

THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL CRITERIA
FOR WORSHIP FORMS IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WISCONSIN

MARCH 2012

Abstract

Due to “worship wars” in the Lutheran church, the issue of worship forms has been thoroughly examined from Scripture and from historical perspective. Until recently, however, the Lutheran Confessions have not been strongly represented in these studies. Studies that have considered the Lutheran Confessions have not always accurately reflected all that the confessions might say about worship forms. The goal of this study is to compare the arguments that have been advanced with what the confessions have to say about worship forms. Based on a reading of all the confessions have to say on the topic, several theological and pastoral criteria emerge that give a solid confessional Lutheran perspective on worship forms. Most notable among these is the centrality of justification by faith alone, which shapes the entire theology of worship in the confessions. It also gives great importance to the pastoral concerns that surround worship forms because the truth of the gospel is at stake. These theological and pastoral criteria in the Lutheran Confessions are able to provide a foundation that will guide Lutherans as they seek an appropriate approach to the issue of worship forms.

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Introduction

What will Lutherans do when they gather together for public worship? This question arose with the onset of the Lutheran Reformation, since the twin hallmarks of Lutheran teaching, justification by faith alone and the authority of Scripture alone, systematically dismantled the Roman Catholic sacramental system and removed the authority of the church to dictate what would take place in public worship. Martin Luther took the lead in providing an answer when he published his two orders of service, the *Formula Missae* and the *Deutsche Messe*.¹ Luther's approach, which simultaneously recognized the existence of freedom in liturgical matters and considered the historic liturgy worthy of retention, has been the subject of many studies.²

The approach the Lutheran Confessions take to the question of worship forms, on the other hand, has not received nearly as much attention. It is not as though Luther had given a definitive answer; the question of worship forms never fully disappeared from the Lutheran church. Nevertheless, until very recently, guidance in how to answer the question was not sought in the Lutheran Confessions.

What has finally driven many to give consideration to the confessions is that the old question of worship forms has once again come to the foreground of discussion. This is due in large part to the influence of two movements that began outside of the Lutheran church: the

¹ The *Formula Missae*, Luther's first order of service, was published in 1523. The *Deutsche Messe*, which presented the entire service in German, followed in 1526. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition*, Vol. 53, *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1965), 15ff.; 51ff.

² See, for example, Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia, Muehlenberg Press, 1958); Bryan D. Spinks, *Luther's Liturgical Criteria and His Reform of the Canon of the Mass* (Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd., 1982); John R. Stephenson, "Luther's Reform of the Mass and Its Application to Liturgical Change Today" in *Worship 2000: Papers presented at the Congress on the Lutheran Confessions*, eds. John A. Maxfield and Jennifer H. Maxfield, (St. Louis, MO: Luther Academy, 2010), 20-28; Johnold Strey, "Neither Papistic nor Karlstadtian: Luther's Principles of Adiaphora Applied to the Liturgical Life of the Church," (Presented to the Arizona-California Pastors' Conference, North Hollywood, California, October, 2009), http://www.az-cadistrict.org/siteoutlines.aspsec_id=180002237&secure=&dlyear=0&dldcat=Essays (accessed October 10, 2011).

Liturgical Movement³ and the Church Growth Movement.⁴ Both movements arose in the twentieth century. Both came with the desire to renew and reinvigorate the church. Both considered public worship a central arena in which renewal would take place. But the two movements differed in their approach to renewal in worship.

The Liturgical Movement undertook major studies of historic worship practice and, perhaps for the first time in the history of the church, attempted to articulate a theology of worship. From this arose a desire to reinvigorate parish life around the active participation of the laity in a worship life that was historically informed and arranged around the centrality of the Eucharist.

The Church Growth Movement, on the other hand, undertook major studies of sociology and evangelism. From this came a strong push to contextualize worship so that it focused on engaging the people who assembled for worship, including non-member “seekers.” Worship was to be conceived of in such a manner that it connected with the average person in the pew.

Both movements gained a hearing in the Lutheran Church to some degree. The result was that the Lutheran church entered an era of “worship wars.” During most of the long debate, little attention was given to the Lutheran Confessions. Studies that did consider the Lutheran Confessions tended to revolve around the confessional statements on adiaphora. It seemed that the confessions had little more to contribute to the discussion than the affirmation of Christian

³ The Liturgical Movement, predominantly a Roman Catholic undertaking, culminated in the sweeping liturgical reforms enacted by the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, issued in 1963. The movement traces its origins to the re-founding of a Benedictine Abby at Solesmes by Dom Prosper Gueranger with the goal of promoting the use of Gregorian Chant. At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the encouragement of Pope Pius X, serious studies on liturgical history and practice began to be undertaken at notable centers of study such as Maria Laach in Germany and St. John’s College Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota. Notable names include Odo Casel, Josef Jungmann, Louis Bouyer, Virgil Michel. Among Anglicans, Dom Gregory Dix also contributed significant studies aimed at a revitalization of liturgy. For a brief overview of the history, see the opening chapters of Timothy C.J. Quill, *The Impact of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1997).

⁴ The Church Growth Movement, most evident among American Evangelicals, might trace its origins to the 1970 publication of Donald A. McGavran’s *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). The movement has been headquartered at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Notable names include C. Peter Wagner and Lyle Schaller, and, among Lutherans, Kent Hunter and Waldo Werning.

freedom in all matters liturgical.⁵ Perhaps this prevailing assumption explains the ease with which non-Lutheran ideas about worship found their way into the practice of the Lutheran church.⁶

Recently, however, and perhaps in reaction to this one-sided understanding of the Lutheran Confessions, much more attention has been given to a thorough study of what the confessions have to say about worship.⁷ Unfortunately, these studies have sometimes advocated an opposite extreme. A Lutheran “liturgical theology” has been sought, often based on the Lutheran Confessions.⁸ This kind of understanding is viewed as an avenue through which to escape the endless debates over adiaphora. If liturgy is God acting, then the liturgy can no longer fall into the realm of Christian freedom. Furthermore, such an approach is deemed to be “gospel oriented,” because it begins by affirming the high theological importance of the worship form itself, thus effectively relegating the discussion about adiaphora to insubstantial matters.⁹

Such an approach to the confessions is no more satisfying than ignoring them altogether. Looking for a liturgical theology runs the risk of altering the theology of the confessions. In addition, it contradicts the insistence upon freedom in the confessions. Ultimately, the overzealous liturgical defender who looks to the confessions ends up in the same place as the one who assumes that the confessions advocate a total separation of doctrine and practice. The latter concludes that the confessions have nothing more to say other than an affirmation of carte blanche liturgical freedom. The former denies that there is freedom in liturgical matters. But in

⁵ *Christian Worship: Manual*, eds. Gary Baumler and Kermit Moldenhauer (Milwaukee: NPH, 1993), 21ff., demonstrates this approach in its section on principles of Lutheran worship, which only references the confessional statements of Christian freedom before moving on to a detailed examination of Martin Luther’s principles of worship. There is nothing wrong with this approach, especially since Luther and the confessions are quite consistent, but it does demonstrate the scant attention given to the Lutheran Confessions.

⁶ This is true not only of Evangelical practices that made their way into the Lutheran church, but also of the practices that came out of the Liturgical Movement and Roman Catholicism. In fact, Vatican II had at least as profound an impact on Lutheran worship as the influences coming from American Evangelicals and the megachurches, and probably even more.

⁷ See the literature review below for a listing of these studies.

⁸ See the literature review below for examples of this approach.

⁹ Beginning the discussion with adiaphora is deemed “law oriented” because it is viewed as an approach that is only concerned with finding boundaries for what is or is not acceptable in worship.

both circumstances, only half of what the confessions have to say about worship is realized.

The Lutheran Confessions have much to say about worship forms. For this reason, studying them has value beyond that of an academic exercise. The continuing discussion about how to answer the question of what Lutherans will do when they gather for public worship would benefit greatly if general agreement could be reached on the theological principles that should guide the use of worship forms. Needless to say, these theological principles must be drawn from a distinctively Lutheran, biblical perspective. The Lutheran Confessions are the natural place from which to draw such theological insights that will then shape the worship life of the Lutheran church.

Furthermore, the confessions strike a refreshing and balanced perspective on the issue of worship forms. In contrast to those who would like absolute freedom in worship, the confessions demonstrate the close connection between doctrine and practice and the pastoral concerns that temper that freedom. In contrast to those who would like the confessions to demand a liturgical form, freedom in external matters is vigorously maintained on the basis of theological grounds and pastoral concerns. A confessional Lutheran approach to worship forms is both theological and pastoral.

I initially thought that this thesis could be proven by historical precedent; for example, by an examination of the *Kirchenordnungen*.¹⁰ The thought was that the theological and pastoral approach of the confessions could be observed as it played out in the actual practice of the early Lutherans. However, it soon became obvious that the difficulties with such an undertaking would be too great to overcome in a paper of this size. The greatest of these difficulties lies in the lack of general agreement of how to understand the *Kirchenordnungen*.¹¹ Looking for evidence in them would not only be based on historical uncertainty, but it would also require analysis of the vast difference between the state-controlled church of the early Lutherans and the synodical and congregational governance of the present day. Because of this, studies that have attempted such

¹⁰ The *Kirchenordnungen* are documents of church law that prescribed how worship was to be carried out in a given territory of Germany. Volumes are continuing to be published under the title *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Emil Sehling.

¹¹ There is a debate over how reliable the *Kirchenordnungen* are in reflecting actual practice. See the literary battle between Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) on this issue.

an approach have proven to be unsatisfying in their conclusions.¹²

A better way to prove the theological and pastoral approach to worship forms in the Lutheran Confessions is simply to let the confessions speak for themselves, along the way comparing them with some of the conclusions that others have been drawn from them. By means of contrast, the theological and pastoral approach of the confessions will shine forth all the more clearly. This examination of the confessions will follow a literature review and an overview of liturgical theology, which will be useful in clarifying what constitutes an appropriate “theological” approach to worship forms in the Lutheran Confessions.

Literature review

Scholarship devoted to worship in the Lutheran Confessions has tended to focus on specific issues. No attempt at a comprehensive study of all that the confessions have to say about worship has been undertaken. *Worship, Gottesdienst, Cultus Dei: What the Lutheran Confessions Say About Worship*¹³ is the largest and widest in scope of any published studies, but it is very light on analysis since it consists almost entirely of a compilation of quotations from the confessions that are organized under various topics and very briefly summarized. “The Augustana and Lutheran Worship,”¹⁴ which considers worship on the basis of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, covers more territory in the confessions than most of the other studies and draws a number of helpful practical applications.

