

## **Introduction**

We are confessional Lutheran pastors. At ordination, we professed our belief that the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the 1580 Book of Concord are true expositions of the Word of God. We hold to these confessional writings because (*quia*), not in so far as (*quatenus*), they faithfully express the truths of Scripture. The Lutheran Confessions serve as the *norma normata* of our faith and practice, second only to Scripture in determining what we believe, teach and confess. The confessions authoritatively define what it means to be Lutheran. Confessional Lutheran churches have often identified themselves by the initials “U.A.C.” The Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530, before Melancthon started “editing” it, is chief among the Lutheran Confessions.

Perhaps all of this sounds obvious. Perhaps these statements about the Lutheran Confessions are so apparent to a group of WELS pastors that they should go without saying. Yet, when we consider the landscape of Christianity, and especially Lutheranism, in America today, these statements are not so obvious.

This is especially true when we consider public worship. God’s people have always set aside time to worship. But what have God’s people done when they worship? They have gathered around the Word of God, whether that Word was spoken, sung, or connected with the sacrifice of animals or the sacramental elements. Believers from the very beginning have publicly gathered to “call on the name of the Lord,”<sup>1</sup> that is, to publicly proclaim who the true God is and what the true God has done. The church’s life, even when the church was literally underground, has always revolved around this regular gathering.

Since the chief activity of the church is to gather around Word and sacrament, it only makes sense that the chief Lutheran Confession, the Augustana, would have something to say about public worship. The confessors were very aware that their churches were judged by what was happening on Sunday morning. So the confessors spilled a considerable amount of ink addressing the subject of Lutheran worship.

Since we are confessional Lutherans, we will want to listen to what the Augustana has to say about the most visible activity in the church: worship. These confessions are not dusty historical documents that are nice to study and then put back on the shelf. Rather, because they correctly confess the teachings of the Bible, they have something to say about Lutheran worship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **I. The Augustana’s Definition of Lutheran Worship**

A confessional Lutheran understands the axiom that the article upon which the church stands or falls is justification by faith. The Augustana confesses that truth. The entire confession revolves around Article IV.

Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21–26] and 4[:5].<sup>2</sup>

No pilgrimages or prayers, no decision or experiences, no human works or worship – forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life are gifts of God’s grace because Jesus paid the price with his life on the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 4:26.

<sup>2</sup> AC IV:1-3. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000. Unless otherwise noted, the translation of the Augustana’s German text will be used.

Faith in Jesus receives these gifts. Everything in Scripture, and therefore everything in the Augustana, is centered in the doctrine of justification.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, everything the Augustana has to say about Lutheran worship flows from the teaching of justification by faith. Article V, which is connected grammatically to the preceding article, explains the “how” of justification by faith.

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ’s merit, when we so believe.<sup>4</sup>

Since faith is only worked by the Holy Spirit through the Word and sacraments, the Augustana lays before us the definition of public worship. Christians gather together to receive the blessings God gives in Word and sacraments. Melancthon explains this in the Apology as he equates faith with worship.

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.<sup>5</sup>

So Lutheran worship is first and foremost about God’s actions for us. It has to be. Article II brings that out when it speaks of the complete inability of human beings to fear and love God. Article III follows up with what is proclaimed, the content of the gospel, as it echoes the ecumenical creeds in speaking of the person and work of Jesus. Even there, the stress is on Jesus’ sacrificial work on behalf of and in the place of sinful mankind. The exaltation of Christ receives mention in light of justification by faith.

Moreover, the same Christ “descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, is sitting at the right hand of God” in order to rule and reign forever over all creatures, so that through the Holy Spirit he may make holy, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, also distribute to them life and various gifts and benefits, and shield and protect them against the devil and sin.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus lives and reigns now and forever so that he might send the Holy Spirit to work faith through the means of grace. The proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are what bring the church into being. These are what the church does.<sup>7</sup>

So if Lutheran worship is defined as the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, the worshipers receiving the blessings God gives through these means of grace, does the Augustana have anything to say about how this proclamation and administration is carried out? Most certainly. We can follow several threads of thought throughout the Augustana pertaining to worship. All of them, in one way or another, are intertwined with justification by faith and form the strong rope that supports the Lutheran definition of worship.

