describe themselves as charismatic Christians, making them more than four times as likely as non-Latino Catholics to identify with renewalist Christianity. The implications of this are particularly important for the Catholic Church, given that the rapidly growing Latino flock is practicing a distinctive form of Catholicism. Latino Catholics nevertheless remain very much Catholic. Indeed, renewalist practices seem to have been incorporated into Hispanic Catholicism without displacing Catholic identity.

Chapter 4: Conversion and Views of the Catholic Church

Nearly one-fifth (18%) of all Latinos say they have either converted from one religion to another or to no religion at all. Conversions are a key ingredient

¹⁵ *Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion*, 2007, Pew Research Center. <http://pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Demographics/hispanics-religion-07-final-mar08.pdf>.

in the development of evangelicalism among Hispanics. Half of Hispanic evangelicals (51%) are converts, and more than four-fifths of them (43% of Hispanic evangelicals overall) are former Catholics.

By an overwhelming majority (82%), Hispanics cite the desire for a more direct, personal experience with God as the main reason for adopting a new faith. Among those who have become evangelicals, nine-in-ten (90%) say it was this spiritual search that drove their conversion. A majority of evangelical converts (61%) say the typical Catholic mass is not lively or exciting, although only about one-in-three (36%) cite that as a reason for their conversion.

Chapter 5: The Ethnic Church

The houses of worship most frequented by Latinos have distinctly ethnic characteristics. A majority of those in the congregation are Hispanic; some Latinos serve as clergy; and liturgies are available in Spanish. The growth of the Hispanic population is leading to the emergence of Latino-oriented churches in all the major religious traditions across the country. While the prevalence of Hispanic-oriented worship is higher among the foreign born, with 77% saying they attend churches with those characteristics, the phenomenon is also widespread among the native born, with 48% saying they attend ethnic churches.

Appendix D: Outline of Seminary Hispanic culture and language course—Prof. Tom Flunker

1. Basic Spiritual/Church Topics & Themes
 - a) Common/familiar bible passages, and prayers (Common table prayers, the Lord's Prayer)
 - b) The church year, and basic Bible stories (Creation, Christmas, Easter)
 - c) God's Great Exchange
2. Useful language basics
 - a) Vocabulary
 - b) Grammar/parts of speech
 - c) Phrases, Idioms

3. Basic understanding of Hispanic populations and demographics in the US
 - a) Mexican
 - b) Central & South America
 - c) Puerto Rican
 - d) Cuban
 - e) Other Hispanics

4. Basic understanding of Hispanic culture (similarities & differences)
 - a) Family makeup & values
 - b) Traditions, legacy, history
 - c) Beliefs, religions
 - d) Celebrations and holidays
 - e) Eating habits, foods, etiquette

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

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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:

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

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

³ The 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 643).

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; ESV)⁴

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; NKJV)⁵

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 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

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.

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

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

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 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:

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

“Everything is permissible”—but not everything is beneficial.
“Everything is permissible”—but not everything is constructive.
(1 Corinthians 10:23–24; NIV)⁸

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 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

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

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 God;¹⁰ while the logic of the Athanasian Creed

⁹ James F. Korthals, “Publication of the Book of Concord—425th Anniversary,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 102, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 227–28.

¹⁰ The 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, 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 developed in a typically “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 Melanchthon] supplemented each other. As Melanchthon had learned from him, so he had learned from Melanchthon. It has great significance for the Lutheran church that its Confessions were not written by Luther alone. As Melanchthon’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 Melanchthon 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

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], 309–10).

¹¹ In 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, 23–25).

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:

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

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

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. 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

¹³ Jakob 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), 63 (emphasis added).

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

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 communal life, to *the breaking of the bread* and to *the prayers*” (Acts 2:41–42; NAB).¹⁵

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

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

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

¹⁷ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration X: 31, Kolb/Wengert, 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

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 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:

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], 41–42).

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

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.

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

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 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 of 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 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

²⁰ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII: 75, 77–78, Kolb/Wengert, 606–07 (emphasis added).

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.

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

²¹ When 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.

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 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

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

²³ Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 60–61, Kolb/Wengert, 340 (emphasis added).

²⁴ Earlier 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, 331 [emphasis added]). This statement is then followed by an exegetical discussion of several passages from the Gospels and Epistles (8–11, 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.”