Many studies have focused on the issue of adiaphora and especially its treatment in Formula of Concord Article X. James Alan Waddell published a lengthy study of the treatment of adiaphora, titled *The Struggle To Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church: Adiaphora in*

¹² See Matthew C. Harrison, “Lutheran Liturgical Uniformity in Relation to Church Polity in the Augustana and the Formula of Concord: The *Kirchenordnungen* as Key to Understanding the Intent of the Confessors” in *Worship 2000: Papers presented at the Congress on the Lutheran Confessions*, eds. John A. Maxfield and Jennifer H. Maxfield, (St. Louis, MO: Luther Academy, 2010), 20-28.

¹³ *Worship, Gottesdienst, Cultus Dei: What the Lutheran Confessions Say About Worship*, ed. James L. Brauer (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2005).

¹⁴ Joel D. Otto, “The Augustana and Lutheran Worship,” (Mequon, WI: WLS Essay File, presented at the “Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions,” September, 2005), <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1624> (accessed September 20, 2011).

Historical, Theological, and Practical Perspective.¹⁵ This work primarily focuses on affirming liturgical freedom against the threat of a liturgical theology. However, by introducing philosophical distinctions, it often leaves the waters muddier than they were to begin with. In addition, the tone is harshly critical and not always balanced. Paul Kelm's, "Christian Freedom in Worship: More Than Just a Throwaway Line" suggests that the confessional mandate of freedom in worship has not always been evident in the present day.¹⁶

Other articles have compared the confessions with historical practice, especially as it relates to liturgical freedom and uniformity. Matthew Harrison's article, "Lutheran Liturgical Uniformity in Relation to Church Polity in the Augustana and the Formula of Concord: The *Kirchenordnungen* as Key to Understanding the Intent of the Confessors,"¹⁷ as its title indicates, compares the confessional assertions of freedom with the practice of dictating how worship should be carried out in the *Kirchenordnungen*. A full analysis of the state and church relations in early Lutheranism and how they impacted the worship practice of the day is unfortunately lacking. "Considering Contexts: Understanding Article X of the Formula of Concord Then and Now"¹⁸ and "The Adiaphoristic Controversy: Its Resolution in the Formula of Concord, Article X and Implications for the WELS Today"¹⁹ both examine the historical similarities and differences between the time of the Formula of Concord and the contemporary situation. Both conclude that the dissimilarities are greater than the similarities, and that contemporary applications should reflect this.

¹⁵ James Alan Waddell, *The Struggle To Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church: Adiaphora in Historical, Theological, and Practical Perspective* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Paul Kelm, "Christian Freedom in Worship: More Than Just a Throwaway Line" (Paper presented at the Worship Conference at St. Mark, De Pere, WI, 2005).

¹⁷ Matthew C. Harrison, "Lutheran Liturgical Uniformity in Relation to Church Polity in the Augustana and the Formula of Concord: The *Kirchenordnungen* as Key to Understanding the Intent of the Confessors" in *Worship 2000: Papers presented at the Congress on the Lutheran Confessions*, eds. John A. Maxfield and Jennifer H. Maxfield, (St. Louis, MO: Luther Academy, 2010), 20-28.

¹⁸ Nathan Montover, "Considering Contexts: Understanding Article X of the Formula of Concord Then and Now," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 32:2 (April 2005): 124-127.

¹⁹ Donald J. Pieper, "The Adiaphoristic Controversy: Its Resolution in the Formula of Concord, Article X and Implications for the WELS Today" (Presented to the Arizona-California Pastors' Conference, North Hollywood, California, October, 2009), http://www.az-cadistrict.org/site/outlines.aspsec_id=180002237&secure=&dlyear=0&dlcat=Essays (accessed October 10, 2011).

“Walking Together: ‘Public Displays of Affection’ or ‘Just Holding Hands?’”²⁰ examines the confessional understanding of complete unity in doctrine and practice. It also addresses the issue of a liturgical theology in the confessions. Liturgy and a liturgical theology in the confessions are covered in several other studies: “Whose Liturgy Is It?”²¹ by Norman Nagel and two papers by John T. Pless, “Toward a Confessional Lutheran Understanding of Liturgy”²² and “The Relationship of Adiaphora and Liturgy in the Lutheran Confessions.”²³ In addition, Pless’s “Ceremonies for Seekers: Catechesis as a Fundamental Criterion for Worship in the Lutheran Confessions”²⁴ is concerned with the theological definition of liturgy and how it might serve catechetically.

Worship in the Lutheran Confessions is a topic that has hardly been exhausted. Because of the recent inclination towards finding a liturgical theology in the confessions, those studies that examine liturgy in the confessions will receive greater attention in this paper. Because its background is probably unfamiliar to many Lutheran readers, briefly surveying liturgical theology first will be helpful in understanding how it differs from the theological criteria for worship forms in the Lutheran Confessions.

Defining a theological approach

Recently, the idea of looking to the confessions to outline a “liturgical theology” has gained traction. In order to understand the implications of this approach, it is first of all necessary to trace the history of liturgical theology.

Alexander Schmemmann, an Orthodox priest, is the father of liturgical theology.

²⁰ David Jay Webber, “Walking Together: ‘Public Displays of Affection’ or ‘Just Holding Hands?’” (Presented to a Pastoral Meeting of the Gadsen Conference, Arizona-California District, February, 2010), <http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/WebberWalkingTogether2010.pdf> (accessed December 16, 2011).

²¹ Norman Nagel, “Whose Liturgy Is It?” *Logia* 2:2 (April 1993): 4-8.

²² John T. Pless, “Toward a Confessional Lutheran Understanding of Liturgy” *Logia* 2:2 (April 1993): 9-13.

²³ John T. Pless, “The Relationship of Adiaphora and Liturgy in the Lutheran Confessions” in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, eds. Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn, MI: Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990): 195-210.

²⁴ John T. Pless, “Ceremonies for Seekers: Catechesis as a Fundamental Criterion for Worship in the Lutheran Confessions” in *Worship 2000: Papers presented at the Congress on the Lutheran Confessions*, eds. John A. Maxfield and Jennifer H. Maxfield, (St. Louis, MO: Luther Academy, 2010): 29-43.

Schememann bemoaned what he perceived as the relegation of liturgical studies to a status of a mere practical discipline.²⁵ He saw the beginnings of hope in the renewed interest in liturgics that arose in the first half of the twentieth century within the Liturgical Movement. However, the Liturgical Movement did not go far enough for Schememann. Its concerns were only “pastoral” and “missionary.”²⁶ But its attention to liturgical studies did open the door to a theological analysis of worship.

Schememann opened that door further. Liturgical theology, according to Schememann, is “the study of the theological meaning of Divine Worship.”²⁷ While on the surface this may sound fairly benign, liturgical theology is not merely concerned with how liturgy expresses theological truths. Rather, liturgy is itself the source of theology.²⁸ As such, worship transcends all else. Even “the Church is thought of as being a *function of worship*.”²⁹

Among Roman Catholics, Aidan Kavanagh promoted similar ideas, especially with his conclusion that liturgy is “the dynamic condition within which theological reflection is done,”³⁰ a thought that was expanded by David Fagerberg. For Fagerberg and Kavanagh, liturgy is a kind of “primary theology” because it is an encounter with God. Theological reflections on this encounter, then, are secondary and can only exist because of liturgy.³¹

This approach removes the distinction between theology and liturgy by turning liturgy into theology, resulting in the absolute dominance of liturgy. To use the oft-quoted axiom, *lex*

²⁵ Alexander Schememann, “Liturgical theology: Its task and method,” *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 1:4 (1957), 16. Schememann, from his Orthodox viewpoint, considered this a concession to Western thinking; part of what he calls the “Western captivity” of Orthodox theology. For a longer exposition, see Alexander Schememann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1966).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20: “The Liturgy is an essential part of Tradition and as such it must rightly be defined as one of the sources of theology.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 25. Emphasis his.

³⁰ Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 8.

³¹ David W. Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What Is Liturgical Theology?* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2004), 16-17. Fagerberg, an ex-Lutheran, betrays his Lutheran roots with his language of encounter: God's holy presence is “in word and sacrament.” Nevertheless, his studies took him to their logical end: his conversion to Roman Catholicism.

orandi establishes *lex credendi*.³²

It should be obvious that such an approach is incompatible with Lutheranism's strong emphasis on *sola scriptura*. Accordingly, in 2003, Kurt Marquart published an essay titled "Liturgy and Dogmatics"³³ which decisively condemned the "organic" union of liturgical theology:

Here at last we are face to face with the crux of the Reformation: what is the gospel? Is it the glorious trinitarian truth of full and free salvation in the incarnate Son of God—*sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura*—to which everything else must yield, even an angel from heaven (Galatians 1:8!), how much more then the various details of liturgy or ritual, no matter how "traditional"? Or is the gospel a complex amalgam to be pieced together from or read out of the bric-a-brac of traditional ecclesiastical ritual? The contradiction between the two views could not be more glaring—there can be no compromise between them.³⁴

Unfortunately, not all Lutherans have agreed with Marquart. Oswald Bayer, in his book *Theology the Lutheran Way*, argues for a radical liturgical theology. Because "theology begins and ends with the divine service,³⁵" Bayer concludes that systematic theology must be dramatically revamped. It is not sufficient for it to "follow the outline of the creed, as most textbooks do, beginning with creation and ending with eschatology."³⁶ This, according to Bayer, will guard against abstraction and speculation. Bayer considers the Small Catechism a fine organizing principle for theology only because he views it as a liturgical text.³⁷

This is not to deny that it could, in fact, be very beneficial to arrange a study of doctrine around the divine service. Nevertheless, Bayer is arguing for more than just a different organization *schema*. Consider what Mark Mattes, commenting on Bayer, concludes: "Theology

³² Schmemmann, 20. For Schmemmann, it is only once the *lex orandi* has been established that the *lex credendi* can even be expressed. See also Fagerberg, 195: "*lex orandi* establishes *lex credendi* and not vice versa."