The first thread is the emphasis that what Lutherans are confessing, proclaiming and doing is nothing new. Repeated quotations from the Fathers, as well as the condemnations of the ancient heresies and recent sects, bear this out. In addition, there were no wholesale changes in worship. Consider these statements from Article XXIV.

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<sup>3</sup> For an excellent exposition of justification, see the two essays by Pastor Jon Buchholz delivered at the 58<sup>th</sup> WELS convention this past summer.

<sup>4</sup> AC V:1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Apology IV:49.

<sup>6</sup> AC III:4-6.

<sup>7</sup> AC VII:1.

Moreover, no noticeable changes have been made in the public celebration of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung alongside the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people.<sup>8</sup>

On holy days and at other times when communicants are present, Mass is celebrated, and those who desire it receive the sacrament. Thus, the Mass remains among us in its proper use, as it was observed formerly in the church.<sup>9</sup>

No novelty has been introduced that did not exist in the church in days of old. No noticeable change has occurred in the public liturgy of the Mass, except that other, unnecessary Masses, which perhaps through misuse were celebrated besides the parish Mass, have been discontinued. Therefore this way of celebrating Mass should, in all fairness, not be condemned as heretical or unchristian.<sup>10</sup>

Why did the confessors go out of their way to stress this point? Was it for political reasons? After all, this was presented by a group of German rulers before Emperor Charles V. Was it for pastoral reasons? The people had been worshiping one way for so long. To make drastic changes so soon could damage people's faith.<sup>11</sup> But could it also be that the confessors understood that the majority of the historic rites and ceremonies proclaimed the true gospel throughout the centuries of false teaching, that even though heresy was proclaimed from the pulpit, God's people had their faith fed through the gospel content of the liturgy?<sup>12</sup> Could it be that they believed that using the ancient canticles, creeds, prayers, vestments and ceremonies reminded the church militant of their connection with the church triumphant? "With all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven..."

The second thread is that the proclamation of the Word in worship is to be done in a decent and orderly way. Those who preach, teach and administer the sacraments must have a proper call.<sup>13</sup> Otherwise chaos and confusion would ensue. The Word and sacrament would lose their central place. Christ would be obscured. The church needs to have men qualified and chosen to publicly carry out the church's work in the church's name.

In the same vein, rites and ceremonies were retained to promote good order. These words in Article XV are typical of the confessors' attitude toward church ceremonies.

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, for example, certain holy days, festivals, and the like.<sup>14</sup>

Why are "peace and good order" so important? For the same reasons Paul says that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."<sup>15</sup> First, God is a God of peace and order, not chaos. Everything God does, from his work of creation to his plan of salvation, is planned out and carried out in an orderly way. Second, if there is a lack of orderliness, the gospel is obscured and people cannot be edified by the Word. The focus of worship moves away from Christ and the means of grace.

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<sup>8</sup> AC XXIV:2.

<sup>9</sup> AC XXIV:34-35.

<sup>10</sup> AC XXIV:40.

<sup>11</sup> To be sure, the Lutheran Reformation was, to use C.P. Krauth's term, a conservative reformation. And Luther was at heart a parish pastor. Consider his reaction to Karlstadt's attempts at a radical reformation in Wittenberg.

<sup>12</sup> Fred Pratt Green phrased it in a poetic way in his hymn "When in Our Music God Is Glorified."

So has the Church, in liturgy and song,

In faith and love, through centuries of wrong,

Borne witness to the truth in every tongue: Alleluia! (*Christian Worship* 248:3)

<sup>13</sup> AC XIV.

<sup>14</sup> AC XV:1 (Latin).

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:40

That leads into the third thread. Ceremonies, rites and hymns are for teaching the people. If there was one point that Lutheranism wanted to emphasize, it was that the people needed to know the faith. They needed to understand the truths God wanted them to believe. Lutheran worship, as it proclaims these truths in spoken Word, song and ceremony, intends to teach the people. Article XXIV expresses this clearly.