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 error.²⁸

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

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

²⁷ Small Catechism, Table of Duties: 2, Kolb/Wengert, 365 (emphasis added).

²⁸ Another 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

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

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 [I Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:6] that a bishop must be pious, able to teach, and the husband of one wife—and in I 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 [I 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], 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).

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 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

²⁹ Lutherans 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], 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, 341.

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

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....

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

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

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 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.

³³ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration X: 5, 7, 9, Kolb/Wengert, 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.

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 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

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

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 comprise plainsong canticles, metered hymns, or 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 a 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 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 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 comprises 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 fear.³⁶

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

³⁶ Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV: 1, 3, Kolb/Wengert, 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

... we gladly keep the ancient traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquility 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*,

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*, ed. Carlos R. Messerli [Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2005], 144–45).

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

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 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

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

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 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

³⁹ Jacob 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), 144.

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 reinforce a certain scriptural truth. But the old ceremony, by its very *oldness*, is also able to teach and reinforce 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

⁴⁰ Since 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.

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 Irenaeus 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 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

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

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

⁴² In 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], 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, 207 [emphasis 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 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

more of 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. 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

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* 9, no. 24 [July 19, 1853]: 163).

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 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 [Hieronimus] 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

⁴³ William Julius Mann, “Blaetter aus dem Wanderbuche,” *Der Deutsche Kirchenfreund*, vol. VIII (1855): 386 ff.; quoted in Adolph Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, vol. I (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), 354–55.

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 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

⁴⁴ August L. Graebner, book review of *Church Liturgy for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, *The St. Louis Theological Monthly* 1, no. 4 (August 1881): 77–78 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁵ Introduction, *Lutheran Hymnary, Junior* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1916), 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, 2010), 331–32.

therefore that greatest care is necessary so that the building and that which takes 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

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

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 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:

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

⁴⁸ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Magazin für evangelisch-lutherische Homiletik und Pastoraltheologie* 53, no. 6 (June 1929): 216–17.

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

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

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

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

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

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 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

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

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

⁵² Critics 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*, 127–29).

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 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

⁵³ Jacob Aall Ottesen Stub, *Vestments and Liturgies* (n.d.), 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

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). L5Q

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], 300–02; quoted in Edward T. Horn, "Ceremonies in the Lutheran Church," *Lutheran Cyclopedia* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899], 83).

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, 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, 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), 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 “papist” 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 (*Gewandtpragt*) 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 parurer, 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* (Malmö, 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- Veremonien 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.

Into the Arms of Embrace

*Matthew W. Crick
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My tried and true friend, the gallows cross,
Whose arms, fully extended to embrace,
Then stiffening in the cooling blood
All that darkened day,
Had enemies,
Real ones.

They resolved to be just that too,
Mocking his disgrace
Which took place outside the city gate.

I think on this
And let tears fall
(With so many still living as enemies
To the cross).

I once did.

O soul memory,
Let those tears fall, let them freely fall,
(Tasting the salt in both tear and blood)
Going to him, outside the gate;
Going to him, outside the gate. [LSQ](#)

Arisen

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From the womb of morning he arose,
The light of life springing forth
From his tomb, once virgin.
It was here that even
The most faithful had turned away.

It was here that he returned to them
On the third day.

One woman only
Could be found there, lingering, unsuspecting,
Burial spices still in hand,
Tears in need of drying,
Hope doused.

The light of life,
Standing squarely on his own two feet,
Approached her,
As if a bridegroom reaching out to a grieving spouse.

“Mary,” was all he needed to say.
“Mary,” was all she needed to hear. LSQ

Book Reviews

LSQ Vol. 52, Nos. 2–3 (June–September 2012)

Book Review: A Lutheran Looks at Eastern Orthodoxy

Robert J. Koester. *A Lutheran Looks at Eastern Orthodoxy*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2012. 141 pages. \$14.50.

The series “A Lutheran Looks at...” is intended to provide a “confessional Lutheran perspective on the teachings and practices of other denominations” (back cover). Robert J. Koester’s contribution treats the Eastern Orthodox Church which many in the west know little about. Although it may not seem like it in North America, Eastern Orthodoxy worldwide represents the second largest grouping of Christians after Roman Catholicism. This fact alone makes learning about this Christian church worthwhile.