³³ Kurt E. Marquart, "Liturgy and Dogmatics," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67:2 (April 2003): 175-190.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

³⁵ Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 93.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 70-73; see also Pless, *Toward a Confessional*, 11-12.

is...accountable to the divine service.”³⁸ In Bayer’s mind, the divine service has much more authority than the Holy Scriptures. He writes: “If the constitutive aspects of the “embodied word” are evident from the event and enactment of the Lord’s Supper, we do not need to locate the authority of God’s word and the Holy Scriptures in a rigid positivism of revelation.”³⁹

For Bayer, this is because liturgy is foundational or constitutive to theology. Bayer bases this argument on his consideration of Luther’s famous triad on the making of a theologian, drawn from Psalm 119: *oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*. According to Bayer, there were two sides to theology that Luther, as no one else, was able to hold together: “scholastic,” academic theology and “monastic,” liturgical theology.⁴⁰ Luther’s triad on the making of a theologian is clearly not an academic approach to theology; therefore, it represents the monastic side of Luther’s theology. Far from understanding Luther’s triad as a reference to study of the Word, Bayer considers it rather to refer primarily to communal prayer and meditation in worship. As Bayer makes clear, this “monastic” side of theology provides the source for theological reflection: “Luther holds that the ‘monastic’ aspect of theology with its liturgical spirituality grounded in the divine service is constitutive, in that this provides theology with its content.”⁴¹ In practical terms, this means that “theology focuses specifically on the liturgical forms of the particular divine service which shape human life and human speech.”⁴² Thus Bayer’s dictum, “Theology begins and ends with the divine service.”⁴³

It appears that this appeal to liturgy as normative and authoritative is because it is viewed as encounter or experience with God. The idea that in the liturgy an “encounter with God” is to be sought is something that, as Frank Senn puts it, is at home in the Eastern church, but has not

³⁸ Mark Mattes, “Theology the Lutheran Way: A Synopsis and Glossary,” *Logia* 16:4 (Reformation 2007): 39.

³⁹ Bayer, 90. This, of course, is the improper elevation of the sacraments to a higher status than the Word.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 94. Compare Mattes, 37: “the liturgical pole provides the content of theology;” 39: “Through meditation, the monastic, liturgical spirituality, which is constitutive for theology, is united and held in tension with the scholastic, academic, regulative aspect of theology, which seeks to order, analyze, and reflect on the liturgical.”

⁴³ Bayer, 93.

found much of a home in the West. Senn would like to reshape theology to reflect this encounter: “Theology, in the academic sense, has been a study *about* God. Religiously, however, it is an experience *of* God.”⁴⁴ Senn continues:

The possibilities in this approach to theology are exciting. Human potential (expressed in the *imago Dei*) is proleptically realized in the liturgy...Christology can be developed from the perspective of Christ as the object of worship in Christian devotion and as the mediator of worship in liturgical tradition...Pneumatology can also be developed from the role of the Spirit in worship.⁴⁵

Senn is not advocating for liturgy as “Tradition” in the manner of Schmemmann,⁴⁶ but he arrives at virtually the same conclusion by looking to develop a theology from liturgy. Senn states: “I would suggest that the liturgical tradition, experienced in order, texts, rubrics, actions, music, architecture, and the arts, might very well provide the grist for theological mills.”⁴⁷ For Senn, if one wants to develop a systematic Christology, he must consider Christ’s role in worship.⁴⁸ The starting point and the source of content for theological reflection is found in liturgy.⁴⁹

Neither Bayer nor Senn even feel the need to claim a liturgy that is first grounded in and expressive of the Word. Even the rubrics and actions of liturgy are elevated to the constitutive plane. Why is this the case? For Bayer, it seems that his goal is to avoid the philosophical

⁴⁴ Frank C. Senn, “Worship, Doctrine, and Life: Liturgical Theology, Theologies of Worship, and Doxological Theology,” *Theology* 9:1 (1981): 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁶ Schmemmann, 20: “The Liturgy is an essential part of Tradition and as such it must rightly be defined as one of the sources of theology.”

⁴⁷ Senn, 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19: “Christology can be developed from the perspective of Christ as the object of worship in Christian devotion and as the mediator of worship in liturgical tradition... Pneumatology can also be developed from the role of the Spirit in worship.”

⁴⁹ Nagel comes dangerously close to a similar idea, 5-6: “You recall how the apostle calls them back to the liturgy, as he quotes it with the words of our Lord [1 Cor 11:23-26]. From the liturgy, then, he draws out the things that they need to be hearing about.”

blunders of Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Kant.⁵⁰ Senn, on the other hand, arrives at his understanding because he entertains the notion of theology as experience of God, and nowhere else is God “experienced” as he is in the liturgy.⁵¹ In addition, other Lutherans have looked to liturgical theology because it provides something even more exciting than a mere source of theology—the prospect of a uniting ground from which ecumenical endeavors can grow.⁵²

What does this have to do with worship forms in the Lutheran Confessions? Bold and outright proponents of liturgical theology such as Senn and Bayer are not concerned with proving their views from the Lutheran Confessions. However, others have attempted to apply some of the ideas of liturgical theology to their reading of the confessions:

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 church, and what goes on in the church’s worship, is an important focus for us in discerning what the overall theology of the church actually is. And second, it means that those aspects of theology that are not directly a part of the church’s practice of worship still need to be seen according to their connection to worship, and to what goes in (sic) worship.⁵³

While this kind of a liturgical theology is not the same as Bayer’s or Senn’s, it is arguably

⁵⁰ Bayer, 94: “Modern theology has understood Christianity in three different ways. One follows Hegel and understands it theoretically; another follows Schleiermacher and sees it existentially, while the third follows the Kantian tradition and understands it morally. In view of these transformations, I believe that there is only one way in which systematic theology can come to a responsible understanding of what theology is, and that is to see it linguistically or, more precisely, to see it as a doctrine of forms...theology focuses specifically on the liturgical forms of the particular divine service which shape human life and human speech, such as the songs of praise and the complaints, the cries for help (like the “Kyrie!”), the prayers of intercession, and the words of blessing. The important thing therefore is that theology focuses on the forms of speech that are used in the divine service.”

⁵¹ Senn, 19: “Theology, in the academic sense, has been a study *about* God. Religiously, however, it is an experience *of* God. What would it mean to take this experience of God in worship as the starting point for theology? This kind of apophatic theology has had a home in the Eastern Church which it hasn’t had in the Western Church, except for some mystical theologians...The possibilities in this approach to theology are exciting. Human potential (expressed in the *imago Dei*) is proleptically realized in the liturgy.”

⁵² See, for example, Dorothea Haspelmath-Finatti, “*Theologia Prima*--Liturgical Theology as an Ecumenical Challenge to Lutheran Worship Practice,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 48:4 (December 2009): 374-379. Haspelmath-Finatti, 375, raves about the possibilities: “In my experience ecumenical worship is a good place to find the dynamics of *theologia prima*. In ecumenical contexts no single church can determine an entire service. Instead, we receive the wealth of a different tradition; we receive the Word of our God from other hands. We share in ecumenical worship with the hope of living as the one church together with others. Here we do not ‘do’ Christian rite. We receive it. We can witness God’s work upon us.”

⁵³ Webber, 25. Emphasis his.

reading into the confessions more than the confessions say. As with others whose understanding of liturgical theology shades their reading of the confessions,⁵⁴ problems arise because too much theological significance is being given to the worship form itself. In this case, worship is given a status in which all other “aspects of theology” must be seen in connection to it.

Another definition of liturgical theology is offered by Timothy Maschke: “the discipline that articulates the theology that corporate worship actually expresses.”⁵⁵ This is not exactly the same as Schmemmann’s definition: “the study of the theological meaning of Divine Worship.”⁵⁶ Schmemmann would not accept Maschke’s definition, because Maschke assumes that worship must *express*, not *be*, theological meaning. According to Maschke, liturgical theology has as its task the articulation of that theological meaning. To proponents of a true liturgical theology, this would be a task which would clearly fall into the category of “secondary theology.”

Neither Luther nor the Lutheran Confessions undertook the kind of systematic study of worship that Maschke describes, but they did show the same concern. This is evident in their insistence that what takes place in worship must give clear confession to the theological truths of the gospel.⁵⁷ Perhaps current discussions would benefit from giving more thought to the message that is being given by what is taking place in worship, or, as Maschke put it, the theology that our worship is actually expressing.

The more familiar flip side of this might be called a “theology of worship.” The confessions assume that decisions about worship will be guided by theology, or, as is commonly stated, practice is governed by doctrine. If the confessions have more to say about worship than

⁵⁴ One prominent example, a self-proclaimed disciple of Aidan Kavanagh, is Arthur Just. Liturgical theology is evident in his work *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2008).

⁵⁵ Timothy Maschke, “The Holy Trinity and our Lutheran Liturgy,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67:3/4 (July/October 2003): 246.

⁵⁶ Schmemmann, 20.

⁵⁷ FC Ep X, 6: “We believe, teach, and confess that in a time of persecution, when an unequivocal confession of the faith is demanded of us, we dare not yield to the opponents in such indifferent matters.” This and all subsequent quotations from the Lutheran Confessions will be taken from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

that there is absolute freedom in all matters liturgical, then they must articulate some theology that impacts what will take place in worship. This is the kind of theological meaning that should be sought in them. Rather than seeking to give theological significance to the form itself, in the confessions theological concerns shape and govern the form, which remains free and subject to change.⁵⁸

A confessional Lutheran approach to worship forms is theological

It might seem that the natural starting point for a study of worship forms in the Lutheran Confessions would be the articles that deal directly with rites and ceremonies, such as Augsburg Confession Articles XV and XXIV and Formula of Concord Article X. However, this is not the case. The theological approach to worship in the Lutheran Confessions begins with the foundational article, Augsburg Confession Article IV: justification by faith alone.⁵⁹

Justification by faith alone

Justification by faith alone is at the heart and core of Lutheran, biblical doctrine. Correspondingly, it must also be at the heart and core of what takes place in corporate worship. Everything which goes on in worship must be seen in its light.⁶⁰

Because man is justified by faith, true worship is concerned with the heart and not with the external actions. This means that the worship form cannot benefit man merely *ex opere operato*.⁶¹ The understanding of liturgical theology that the external form is the manner in which God is made present would also fall into this category. For example, consider the confusion that

⁵⁸ At the same time, the freedom itself is based on theological truths: justification by faith alone and the authority of Scripture alone.

⁵⁹ Pless, *Relation of Adiaphora*, 197; Otto, 1-2; Jacob A. O. Preus III, “What’s Lutheran About Worship: Theology From the Inside Out,” *Missio Apostolica* 8:2 (November 2000): 73.