Our people have been unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass. But it is obvious, without boasting, that the Mass is celebrated among us with greater devotion and earnestness than among our opponents. The people are instructed more regularly and with the greatest diligence concerning the holy sacrament, to what purpose it was instituted, and how it is to be used, namely, as a comfort to terrified consciences. In this way, the people are drawn to Communion and to the Mass. At the same time, they are also instructed about other, false teaching concerning the sacrament. Moreover, no noticeable changes have been made in the public celebration of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung alongside the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people. For after all, all ceremonies should serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Notice that the language is changed when needed so people can understand. Hymns are written and sung to teach the people. Think of Luther's hymns on the Nicene Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.<sup>17</sup> Consider the numerous truths of the Christian faith proclaimed in the Gloria in Excelsis. The Trinity, the person of Christ, his humiliation and exaltation, and universal atonement are all taught in this one canticle. The sign of the cross at the words of absolution, standing for the reading of the Gospel, and kneeling at the Communion rail are just some of the actions of Lutheran worship. They serve to teach God's people what God wants them to know about the connection between Jesus' crucifixion and our forgiveness, the importance of the words and works of our Savior, and the attitude with which we sinners come to receive the body and blood of our Lord.

That last point regarding reception of Lord's Supper is something that we perhaps often misunderstand about the teaching aspect of the liturgy. Listen again to the words of the Article XXIV.

The people are instructed more regularly and with the greatest diligence concerning the holy sacrament, to what purpose it was instituted, and how it is to be used, namely, as a comfort to terrified consciences. In this way, the people are drawn to Communion and to the Mass.<sup>18</sup>

The gospel content of the rites, canticles, and hymns of Lutheran liturgical worship, as well as explicit law/gospel preaching, teaches people in such a way that will lead them to desire Holy Communion. This teaching goes beyond merely imparting information. The purpose is to draw people to the comfort of forgiveness in Jesus' body and blood, to impress upon them the need and the value of the sacrament.

The emphasis of these ceremonies and rites – indeed whatever happens in worship – must always be on the Word and sacraments. When the focus is on the Word and sacraments the focus is on Christ, the gospel and justification by faith. That's the fourth thread of what the Augustana has to say about Lutheran worship. Any attitude that implies that certain rites and ceremonies have to be done in order to be saved militates against the gospel. That attitude is completely rejected.

For the gospel demands that in the church one should and must emphasize the teaching concerning faith. But this cannot be understood if people imagine that grace is earned through self-chosen works.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> AC XXIV:1-3,7,9.

<sup>17</sup> "We All Believe in One True God" (*Christian Worship* 271); "The Ten Commandment Are the Law" (*Christian Worship* 285); "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" (*Christian Worship* 410).

<sup>18</sup> AC XXIV:

<sup>19</sup> AC XXVI:20.

Our side also retains many ceremonies and traditions, such as the order of the Mass and other singing, festivals, and the like, which serve to preserve order in the church. At the same time, however, the people are taught that such external worship of God does not make them righteous before God and that it is to be observed without burdening consciences, that is, no one sins by omitting it without causing offense.<sup>20</sup>

Now it is patently contrary to God's command and Word to make laws out of opinions or to require that by observing them a person makes satisfaction for sin and obtains grace. For the honor of Christ's merit is slandered when we take it upon ourselves to earn grace through such ordinances.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

The confessors sensed the ongoing need to battle the Roman Catholic teaching that the Mass saves *ex opere operato*.<sup>23</sup> Melancthon went to great lengths in the Apology to debunk the notion of *ex opere operato*, attacking the idea of daily masses and various other worship practices dictated by canon law. But this isn't just a Roman Catholic idea. It is a notion ingrained in the sinful nature of every human being. We have this propensity toward the law. What must I do to be saved? Tell me the steps to follow. Show me how to do it the right way. We would feel more comfortable as Levites always knowing that this is how God says it must be done. God had his reasons for setting down such rules and regulations for his covenant people in the Old Testament. Those reasons served his covenant promises. The Augustana, revolving around justification by faith, leaves no room for rules and regulations in exactly how to worship because such an attitude is contrary to the gospel. The confessors insisted on their Christian freedom, not just in the area of public worship, but in all aspects of congregational life. There were no New Testament laws.