Koester provides a good overview of Eastern Orthodoxy for laymen although pastors can benefit from his work as well. Perhaps most striking about the Orthodox faith when viewed from our confessional Lutheran faith is its central emphasis on the Christian achieving *theosis* or deification (becoming god) through his own efforts and, through this, achieving salvation. As Lutherans, we believe that we have salvation by grace alone through faith alone and that Christ lives within us (the mystical union), again through faith alone. Koester indicates an origin of this critical Eastern Orthodox error:

Once the Church lost Paul’s pure gospel message, it shifted its understanding of “sharing in the divine nature.” Once the idea of becoming divine was cut loose from an understanding of the true gospel message, it took on a life of its

own. God being in us was no longer something a Christian had by faith in the gospel but something a Christian achieved by keeping the law. And instead of focusing on Christ who died for us and is now living in those who are pure and holy through faith, the focus came to be on external phenomena that would display the divine nature within a person. The monks led the way in putting *theosis* on display. (72)

It is not clear whether Koester recognizes that confessional Lutheranism from its beginning has taught the scriptural doctrine of the “mystical union” and the biblical *theosis* theme, based on passages such as John 14:23-24; 2 Peter 1:4; and 1 John 3:2. While the Eastern Orthodox have elevated *theosis* to center stage to the near exclusion of the central scriptural teaching of justification by grace alone through faith alone, much of contemporary Lutheranism has lost sight of the proper scriptural, confessional teaching of the mystical union that teaches that the entire Trinity dwells in the believer for his comfort. The Eastern Orthodox understand the mystical union and *theosis* as something that is achieved by the Christian, while confessional Lutherans understand the mystical union with Christ to be the result of being saved by faith alone in the Savior. The Eastern Orthodox understand the mystical union to be a union with the *energies* of God, while confessional Lutherans

understand the mystical union is with the very essence of God.

Koester writes of the Eastern Orthodox meaning of *theosis*:

Although *theosis* means to “become God,” it is not quite as bad as it sounds. No Eastern Orthodox teacher claims that Christianity is the way to become God in the fullest sense.

Eastern Orthodox theologians have modified the meaning of *theosis* in two ways. First, they say that we become God, “as far as it is possible for human beings.” One encounters this phrase again and again in Orthodox books on *theosis*. Still this is a rather open ended statement. There is no description of the boundary human beings are unable to cross in “becoming God,” and the concept is explained in different ways.

Second, Orthodox theologians say that we do not become God according to his *essence* but according to his *energies*. This is a distinction based more on philosophy than on Scripture. This distinction is made to protect God’s transcendence. In other words, God is completely above human beings. (69)

Pres. Gaylin Schmeling asserts that the primary reason the Eastern Orthodox teach that the mystical union is a union between the believer and the *energies* of God rather than between the believer and God in his

essence is that they fear that a union with God's essence will destroy a believer's humanity.¹ The mystical union and its resulting theosis is clearly supported in the writings of Lutheran orthodoxy. Abraham Calov, one of the chief fathers of the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, says of the mystical union of the believer with Christ:

The mystical union is a true and real and most intimate conjunction of the divine and human nature of the theanthropic [God man] with a regenerated man which is affected by the virtue of the merit of Christ through the Word and Sacraments; so that Christ constitutes a spiritual unit with the regenerated person, and operates in and through him, and those things which the believer does and suffers he appropriates to himself, so that the man does not live, as to his spiritual and divine life, but by the faith of the Son of God, until he is taken to heaven.²

In Koester's visits to eight Eastern Orthodox congregations in Wisconsin, representing the various divisions of orthodoxy, he found that the centrality of the liturgy

¹ From a personal conversation with President Gaylin Schmeling.

² Abraham Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum* (1655-77), x, 526: quoted in Heinrich Schmidt, *Of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1889), 487.

consistently predominated over the reading of Scripture. Apparently Paul's epistles are seemingly ignored accounting for the complete lack of the teaching of justification by grace through faith. Because of the centrality of the believer achieving theosis, the Eastern Orthodox are more oriented to works righteousness than even the Roman Catholic Church.