⁶⁰ Note, for example, how the Augsburg Confession ties false ideas about worship to a faulty understanding of justification. AC XXVIII, 61-62: “There are still tremendous debates concerning the change of the law, concerning ceremonies of the new law, concerning the change of the sabbath, all of which have arisen from the false assumption that worship in the church should be like Levitical worship and that Christ commissioned the apostles and bishops to devise new ceremonies that were necessary for salvation. *These errors crept into the church when the righteousness of faith was not taught with sufficient clarity.*” Emphasis mine.

⁶¹ Ap XXIV, 27: “In summary, the worship of the New Testament is spiritual, that is, it is the righteousness of faith in the heart and the fruits of faith. Accordingly, it abrogates the Levitical worship. And Christ says in John 4 [:23-24], “[T]rue worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” This passage clearly condemns the notions about sacrifices that imagine they avail *ex opere operato*, and teaches that one should “worship in spirit,” that is, with the deepest activity of the heart and faith.”

results from Arthur Just's attempt to merge justification by faith and the liturgy into an inseparable entity: "The supreme expression of justification is in the liturgy. If our liturgies are to be Lutheran, they must be understood in the context of justification and justification in the context of the liturgy."⁶²

There are several troubling issues here. The first and most glaring is the last phrase. Certainly liturgy must be understood in the context of justification. But why the reverse? Liturgy reflects or doxologically expresses justification; it does not govern the understanding of justification. This would be elevating the *lex orandi* above the *lex credendi*.

But even more troubling is the notion that the "supreme expression of justification" is to be found in the liturgy. While the liturgy⁶³ does, in fact, clearly express justification (while the sermon very well might not), the real problem with what Just says is that he has tied too much importance to the ritual form. While no one would disagree with his comment that rituals do not analyze or discourse but rather proclaim,⁶⁴ Just is not content to stop there. As he proceeds, it becomes evident that ritual is itself the means by which Christ is made present in Just's mind. Just writes: "The Divine Service does not simply reflect what Christ is like, it enacts us in His flesh...Rituals are not a mirror to show us what reality might look like; *rituals are reality*, and by our participation in those rituals we enact reality."⁶⁵ This sheds light on how to interpret Just's statement that justification finds its "supreme expression" in liturgy. For Just, liturgy is itself the way to encounter God. Liturgy is reality.⁶⁶ While Just might object and point to his references to

⁶² Just, 23.

⁶³ Defined as the Western Rite.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 37. It's hard disagree with Just's words: "Rituals do not hand out instruction manuals. When one engages in ritual, there should be very little explanation...Once the Divine Service begins, we should have very few announcements or explanations, letting the service instead take us into its rhythms. This symphony of movement flows toward Jesus' clear voice in the Gospel and in the Words of Institution, the two climaxes of the liturgy."

⁶⁵ Ibid., 38-39. Emphasis his.

⁶⁶ Waddell, 184-185, commenting on Just, writes: "This echoes the assumption of the broader context of Liturgical Theology, that liturgy is primary theology and that theological reflection is secondary. It even goes so far as to subordinate scripture to liturgy, since it identifies the "supreme expression of justification...in the liturgy" and not scripture." In fact, Just's concept is really no different than Odo Casel's concept of "re-presentation," which is summarized by Quill, 38: "When Christ and his Church cooperate in the doing of the liturgy, this ritual and sacramental action of the Church makes present (re-presents) Christ's act of salvation."

the means of grace, the fact of the matter is that by making ritual reality, the means of grace are clearly subordinate in nature. They are reduced to the role of being the content of ritual. The result is a near equivalent of *ex opere operato*. One should look to the ritual form if one wants to encounter justification, at least in its “supreme expression.”

In contrast, the confessions are quite clear that true worship does not consist of performing the proper rituals but rather revolves around the receiving of Christ’s righteousness by faith:

It is easy to determine the difference between this faith and the righteousness of the law. Faith is that worship which receives the benefits that God offers; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. God wants to be honored by faith so that we receive from him those things that he promises and offers.⁶⁷

For faith does not justify or save because it is a worthy work in and of itself, but only because it receives the promised mercy. This worship, this *latreia*, is especially praised throughout the Prophets and Psalms.⁶⁸

Since justification by faith alone means that man can contribute nothing to his salvation, the confessions also maintain that the external form of worship is not God-pleasing in and of itself.⁶⁹ Worship cannot be seen as a sacrifice to God or as a meritorious good work.⁷⁰ Nor is it necessary for salvation.⁷¹ It is on these theological grounds that Melanchthon can claim that among the Lutherans the liturgy is more dignified than among the Roman Catholics. Lutherans,

⁶⁷ Ap IV, 49

⁶⁸ Ap IV, 56-57

⁶⁹ AC XXVI, 40-41: “Nevertheless, many traditions are kept among us, such as the order of readings in the Mass, holy days, etc., which are conducive to maintaining good order in the church. But at the same time, people are warned that such acts of worship do not justify before God.”

⁷⁰ AC XV, 3: “They are also reminded that human traditions that are instituted to win God’s favor, merit grace, and make satisfaction for sins are opposed to the gospel and the teaching of faith.” SA II.ii.7: “As the canon of the Mass and all the handbooks say, the Mass is and can be nothing but a human work (even a work of rotten scoundrels), performed in order that individuals might reconcile themselves and others to God, acquire the forgiveness of sins, and merit grace. (When the Mass is observed in the very best possible way, it is observed with these intentions. What purpose would it otherwise have?) Thus the Mass should and must be condemned and repudiated, because it is directly contrary to the chief article, which says that it is not an evil or devout servant of the Mass with his work, but rather the Lamb of God and the Son of God, who takes away our sin.”

⁷¹ AC XV, 2: “People are reminded not to burden consciences, as if such worship were necessary for salvation.”

Melanchthon says, not only “keep the ancient traditions” but also “interpret them in the best possible way, by excluding the opinion that they justify.”⁷²

The false idea that worship is a meritorious good work can be seen in the mantra of the Liturgical Movement, that liturgy is “the work of the people.” In its origins among Roman Catholics, this slogan was meant as a rallying cry for more active participation of the laity in public worship because their participation was viewed as their role in the sacrifice that was being carried out.⁷³ In other words, by participating in the rite, the laypeople were carrying out the good works they had been given to perform.

Some Lutherans have also, perhaps unwittingly, adopted this understanding of “liturgy.”⁷⁴ Such an understanding is inconsistent with the centrality of justification by faith alone, and is soundly refuted in the confessions. Melanchthon, in response to the argument of the Confutation, which claimed that the word “liturgy” meant “sacrifice,”⁷⁵ wrote:

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 the minister who preaches sets forth the gospel to the people, as Paul says, “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries,” that is, of the

⁷² Ap XV, 38-39

⁷³ Nagel, 4.

⁷⁴ Senn, xiv: “Liturgy (*leitourgia*) is the public work performed by a particular community.” Lutheran ears perhaps assumed that it meant “let the people participate.”

⁷⁵ For the Roman Catholic argument, see *The Confutation of the Augsburg Confession*, tr. Mark D. Tranvik, in *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 129.

gospel and the sacraments...Thus the term “liturgy” fits well with the ministry.⁷⁶

In fact, Melanchthon is only willing to call the service a “sacrifice” so long as it is not separated from the proclamation of the gospel:

We are perfectly willing for the Mass to be understood as a daily sacrifice, provided that this includes the entire Mass, that is, the ceremony together with the proclamation of the gospel, faith, prayer, and thanksgiving. For these things are joined together as a daily

⁷⁶ Ap XXIV, 80-81. Cf. Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1968), 14: “[T]his word might be translated “work done for the people” (*Volkswerk*) or “service rendered the people” (*Volksdienst*).” On the basis of this meaning, the conclusion is drawn that liturgy is God serving man, for example: David Fagerberg, quoted in Haspelmath-Finaitti, 11: “Liturgy is the work of Christ on behalf of the vital interest of the clan to which he belongs: the family of Adam and Eve.”

Some Lutherans make the same claim on the basis of Melanchthon’s comments. Pless, *Toward a Confessional*, 9: “Contrary to both the medieval Roman opinion that the liturgy or the Mass is church’s sacrifice and the modern Liturgical Movement’s slogan “Liturgy is the work of the people,” the Confessions understand liturgy as God’s work, *Gottesdienst*, Divine Service.” This then creates a divine mandate for the liturgy, as is evident in Nagel, 4, and Quill, 166, who states: “The primary challenge is to maintain a theology and practice of worship in which the liturgy is understood as belonging to God, not the local or ecumenical Christian community...The liturgy is God’s working through his ministers. His liturgy is none other than Holy Baptism and the ongoing preaching of “all that I have commanded,” namely, Holy Absolution and Holy Communion (AC XXVIII, 5-10). When all are the Lord’s things and the Lord’s work, then there is certainty (*extra nos*). The adjective “holy” indicates that it belongs to God (not to the Church) and is a ministry done by God to man; thus Holy Ministry, Holy Gospel, Holy Liturgy (*Gottesdienst*, not *Menschen dienst*), Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Communion, Holy Church.” Others use Melanchthon’s argument as a basis for a liturgical theology. Webber, 25: “What we see here is a remarkable and enlightening convergence of several topics that might otherwise be discussed separately...all of these things are touched on under the overarching category of the “liturgy.” So, while we do need to maintain the kind of distinctions between these various *loci* that the Scriptures maintain, and while we do perhaps need to tease them apart from each other logically when we systematically explain what each one is, we still must always remember that 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.” Emphasis his.

Several difficulties should prevent one from drawing too many conclusions on the basis of Melanchthon’s comments, however. The first is that this is the only place in the confessions where the term “liturgy” occurs. When the confessions wish to discuss worship, the terms *cultus* and *Gottesdienst* are employed. When they wish to speak of what is commonly called “liturgy” today, they use *ritus*, *ceremonia*, and *tradio*. (See the very helpful discussion of these terms in Brauer, 291-298). Second, Melanchthon is compelled to speak about liturgy because the Roman Catholic opponents had attempted to use the word to promote their conception of the mass as sacrifice. Melanchthon is defending his position and noting that the term does not of necessity require the understanding of a sacrifice. While it does agree “quite well with our position,” he is not attempting to build an entire theological understanding of worship on the back of one word. Finally, does Melanchthon actually equate liturgy with Christ serving his people? Melanchthon’s comments focus more on the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacrament within the context of the mass than on God’s action in particular.