All of this almost seems contradictory. We don't insist that certain rites and ceremonies have to be used. We don't say a rite has to be done a certain way or that the same ones have to be used by everyone. There is freedom to add, change or take away rites and ceremonies. But nothing is said by the confessors about getting rid of them all together. Nothing is said about following Karlstadt and Zwingli by removing crucifixes, smashing altars and destroying statues. Nothing is said about revamping or rejecting the entire historic liturgy. In fact, the Augustana emphasizes that the Lutherans retained the ancient liturgy of the church. All of this doesn't compute until we factor in the centrality of justification by faith. Since worship is all about "giving the gospel" – proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments – and receiving the blessings the gospel gives, the forms, rites and ceremonies are retained because they do just that. In fact, "giving the gospel" and receiving the blessing of the gospel often occur at the same time in Lutheran worship. Pastors not only preach a law-gospel sermon, but they also are fed by that same sermon. Worshipers who sing "Dear Christians One and All Rejoice," not only proclaim the gospel in song, but also receive the blessings which the gospel content of that hymn gives. Consider these two statements from the Apology to illustrate this.

This is how God wants to become known and worshiped, namely, that we receive blessings from him, and indeed, that we receive them on account of his mercy and not on account of our merits. This is the richest consolation in all afflictions, which the opponents destroy when they trivialize and disparage faith and only teach people to deal with God through works and merits.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> AC XXVI:40-41.

<sup>21</sup> AC XXVII:35-36.

<sup>22</sup> AC XV:2-3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ex opere operato* = literally, worked by the work. In other words, the sacraments are efficacious simply because the priest did everything the prescribed way. This fosters a "going-through-the-motions" attitude toward worship. It doesn't really matter if I'm paying attention or even believing in the truth and reality of what is happening. As long as I'm present when it happens, that's what counts.

<sup>24</sup> Apology IV:60.

Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies. We keep the Latin for the sake of those who learn and understand it. We also use German hymns in order that the [common] people might have something to learn, something that will arouse their faith and fear. This custom has always existed in the churches. For even if some have more frequently used German hymns and others more rarely, nevertheless almost everywhere the people sang something in their own language.<sup>25</sup>

Luther's dichotomy stands true. "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."<sup>26</sup> Considered in terms of worship, we could say it this way.

- The church is perfectly free from all prescribed forms, rites and ceremonies because the gospel has given us that freedom.
- The church is bound to use forms, rites and ceremonies that proclaim the gospel in Word and sacraments.

In other words, both of these statements flow from the central teaching of Scripture, justification by faith. So the Augustana made it clear that because of gospel freedom the forms of public worship are adiaphora. Yet, the Augustana insisted on using the ancient forms of the liturgy because they served that gospel freedom by centering on the means of grace.

God deals with us only through the means of grace. He promises his presence through Word and sacraments. We don't sense the presence of God, as though he comes to us only when we feel him close by. God comes through Word and sacraments whether we sense his presence or not. He who is the Word made flesh now comes to us through the proclamation of the Word made flesh. That's how the Augustana defines Lutheran worship – worship that is biblical.

## **II. The Augustana's View of Lutheran Worship in Lutheran History**

The Augustana's view of Lutheran worship was not some ivory tower ideal. A brief look at Lutheran history demonstrates that it was carried out in the local parishes. It started with Luther himself. After many years and much urging by friends, pastors, and princes, Luther wrote two services for use in Lutheran parishes. The *Formula Missae*, published in 1523, was primarily Latin, intended for use in the larger cities and universities where Latin was still the language of education, government and business. The lessons were often read in German after being chanted in Latin. The sermon was also in German. The order was almost identical to the Roman Mass from the Introit to the Creed. Only what spoke of the sacrament as a sacrifice was removed. Trained choirs did most of the singing. The usual vestments, candles, incense, etc. were retained. Luther eliminated from the church year festivals and saints' days that lacked biblical warrant, even while retaining with an evangelical emphasis certain festivals of the virgin Mary along with apostles' and evangelists' days.<sup>27</sup>