Within Eastern Orthodoxy, Jesus' suffering and death is not understood as the substitutionary suffering and death for our sins. The Orthodox seem to have no explanation for it. They do not accept forensic justification of the world. Righteousness is to be achieved by achieving theosis. Baptism for the Orthodox is not for the forgiveness of sin and receiving the Holy Spirit. It is merely the starting point for the journey toward achieving theosis and keeping the law. The Eastern Orthodox see the Lord's Supper as the transubstantiated body and blood of Christ which is then offered as a sacrifice to God. As with the Roman Church, Holy Communion is a good work accomplished by the clergy. According to Koester, participation in the eucharistic divine liturgy is the most important thing the Orthodox Christian can do. What one believes privately about Jesus is not as important as the corporate and liturgical expression of those beliefs in the Eucharist.

To the Eastern Orthodox the question of the believer's status before God hardly arises at all. It is lost in the overriding emphasis on the process of achieving righteousness through theosis. "Being saved" for the

Orthodox is a lifetime process, not a one-time gift that God accomplished for all people through Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Lutherans might ask what the source of the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church really is. It is easier to say what it is not. It is not primarily the Scriptures. It is clearly tradition. To perhaps an even greater extent than Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox Church is built on tradition, tradition in the sense that if the church has always done something or believed something, God is the one who has led the church to do or believe this or that, and so it is true.

In the latter part of the book Koester deals with how one witnesses to the Eastern Orthodox. Asking the Orthodox why God would let them into heaven is with the goal of helping them to understand that God accepts us only through faith, believing that Jesus lived and died in our place and rose again from death. According to Koester, the one touch point in the Orthodox person's heart that can enable you to break through the maze of works righteousness imposed by their church is their human conscience. It is there that your friend must come to feel the sharp accusation of their own sin. This alone can prepare them to rightly hear and obey the gospel.

Perhaps most Eastern Orthodox people have a saving faith in spite of the errors and weaknesses of Eastern Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, it is because of those weaknesses, contradictions, and even outright false doctrine which can erode saving faith, that faithful Lutherans should reach

out with the pure gospel when the Lord opens an opportunity to do so, speaking the truth in love.

— J. Kincaid Smith

LSQ

Book Review: Studying Luther's Large Catechism

Ryan C. MacPherson. *Studying Luther's Large Catechism: A Workbook for Christian Discipleship*. Mankato, Minnesota: The Hausvater Project, 2012. 100 pages. \$6.95.

Most every member of Lutheran churches of our fellowship has studied at least parts of Martin Luther's Small Catechism. How many have undertaken a systematic study of his Large Catechism? Dr. Ryan C. MacPherson has provided a useful tool for such a study which can be conducted in multiple settings. In fact, Dr. MacPherson makes specific suggestions for utilizing his workbook for Sunday morning Bible classes or for a homeschool curriculum at the high-school level (3-4). But these venues would not be the only ones suitable for this study.

Each of the twelve lessons follows the same format: a liturgical prayer (from *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*), the listing of what is to be read (primarily from the catechisms), discussion questions pertaining to the material read, a hymn (cross-referenced with multiple hymnals), and a summary of key points and ideas for application from the lesson. The material from the Large Catechism

covered in each lesson is broken into manageable portions and the discussion questions provide ample biblical support for the material from the catechism. In fact, Dr. MacPherson places worthwhile emphasis on the centrality of Scripture in his study: “God’s Word is powerful and changes hearts. Every Bible passage cited in the study questions should be read aloud before participants share their answers. A Bible study must remain first and foremost a *Bible* study” (4).

The references to the sections from the Lutheran Confessions are keyed to *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (Concordia Publishing House), but Dr. MacPherson includes section titles and paragraph numbers from the Confessions so that other versions may be used. No specific version of the Bible is recommended nor cited. A Scripture index and general index are also included at the end of the study.

The discussion questions of the study provide apt direction for teacher and student alike. Dr. MacPherson manages to capture the gist of each section through these questions and focuses the attention of the student on the key concepts Luther presents. In certain settings, it might be helpful for an answer key to have been provided. The “Remember” section at the end of each lesson not only summarizes the primary points of the material studied but also directs the attention of the participants to their Savior, who is the true motivator of all good works, and to the Word and sacraments, the very means by which God bestows his grace.

Studying Luther’s Large Catechism will prove to be a good resource in any congregation or home wishing to delve deeper into God’s Word via the Large Catechism.

– Michael K. Smith



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