Given all of the confusion generated by the use of “liturgy,” it may be better not to draw too many conclusions from the vocable meaning or from Melanchthon’s argument in the Apology. God certainly serves man in worship, but his service is the means of grace, not the liturgical rite. The liturgical rite is the servant that proclaims the Word and aids in the administration of the sacrament. It is not essential to the means of grace. Perhaps it would be best to leave “liturgy” out of the discussion or to use it in its simpler, narrower sense. Luther, for example, could express both dimensions of worship, God’s service to man and man’s response, without bringing “liturgy” into the picture: “The purpose of this new house may be such that nothing else may ever happen in it except that our dear Lord himself may speak to us through his holy Word and we respond to him through prayer and praise.” Martin Luther, “Sermon at the Dedication of Castle Church, Torgau” in *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, Volume 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 333.

sacrifice in the New Testament; the ceremony was instituted for the sake of these things, and must not be separated from them.⁷⁷

The ceremony “must not be separated” from the proclamation of the gospel because that is the reason why the ceremony was instituted in the first place. Because true worship is not found in externals, but is rather the receiving of Christ’s righteousness in faith, Lutheran public worship will be centered on the proclamation of the gospel.⁷⁸ As James Brauer explains, this is the point that Melancthon is making concerning the word “liturgy:”

A service such as the Mass does not confer God’s grace *ex opere operato* or merit remission of sins as some kind of sacrifice to God. It is rather a “liturgy,” that is, a public ministry offering the forgiveness of sins, won by Christ, which is conveyed through the means of grace and received by faith.⁷⁹

Since the external actions of worship are not meritorious or necessary for salvation, they are free. This freedom in externals therefore has its basis in justification by faith.

Correspondingly, there is a distinction between what God has instituted and what is of human institution.⁸⁰ All things which are of human institution are free.⁸¹

The confessional Lutheran approach to worship forms is theological in that it maintains the centrality of justification by faith alone. All decisions concerning worship forms must be evaluated in light of justification. As has been noted, this means that any form, rite, or ceremony that is designed to give the impression that it can merit salvation must be rejected. This is the

⁷⁷ Ap XV, 35

⁷⁸ Ap XV, 42: “And yet the chief worship of God is to preach the gospel.”

⁷⁹ Brauer, 85.

⁸⁰ AC XXII, 1-2: “Both kinds are given to the laity in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper because this usage has the command of the Lord.” Ap XXIV, 92: “It is not safe to institute an act of worship in the church without the authority of Scripture.” Ap XII, 16-17: “Finally, if everything that has the command of God and some promise added to it ought to be counted a sacrament, why not include prayer, which can most truly be called a sacrament?...But let us skip over all of this. No intelligent person will argue much about the number or the terminology, as long as those things are retained that have the mandate and promises of God.”

⁸¹ AC XXVII, 40-44: “Nevertheless, many traditions are kept among us, such as the order of readings in the Mass, holy days, etc., which are conducive to maintaining good order in the church. But at the same time, people are warned that such acts of worship do not justify before God and that no punishable sin is committed if they are omitted without offense. Such freedom in human rites was not unknown to the Fathers...Irenaeus says, ‘Disagreement about fasting does not dissolve the unity in faith.’”

negative aspect of the justification principle. Justification also results in two positive principles that flesh out the theological approach of the confessions to the worship form. First, worship will revolve around the means of grace. Second, all externals are and remain free. These two implications will now be explored.

Centered on the means of grace

Because Lutheran worship is built on the theological foundation of justification by faith, it is centered on the means of grace. The Augsburg Confession highlights the close relationship between justification and the means of grace when it connects Article V to Article IV with the words, “that we might obtain this faith.” Since God does not deal with people apart from the means of grace, worship of necessity owes its existence to the means of grace. For this reason, preaching the gospel is called the “chief worship of God.”⁸² The worship form must concern itself with proclamation of the gospel,⁸³ reception of the gospel in faith,⁸⁴ and response to the gospel.⁸⁵

Martin Luther sounded the clear insistence on the means of grace in his Smalcald Articles: “In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes

⁸² Ap XV, 42: “And yet the chief worship of God is to preach the gospel.”

⁸³ Ap XXIV, 51: “Now if our opponents make such things the center of worship rather than the proclamation of the gospel, faith, and its struggles, they should be numbered among those whom Daniel describes as worshipping their god with gold and silver [Dan. 11:38].”

⁸⁴ Ap IV, 49: “Faith is that worship which receives the benefits that God offers the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. God wants to be honored by faith so that we receive from him those things that he promises and offers.”

⁸⁵ Ap XXIV, 74: “Once a conscience has been uplifted by faith and realizes its freedom from terror, then it fervently gives thanks for the benefits of Christ and for his suffering.”

Luther nicely summarizes all three of these in his Large Catechism: LC I, 84: “Second and most important, we observe them so that people will have time and opportunity on such days of rest, which otherwise would not be available, to attend worship services, that is, so that they may assemble to hear and discuss God’s Word and then to offer praise, song, and prayer to God.”

before.”⁸⁶ Worship that exists apart from the Word of God will inevitably be idolatry.⁸⁷ The form that worship takes must therefore be informed by the Word. Moreover, the confessions make it quite clear that the content of preaching, not the form of worship, is what distinguishes the Lutheran churches:

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...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 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 works of love.⁸⁸

Melanchthon goes on to explain why he gives this lengthy description of the theological content of Lutheran preaching: “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.”⁸⁹ The Augustana defines the church by the content of its preaching, the proclamation of the gospel, rather than by its liturgy.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ SA III.viii.3. Cf. Ap IV, 67: “God cannot be dealt with and cannot be grasped in any other way than through the Word.”

⁸⁷ LC I, 16-17: “Look, here you have the true honor and worship that please God, which God also commands under penalty of eternal wrath, namely, that the heart should know no other consolation or confidence than in him, nor let itself be torn from him, but for his sake should risk everything and disregard everything else on earth. On the other hand, you will easily see and judge how the world practices nothing but false worship and idolatry. There has never been a nation so wicked that it did not establish and maintain some sort of worship. All people have set up their own god, to whom they looked for blessings, help, and comfort.”

⁸⁸ Ap XV, 42-43

⁸⁹ Ap XV, 44

⁹⁰ LC II, 44-46: “There was no Holy Spirit present to reveal this truth and have it preached. Rather, it was human beings and evil spirits who were there, who taught us to obtain grace and be saved by our works. Therefore there was no Christian church. For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian church, apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ.” See Mary Jane Haemig and Robert Kolb, “Preaching in Lutheran Pulpits in the Age of Confessionalization” in *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture 1550-1675*, ed. Robert Kolb (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 119: “The Wittenberg circle continued to recognize the importance of ritual, dedicated much effort to reforming it properly, but subordinated it to the transmission of the gospel through sermon and other forms of the Word. Luther and his colleagues revised rituals to make certain that they delivered the power of God’s Word to the people.”

Therefore, it is the proclamation of the gospel that gives the chief direction to the form that worship will take. Melanchthon criticized the Roman Catholics because they had reversed this relationship: “They omit the proclamation of the gospel, faith, prayer, and the like, even though the ceremony has been established on account of these.”⁹¹ Ceremonies and rites, the outward form of worship, serve the proclamation of the gospel. If they supplant the proclamation of the gospel, then they have lost the purpose for which they were established. They must remain closely connected as servants of the gospel proclamation if they are to serve a beneficial purpose.

At the same time, there does remain a distinction between the means of grace and the worship form. It is at the very least misleading to say that “Word and sacrament are by their very nature liturgy,”⁹² because it is difficult to separate “liturgy” from its ritual connotation. If Word and sacrament are by their very nature liturgy, the next logical step is that the liturgy “is the vehicle through which Christ comes to us with His words and gifts imparting the forgiveness of sins...the ‘external Word’ in action bestowing God’s gifts.”⁹³ In effect, the liturgy has been raised to a status almost equal to the means of grace. To be fair, this is not a conclusion that John Pless consistently maintains. In another place, he writes:

The Lutheran Confessions’ call for a renewed *cultus* is concerned not with innovative or clever changes in texts and ceremonies, but with a liturgy that revolves around the Lord’s forgiveness proclaimed and bestowed in the preached Word, baptism, absolution, and the Supper.⁹⁴

Here a distinction has been maintained between “liturgy” and that which liturgy revolves around, the means of grace. Such an understanding is in line with the Lutheran Confessions.

Melanchthon maintains this kind of distinction between rite and means of grace:

It is evident that human traditions do not enliven the heart and are neither results of the Holy Spirit’s working...nor instruments through which God moves hearts to believe (as are the given Word and divinely instituted sacraments). Instead they are usages in that sphere of matters which do not pertain at all to the heart but which “perish with use.” It

⁹¹ Ap XV, 34

⁹² Pless, *Toward a Confessional*, 9. Cf. Quill, 166, who equates the liturgy with the sacraments.

⁹³ Pless, *Ceremonies*, 30.

⁹⁴ Pless, *Toward a Confessional*, 11.

must not be thought that they are necessary for righteousness before God.⁹⁵

In other words, Word and sacrament can exist outside of the sphere of liturgy. They do not derive their power from the circumstances in which they are delivered. While there is much value in the liturgy, while for many centuries the liturgy has aided in the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments,⁹⁶ the liturgy is not indispensable in the same way in which Word and sacraments are indispensable. To put it another way: Jesus is present in the liturgy only insofar as the means of grace are present in the liturgy.

On the other hand, the confessions do strongly insist that the worship form clearly set forth the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. If worship is seen primarily as gathering together to praise Jesus,⁹⁷ then it has lost the means of grace focus urged by the confessions. Without its mooring in God's action, such praise quickly becomes anthropocentric. The confessions view the use of a worship form as beneficial in helping those gathered to maintain the correct focus:

The Mass, therefore, was instituted so that the faith of those who use the sacrament should recall what benefits are received through Christ and should encourage and console the anxious conscience. For to remember Christ is to remember his benefits and realize that they are truly offered to us.⁹⁸

The many insistences that faith is the highest worship of God make perfect sense when seen in light of this strong emphasis on the means of grace. Public worship proclaims the gospel to those who gather. Those gathered worship God by receiving the benefits of the gospel.⁹⁹ This does not turn worship into a one-way street, however. There is a danger that Lutherans who

⁹⁵ Ap VII-VIII, 36

⁹⁶ Consider what Melancthon says in AC XXIV, 30-31: "The Mass, therefore, was instituted so that the faith of those who use the sacrament should recall what benefits are received through Christ and should encourage and console the anxious conscience."

⁹⁷ This is the common understanding of Evangelicals. Paul Kelm argues for a similar understanding in "Christian Freedom in Worship: More Than Just a Throwaway Line" (Presented at the Worship Conference at St. Mark, De Pere, WI, 2005).

⁹⁸ AC XXIV, 30-31

⁹⁹ Ap IV, 49: "Faith is that worship which receives the benefits that God offers; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. God wants to be honored by faith so that we receive from him those things that he promises and offers."

rightly stress the proclamation of the gospel in public worship will deny man nearly any response or role in worship other than that of being a passive recipient.¹⁰⁰ But the man who is justified by faith naturally responds by doing good works.¹⁰¹ These good works are not meritorious or necessary for salvation, but they “follow from true faith...as certainly and without doubt as fruit from a good tree.”¹⁰² Therefore, there is a two-fold direction of worship: God creating and strengthening faith through the means of grace and man in faith responding with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.¹⁰³

A Lutheran worship form must reflect the high importance of the means of grace. As such, it will find its substance in the proclamation of the Word, both in readings and in sermon, and in the regular administration of the sacrament. In addition, the form will give opportunity for those gathered to respond to God in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. In this way the confessional Lutheran approach to worship forms is theologically grounded on justification, the forgiveness of sins, which is given through the means of grace.

Freedom in externals

The Lutheran confessions insist that freedom exists when it comes to the form worship takes. This freedom is built on a theological foundation. First, because Scripture is the only authority, no other authority can insist on any human rite or ceremony. Only those which are of divine institution are binding. Second, because man is not justified by what he does but by faith alone, human rites or ceremonies are not necessary for salvation and are not of themselves true worship. Therefore they remain free.

In Article VII, the Augsburg Confession draws the line between what is essential and what is free when it states, “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

¹⁰⁰ Kurt Marquart, “Our ‘Worship Wars’ at the Turn of the Millennium” in *Worship 2000: Papers presented at the Congress on the Lutheran Confessions*, eds. John A. Maxfield and Jennifer H. Maxfield, (St. Louis, MO: Luther Academy, 2010), 156-158, guards against this: “Yet we must not let ourselves be buffaloes into the opposite error and exaggeration...the congregation is far from passive. It is actively responding in prayers and hymns.”

¹⁰¹ AC VI

¹⁰² FC Ep IV, 6

¹⁰³ LC I, 84: “[T]o attend worship services, that is, so that they may assemble to hear and discuss God’s Word and then to offer praise, song, and prayer to God.”

traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere.”¹⁰⁴ The question is exactly how much is to be included under “traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings.”

Those who would like to limit the extent of this article claim that it “‘defines the church liturgically,’ that is, the church is located in the liturgy where the Word is purely preached and the sacraments rightly administered.”¹⁰⁵ This seems to directly contradict the point of the article: “[T]o say that the ‘Augsburg Confession ‘defines the church liturgically’” is to cross a line which the Confession itself goes to great lengths not to cross, and is to render *Augustana* VII internally inconsistent.”¹⁰⁶

Several problems with this approach underline the inconsistency. First, what defined the Lutheran church was not the liturgy, but the evangelical interpretation thereof.¹⁰⁷ Second, it would beg the question, “Which is the right liturgy?” If one considers the liturgy as the distinguishing feature of Lutheranism, then what does one make of the fact that there are confessional Lutherans who use the Eastern Rite?¹⁰⁸ This forces the assumption of a rather arbitrary requirement, typically that the liturgy used by Lutherans must be “rooted in the earlier tradition of the church’s worship.”¹⁰⁹ To claim that the Augsburg Confession defines the church liturgically is, at the very least, ambiguous and open to misunderstanding.

Other arguments from liturgical maximalists run along similar lines. For example, Arthur Just writes:

Recent tradition has in effect reversed that maxim to read: ‘the law of believing founds the law of worshiping.’ We need to recognize that if we want right teaching (*orthodidaskalia*) to be a leaven in our churches, then right worship (*orthodoxia*) must

¹⁰⁴ AC VII, 2-4

¹⁰⁵ Pless, *Ceremonies*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Waddell, 187.

¹⁰⁷ Ap XV, 38

¹⁰⁸ Webber, 42.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

prevail and help to form true doctrine.¹¹⁰

While it is conceded that *lex orandi* will, to some extent, be formational, Just has made “right worship” the guarantee of “right teaching.” There is no two-way street here. For Just, liturgy simply outranks theology, a reversal of the manner in which most Lutherans have understood the axiom.¹¹¹ The practical result is a denial of the existence of freedom.

Similar conclusions are drawn from the argument that, because “liturgy” is “Christ serving his people,” it follows that liturgy is God-given and therefore not subject to change.¹¹² Others have distinguished between “liturgy” and “rites and ceremonies” in attempts to make liturgy “virtually untouchable.”¹¹³ Rites and ceremonies would only include things such as vestments or candles or the like.¹¹⁴ These arguments try to skirt the strong insistence on freedom in the confessions by minimizing what is included under the umbrella of freedom.

In the confessions, “rites and ceremonies” encompasses more than candles and vestments. Melancthon states:

But 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

¹¹⁰ Just, 28.

¹¹¹ Marquart, *Liturgy and Dogmatics*, 175: “It seems that for theologians under the influence of the Reformation, *lex orandi lex credendi* is generally a two-way street, with the rule of faith having the primacy.”

¹¹²For example, Haspelmath-Finatti, 378, states: “It is liturgy that creates the church. The church can modify certain liturgies; the church cannot change the liturgy, the ministry God gave us through Jesus, who is the first liturgist.” Nagel also argues this point. He turns the liturgy into something given by God. See Nagel, 6: “[W]e might bump into some of the ways nowadays that people would take over the liturgy, as if it belonged to them to do with as they please.”

¹¹³ Webber, 25: “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;” this leads to his conclusion, 38: “The ceremonies of this category are universally understood as testimonies to God’s truth, and to a proper liturgical theology. Hence the inevitable impression that would be left by a removal of these ceremonies would be that those who are removing them are thereby *rejecting* the truth and the proper theology that everyone understands these ceremonies 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 basic liturgical tradition has become, for all practical purposes, virtually “untouchable” in an orthodox church.” Emphasis his. A similar thought is in Pless, *Relationship*, 195: “To be sure, there are usages and ceremonies embedded within the liturgy that may be identified in the category of *adiaphora*.”

¹¹⁴ Webber, 38.

sake of tranquility. Thus, in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's day, and other more important festival days.¹¹⁵

We also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things.¹¹⁶

From these passages it is clear that "rites and ceremonies" encompasses not only vestments and candles but also what is commonly referred to as the liturgy or the order of service. All of these things fall under the category of being of human institution. Therefore, they are not essential in the same way that Word and sacraments are essential.¹¹⁷ "[I]n their nature and essence" they "are and remain in and of themselves free."¹¹⁸

This distinction between what is free and what is of divine institution must be made on the basis of the Word of God.¹¹⁹ This is most clearly set forth in Formula of Concord Article X, with its famous definition that adiaphora are those "ceremonies and ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word."¹²⁰ What God has commanded is that he gives the forgiveness of sins in the means of grace and not in ritual, rite, or ceremony. Therefore, the means of grace are what mark and define the church, not the external form.¹²¹ Likewise, humans do not have the authority to arbitrarily determine what rites or ceremonies necessary for

¹¹⁵ Ap VII-VIII, 33

¹¹⁶ Ap XXIV, 1

¹¹⁷ Pless, *Relationship*, 200: "Thus human ceremonies, no matter how venerable their history, can never be afforded the same status as the Word and Sacraments."

¹¹⁸ FC SD X, 14

¹¹⁹ Ap XV, 17: "Finally, what assurance do we have that religious rites established by human beings without the command of God justify inasmuch as we can affirm nothing about the will of God without the Word of God?"

¹²⁰ FC X, 1

¹²¹ AC VII: "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..."

salvation. This includes not only popes¹²² and bishops,¹²³ but also the power of the keys.¹²⁴

In the confessions, freedom in liturgical matters flows from justification by faith. Even in the clear rejection of human authority's right to tyrannically impose rules on the church justification is never far from sight.¹²⁵ The confessions do not insist that there be freedom in humanly instituted rites and ceremonies because they believe that doctrine and practice are unrelated.¹²⁶ Rather, it is precisely because doctrine and practice are closely connected that they take a strong stand on freedom. Christ set people free from the demands of the law, and the practice of the church should reflect that truth. Those who claimed that it was necessary for salvation to worship in one way robbed Christ of his merits and militated against the consolation of souls found in the righteousness of faith.¹²⁷ Thus they were advocating nothing short of a return to the Mosaic code.¹²⁸ Freedom from that sort of spiritual tyranny must be maintained for the sake of the gospel, as the Formula of Concord makes clear:

For in such a case it is no longer a matter of external adiaphora, which in their nature and

¹²² Ap VII-VIII, 23: "Perhaps the opponents demand that the church be defined as the supreme external monarchy of the entire world, in which the Roman pontiff must hold unlimited power, which no one is allowed to question or censure. This means the power to establish articles of faith and to cast aside the Scriptures as he wishes, to institute forms of worship and sacrifices..."

¹²³ AC XXVIII, 1-3: "In former times, there were serious controversies about the power of bishops...the pontiffs, relying on the power of the keys...instituted new forms of worship...Devout and learned people have long since condemned these vices in the church."

¹²⁴ Ap XII, 176: "As we said earlier, the keys do not have the power to impose penalties or institute rites of worship but only have the command to remit the sins of those who are converted and to convict and excommunicate those who refuse to be converted."

¹²⁵ AC XXVIII, 50-52: "Therefore, it follows that it is not lawful for bishops to institute such acts of worship or require them as necessary, because ordinances that are instituted as necessary or with the intention of meriting justification conflict with the gospel. For it is necessary to retain the teaching concerning Christian freedom in the churches...It is necessary to retain the chief article of the gospel: that we obtain grace through faith in Christ, not through certain observances or through acts of worship instituted by human beings."

¹²⁶ The classic example of this is David Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance* (Lima, OH:CSS Publishing, 2000).

¹²⁷ Ap XV, 27: "When minds are obsessed with the idea that such observances are necessary for justification, consciences are terribly troubled."

¹²⁸ AC XXVIII, 39: "Again, the authors of traditions act contrary to the command of God when they attach sin to food, days, and similar things and burden the church with the bondage of the law, as if, in order to merit justification, there had to be acts of worship among Christians similar to the Levitical ones, and as if God had commissioned the apostles and bishops to institute them."

essence are and remain in and of themselves free, which accordingly are not subject to either a command or a prohibition regarding their use or discontinuance. Instead, here it is above all a matter of the chief article of our Christian faith, as the Apostle testifies, “so that the truth of the gospel might always remain” [Gal. 2:5].¹²⁹

The confessions also guard against self-chosen works. Since no works can stand before God as meritorious, choosing one particular rite or ceremony and deeming it as worthy or god-pleasing would be absolute foolishness. Not only would such a notion rob Christ of his glory, but it would also quickly come to “be regarded as service to God equal to that which God has commanded. Even worse, it would be given precedence over what he has commanded.”¹³⁰

However, this is not to say that the confessions are opposed to rites and ceremonies *per se*.¹³¹ Ceremonies are not unimportant, but they do have a different status and must be measured in light of justification.¹³² Therefore, the confessions point out the pastoral approach that is needed in putting the freedom given Christians concerning worship forms into practice. These pastoral insights will be the topic of the next portion of this paper.

In the Lutheran Confessions, the issue of worship forms is approached theologically. This is especially evident in their insistence on standing in the freedom Christ won. Luther has often been criticized for practicing “liturgy by subtraction.”¹³³ But Luther, consistent with the confessions, was concerned with more than excising what could not stand in the light of justification. What was going to be done also had to be measured by the principle of justification. If the ceremony was helpful in proclaiming Christ, then it had a reason to exist in the worship life of the church. These were theological decisions, but they were not divorced from the impact they would have on people. The Lutheran Confessions approach worship forms not only

¹²⁹ FC SD X, 13

¹³⁰ FC SD X, 15

¹³¹ AC XV, 1: “Concerning church rites they teach that those rites should be observed that can be observed without sin and that contribute to peace and good order in the church.”

¹³² AC XV, 2-3: “However, people are reminded not to burden consciences, as if such worship were necessary for salvation. They are also reminded that human traditions that are instituted to win God’s favor, merit grace, and make satisfaction for sins are opposed to the gospel and the teaching of faith.”

¹³³ Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in 17th-century Lutheranism* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1965), 136.

theologically, but also pastorally.

A confessional Lutheran approach to worship forms is pastoral

Far from approaching the use of freedom in worship forms with an “anything goes” attitude, the confessions show great pastoral concern for the wise use of this freedom because there is a close relationship between theology and liturgy. So long as they are kept in their proper role, rites and ceremonies may serve many useful purposes. Three purposes stand out clearly in the confessions: rites and ceremonies help to edify and educate, maintain good order and peace, and give a clear confession to the truth of the gospel. These purposes breathe with pastoral concern. Consideration is always given to what will be of benefit to the common people, and decisions about ceremonies and rites are made with them in mind. A confessional Lutheran approach to worship forms is pastoral.

Edification and education

Rites and ceremonies serve to edify and educate the people, that is, they serve the proclamation of the gospel.¹³⁴ As Melancthon states, “Ceremonies should be observed...so that people may learn the Scriptures...and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray.”¹³⁵ Clearly, then, ceremonies are valuable insofar as they communicate the gospel. They do not have the inherent power in themselves to edify; they serve as channels or instructional devices. But in that function they have the beneficial purpose of admonishing the people with the Word so that they “might experience faith and fear and finally even pray.”

Rites and ceremonies are especially valuable for the “common people” because they are

¹³⁴ AC XXIV, 3: “For ceremonies are especially needed in order to teach those who are ignorant.” Ap VII-VIII, 34: “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 common folk and the ignorant.” Ap VII-VIII, 40-41: “Whenever they assembled, they also observed some other rites and a sequence of lessons. Frequently, the people continued to observe certain Old Testament customs, which the apostles adapted in modified form to the gospel history, like Easter and Pentecost, so that by these examples as well as by instruction they might transmit to posterity the memory of these important events.”

¹³⁵ Ap XXIV, 3

“concrete” depictions that are easier to grasp than writings.¹³⁶ Melanchthon specifically mentions the church year and “various rites” in this regard. One thinks about how much meaning can be conveyed even by the simple use of color in paraments and vestments. Through the use of color and the repeated lessons of the church year the high and holy truths of the faith are conveyed in a way that is memorable and multi-sensory. No doubt in mentioning “various rites,” Melanchthon had the historic liturgy in mind. It, too, with its repeated texts and actions could symbolically communicate the truths of the gospel. This would constitute an appropriate use of ceremonies, unlike the Roman Catholic use of ceremonies to merit forgiveness.

Children are given special attention in the confessions. They are encouraged to be regular in their attendance at worship, so that they might hear the proclamation of the gospel and learn from it.¹³⁷ There were midweek services were especially fashioned with children in mind.¹³⁸ Chanting the Psalms, which was a duty assigned to the school boys, would help them learn them by heart.¹³⁹ The confessions recognize the ability of music to aid the memorization process, and correspondingly approve of chanting as a ceremony that would be useful for edification and education. Hymnody is also treated in a similar vein, since it could serve a didactic purpose.¹⁴⁰ These purposes sharply contrast with the contemporary notion of using music to move the

¹³⁶ Ap XV, 20-21: “...so that the common people may receive some instruction. (For different seasons and various rites are valuable in admonishing the people)...For it is much more effective to instruct the common people using concrete things as depicted in rites and customs than using writings. Traditions have the purpose of demonstrating and illustrating things for the people.”

¹³⁷ LC, Preface, 26: “The young people should also attend sermons, especially during the time when preaching on the catechism is prescribed, so that they may hear it explained and may learn the meaning of every part. Then they will also be able to repeat what they have heard and give a good, correct answer when they are questioned, so that the preaching will not be without benefit and fruit.”

¹³⁸ LC II, 32: “But the proper place to explain all these different points is not in the brief children’s sermon, but rather the longer sermons throughout the whole year.” Kolb and Wengert include a note on what is meant by a “brief children’s sermon,” 435: “That is, sermons at the weekday worship services, which were designed primarily for children and servants.”

¹³⁹ Ap XV, 40: “The children chant the Psalms in order to learn them; the people also sing in order either to learn or to pray.”

¹⁴⁰ AC XXIV, 2-3: “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.” LC, Preface, 24-25: “For you should not assume that the young people will learn and retain this teaching from sermons alone. When these parts have been well learned, one may assign them also some psalms or hymns, based on these subjects, to supplement and confirm their knowledge. Thus young people will be led into the Scriptures and make progress every day.”

emotions. The thought of a simple song of praise lacking in doctrinal content is unknown to the confessors; music functioned as proclamation, able to serve as an educational aid.

Rites and ceremonies are quite useful didactically. But they are also able “in the process of teaching, to move...to fear or faith.”¹⁴¹ An unbeliever who walks in to see a church full of people kneeling and confessing their sins and then being absolved by the pastor could hardly walk away without having been affected. Such an example demonstrates the ability of rites and ceremonies not only to edify, but also to serve as “evangelical decorum,”¹⁴² that is, the adornment of the gospel.

The frequent references to “the common people” and “children” demonstrates the pastoral concern of the confessions when it comes to the issue of rites and ceremonies. The judicious use of rites and ceremonies is promoted so long as the gospel will be clearly communicated through them. Their use is seen as especially beneficial for those less educated members of society because they can serve as teaching and memory aids that help transmit the deep truths of the faith in a memorable manner. The confessions do not approach worship forms with a purist mentality. Rather, they are deeply concerned that the rites and ceremonies actually benefit the people they are intended to serve.

Order and peace

Rites and ceremonies are necessary for peace and good order.¹⁴³ Since God is not a God of disorder, worship practices ought not be disorderly either.¹⁴⁴ This assumes that worship will necessarily take a form. A purely formless service, one in which everyone came together and did not know what was going on, would be inappropriate.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, rites and ceremonies assist

¹⁴¹ Ap XXVII, 55: “Here we will not discuss all of their ceremonies in worship--lessons, chants, and the like. These could be tolerated if they were used as exercises, the way lessons are in school, that is, for the purpose of teaching the listeners and, in the process of teaching, to move some of them to fear or faith.”

¹⁴² FC SD X, 9: “[A]s seems most useful, beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church.”

¹⁴³ AC XV, 1: “Concerning church rites they teach that those rites should be observed that can be observed without sin and that contribute to peace and good order in the church.”

¹⁴⁴ The theological basis for this is drawn from 1 Corinthians 14.

¹⁴⁵ Ap XV 22: “Paul writes to the Colossians [2:23] that traditions have an “appearance of wisdom,” and indeed they do. For this good order is most appropriate for the church and for this reason is necessary.”

the people so that they “may know at what time they should assemble, so that they may have an example of how all things in the churches might be done decently and in order, and finally, so that the common people may receive some instruction.”¹⁴⁶ Once again, it must be noted that the confessions are not against traditions *per se*, but only against the notion that such acts merit forgiveness. So long as that opinion is excluded,¹⁴⁷ ceremonies and rites are valuable and even necessary for maintaining good order. This good order helps see to it that the proclamation of the gospel is not hindered by disorderly chaos or even something as seemingly minor as not knowing at what time to assemble.

Also, pastoral concern requires good order “for the sake of love and tranquility,” thereby avoiding the giving of offense.¹⁴⁸ Melancthon states:

Nevertheless, we teach that liberty in these matters should be exercised moderately, so that the inexperienced may not take offense and, on account of an abuse of liberty, become more hostile to the true teaching of the gospel. Nothing in the customary rites may be changed without good reason. Instead, in order to foster harmony, those ancient customs should be observed that can be observed without sin or without proving to be a great burden...We judge that the greatest possible public concord which can be maintained without offending consciences ought to be preferred to all other interests.¹⁴⁹

This is not a demand for lockstep uniformity, as though worship would have to look identical in every congregation,¹⁵⁰ but love and tranquility extend beyond congregational boundaries. One wonders how much damage the worship wars have already caused in this

¹⁴⁶ Ap XV, 20

¹⁴⁷ Ap XV, 38-39: “Furthermore, we gladly keep the ancient traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquility, and we interpret them in the best possible way, by excluding the opinion that they justify.”

¹⁴⁸ AC XXVIII, 53-55: “What, therefore, should one think of Sunday and similar rites in places of worship? To this our people reply that it is lawful for bishops or pastors to establish ordinances so that things are done in the church in an orderly fashion...It is fitting for the churches to comply with such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquility and to keep them insofar as they do not offend others.”

¹⁴⁹ Ap XV, 51-52

¹⁵⁰ FC Ep X, 7: “We also believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because the one has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other has, when otherwise there is unity with the other in teaching and all the articles of faith and in the proper use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known saying, ‘Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consantiam fidei,’ ‘Dissimilarity in fasting is not to disrupt unity in faith.’”

regard, as those outside see the bitterness that so often rules the day between congregations and pastors. From the viewpoint of the confessions, this would be the result of failing to consider decisions made about worship forms from a pastoral perspective that is concerned about maintaining peace for the sake of love and tranquility.

The vigor of the language about good order and peace is almost equal to the vigorous defense that rites and ceremonies are free, and it shows just how important it was to the confessors to avoid giving any offense that might become a stumbling block or hindrance to the gospel. The same concerns ought to rule in the church today. Lutherans who desire to exercise freedom in rites and ceremonies should have strong, pastoral “good reasons” for doing so, because they undertake such changes at the risk of disrupting the public harmony and, even worse, giving rise to hostility towards the true gospel.

Again, this shows the pastoral approach the confessions take to worship forms. Order is not to be pursued as an end in itself, but so that the gospel is best proclaimed. Peace is set as a high goal because of the devastation to faith and to the gospel that could result from discord. Special concern is given towards the “inexperienced” and those weak in faith who might most easily be offended.

Giving a clear confession

The marks of the church, while they should not be confined to their place in the liturgy, are most commonly and comprehensively located within the context of public worship.¹⁵¹ Augsburg Confession Article VII is concerned with the actual preaching and teaching of the gospel. Because it is the case that the marks of the church are most frequently encountered in worship, it follows that worship must give confession to what is believed. There is a close relationship between theology and rites and ceremonies in this regard.¹⁵² Having a doctrinal statement that purely expresses the gospel is no good if that pure gospel is not actively preached

¹⁵¹ Kalb, 120: “The time and the place for the administration of the sacraments are without question indifferent...Practically, however, the proper place for Word and Sacrament is the church edifice where the congregation is assembled. Since the service is and must be the business of the entire congregation...”

¹⁵² Just, 27: “The Church’s belief and confession may be observed from her liturgy, hymns, preaching, and catechesis, not convention resolutions. The Church’s belief and confession are inseparable from her liturgical life.” Of course, it should be observed in convention resolutions as well.

and taught in the church.¹⁵³

How exactly worship must fulfill this role of giving confession is a topic that has been debated. Not all agree with how extensively this is to be applied. It has been argued, for example, that the statements in Article X of the Formula of Concord that make mention of giving clear confession are not applicable at all because the situation that the Formula addresses involved the threat of real physical persecution. Because there is not the threat of physical persecution in America, therefore, the statements do not apply to churches in America.¹⁵⁴ However, this fails to consider the broader picture, which is the vast difference between the state-church of the Formula's day and the separation of church and state in modern America.¹⁵⁵ While preaching will always be where the confession of a church is most clearly expressed,¹⁵⁶ it would be wise to consider the confessional value of the rites and ceremonies that make Lutheran worship distinctively Lutheran, especially in a setting like America.¹⁵⁷

The Formula of Concord gives clear advice in this regard. It notes that rites and ceremonies cannot be considered adiaphora if they “give the impression that our religion does not differ greatly from the papist religion or that their religion were not completely contrary to ours.”¹⁵⁸ Lutherans in America making pastoral decisions about worship must consider both sides in this regard. The rites and ceremonies that are chosen for use must not give the appearance of Roman Catholicism. At the same time, they should distinguish Lutherans from the Reformed and Evangelicals as well. In fact, while some might assume that using the historic

¹⁵³ Webber, 26: “But again, 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 an officially-adopted but seldom-read doctrinal statement, collecting dust on a Lutheran parish library shelf.” Emphasis his.

¹⁵⁴ See Montover and Pieper, who both argue this point.

¹⁵⁵ Not to mention the difficulty of being part of a “religious marketplace.”

¹⁵⁶ Ap XV, 42-43

¹⁵⁷ Webber, 44: “In fact, since the Protestant Evangelical movement poses much 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.”

¹⁵⁸ FC SD X, 5

liturgy is “too Catholic,” the greater danger may lie in watering down Lutheran worship until it blends into the comfort of American Evangelicalism. The historic liturgy is neither Lutheran nor Roman Catholic; it is catholic. The confessions are at pangs to demonstrate that the Lutheran church is not sectarian but the continuation of the true, catholic church.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, they desire to keep as many of the traditions that have been handed down from the past as possible, so long as they are not seen as necessary for salvation.¹⁶⁰ Practically speaking, this means that Lutheran worship is going to look more similar to those other churches that maintain a version of the historic, catholic liturgical rite than those who abandoned it entirely. At the same time, Lutherans must make certain that their rites and ceremonies are actually able to be “interpreted in the best possible way.”¹⁶¹ This means that they are giving a clear confession to the gospel and could not be mistaken as meritorious or necessary for salvation.

The Formula of Concord makes it clear that “when confession is necessary” it is incumbent upon Christians “to confess true teaching and everything that pertains to the whole of religion freely and publicly. They are not to do so only with words but also in actions and deeds. In such a time they shall not yield to the opponents even in indifferent matters.”¹⁶² Because ceremonies communicate theological meaning, the church must be concerned with the message that they send. The confessions are insistent that rites and ceremonies give a clear confession because of the damage that can be caused if doctrine and practice fail to proclaim the same message. This pastoral concern is quite evident when the confessions state:

Thus, submission and compromise in external things where Christian agreement in doctrine has not already been achieved strengthens idolaters in their idolatry. On the other hand, this grieves and offends faithful believers and weakens their faith. Christians are

¹⁵⁹ AC, Conclusion of Part One: “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.” Preface to Articles on Abuses: “Since the churches among us do not dissent from the catholic church in any article of faith...it can easily be judged that nothing contributes more to preserving the dignity of ceremonies and to cultivating reverence and piety among the people than conducting ceremonies properly in the churches.”

AC XXIV, 2: “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.”

¹⁶⁰ AC XXIV, 1-2

¹⁶¹ Ap XV, 38

¹⁶² FC SD X, 10

bound to avoid both for the welfare and salvation of their souls.¹⁶³

If practice contradicts doctrine, there is a great danger that people might be led astray or come to believe that doctrinal errors are not a matter of serious concern. Thus the confessions maintain that rites and ceremonies serve a pastoral purpose by giving clear confession to the true, life-giving gospel.

The Lutheran Confessions build worship on a theological foundation grounded in justification by faith. On this basis, the rites and ceremonies that constitute the outward form of worship are matters in which great freedom exists. The “community of God in every time and place” retains the right to change such practices.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, the confessions demand a great deal of discernment in making any such changes so that no offense is given and so that the people of God are best served. The confessional Lutheran approach to its use of freedom in rites and ceremonies is pastoral in nature.

Conclusion

With the recovery of the doctrine of justification by faith, the Lutheran Reformation cut through the fog and returned the central doctrine to its rightful place. The doctrine on which the church stands or falls became the principle against which all practices were to be measured. Everything else had to be seen in its light, and worship was no exception. Accordingly, the Lutheran church undertook a reform of worship forms guided by the theological basis of justification by faith.

With justification by faith comes great freedom. Christ came to set Christians free from service to the law. Yet, as little as Christians were to be bound by any law, it would not be acceptable to maintain any practices that contradicted the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Doctrine had to be confessed by practice. The two could not be separated as though practice were inherently neutral and waiting to be invested with theological content.

Perhaps one might have expected the Lutherans to undertake a radical reform that would do away with everything they had inherited and start from scratch. But that is not the approach of the confessors. Rather, they maintained as many of the old customs as they could. But they did

¹⁶³ FC SD X, 16

¹⁶⁴ FC SD X, 9

not keep so many of the old traditions simply because they had a conservative bent. True, the ceremonies and rites were no longer to be seen as meritorious or necessary for salvation, and some of them had to be rejected because they could not be separated from those ideas, but many were retained because they could serve a good purpose. Those good purposes were theological and pastoral, for the ceremonies could serve as aids in the proclamation of the gospel. Each rite and ceremony had to be weighed as to whether it helped or hindered the doctrine of justification. Whether or not it would continue to be used would be determined by answering that question.

In addition, the confessions saw an issue of great pastoral concern at hand. Any changes to worship forms, even if those forms were made for the benefit of the gospel, could be detrimental to the people if they were not made with a pastoral heart towards the people. Far from being liturgical purists who were pursuing orthodoxy for orthodoxy's sake, the Lutherans made changes to their worship practices cautiously. They preferred to forego the use of their freedom rather than needlessly disturb the peace and hinder the gospel by giving offense. The confessors sought to use their freedom for the beneficial purposes of edification and education, maintaining good order, and giving a clear confession to the gospel. These purposes provided pastoral wisdom that guided decisions about worship forms.

Today, a confessional Lutheran approach to worship forms must also be theological and pastoral. This approach helps to avoid the two extremes of pretending that practice is inherently neutral or denying that freedom exists in matters of practice.

As a corrective to the notion that practice is neutral, the confessions show just how closely doctrine and practice are linked. If changes to worship forms are going to be made, careful consideration should be given to the theological basis that will shape those changes. Seeing the centrality of justification by faith and its implications should be a major factor in making decisions about worship. In addition, pastoral concern necessitates that the worship forms used serve those who have gathered for beneficial purposes. The confessions speak very practically about what purposes rites and ceremonies might serve.

On the other hand, the confessions know of no such notion that there is only one God-given form that worship can take, or that a form itself could become as important as the gospel it is meant to proclaim. The confessions stand with Paul in defending the freedom that Christ has

won. Such a perspective will help to keep the truth of justification at center stage. Ritualism and formalism are dangerous to souls. The confessions point out that rites and ceremonies must give clear confession to the truth so that such dangers do not threaten the people gathered to worship.

A confessional Lutheran approach to worship forms must always remain theological and pastoral. When this is carried out, the worship forms will be of great value, because they will aid the proclamation of the gospel in public worship.

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THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL CRITERIA
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by

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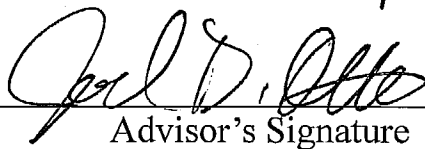
A Senior Thesis Submitted to

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Master of Divinity degree

Professor Joel D. Otto, Advisor

Approved at Mequon, Wisconsin, on April 3, 2012



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