In 1526, he finally published a German service, the *Deutsche Messe*. At first glance, it might appear radically different from the *Formula Missae*. For example, it provided hymn versifications for the five great songs of the liturgy: the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei. In addition, there were several other places for congregation hymns. This was a far cry from the Latin service where the choir did most of the singing. However, the content of the service was basically the same. The hymns still had the same scriptural content as the Latin canticles. The Word and sacraments were still front and center. No changes were mentioned regarding the vestments, elevation and other rites and ceremonies as long as they didn't contribute to a sacrificial view of the sacrament.

Luther prefaced the *Deutsche Messe* with an emphasis on Christian freedom.

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<sup>25</sup> Apology XXIV:3-4.

<sup>26</sup> LW 31:344.

<sup>27</sup> Maschke, pg 62-64.

In the first place, I would kindly and for God's sake request all those who see this order of service or desire to follow it: Do not make it a rigid law to bind or entangle anyone's conscience, but use it in Christian liberty as long, when, where, and how you find it to be practical and useful.<sup>28</sup>

Luther's appeal was followed. Between 1523 and 1555, more than 135 church orders<sup>29</sup> appeared in various German territories where the Reformation had taken hold.<sup>30</sup> "They differ considerably in minor details, and yet their liturgical provisions show a remarkable similarity."<sup>31</sup> Part of the similarity is due to the fact that many of the authors were close colleagues of Luther. More significantly is the fact that they shared his confessional principles founded on the doctrine of justification by faith. What is fascinating, aside from the fact that there were differences at all because of the respect Luther commanded, is what Lutheran composers did with the musical settings of the liturgy. They used variety. They wrote new settings.<sup>32</sup> They made use of choirs and instrumentalists in unique and varied ways. They learned from composers in other countries and expanded the musical vocabulary used in worship. Men like Michael Praetorius, Hans Leo Hassler and Heinrich Schuetz were all professional church musicians who used their superb musical gifts in the service of the church's worship.<sup>33</sup> Their genius was in their use of various musical forms and settings that carried the gospel content of the message without distracting from it. Carl Schalk notes several details of Praetorius' comprehensive collection, *Musae Sioniae*<sup>34</sup> and then offers this conclusion.

Each of these details reflects Praetorius' view of the theological and musical tradition of the Lutheran church not as a quaint relic of the past, but as a living force and a solid foundation on which any vitality in the church's life and worship must inevitably build.<sup>35</sup>

Then, of course, there is Bach. He served as cantor in Leipzig from 1723 until his death in 1750. Pietism and, to a certain extent, Rationalism had ravaged confessional Lutheranism in much of Germany by this time, but Leipzig remained a stronghold of Lutheran orthodoxy.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, this city enjoyed a rich liturgical life. The vast majority of Bach's work was for the main Sunday services in the various congregations in Leipzig. His chorales, cantatas, and oratorios all had their place in the church year. He composed new musical settings of the liturgy. Many of his organ works found their melodic basis in the great Lutheran hymns. His passions were the gospel accounts set to music.

He attached the greatest importance to making the music's text also proclaim the Gospel as purely as possible. He would rather opt for an impure form, an infelicitous rhyme, or an uneven rhythm but retain instead the spiritual content that he wished for in the text and that was not watered down by rhetorical superfluity.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> LW 53:61.

<sup>29</sup> "Church orders (Kirchenordnungen) are legal documents that mandated the church teachings and practices as canon and civil law... The church orders... regulated church polity, church administration, congregational life, charitable institutions, schools, and liturgy" (Senn, pg 329,330).

<sup>30</sup> Senn, pg 332.

<sup>31</sup> Senn, pg 332.

<sup>32</sup> "We know from extant records and inventories that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century alone 151 Latin settings of the liturgy (mostly *missa brevis*; just Kyrie, Gloria) were published for use by German Lutheran choirs. Latin was preferred for the Kyrie and Gloria in cities, but German settings were also used." (Gerlach, pg 19)

<sup>33</sup> For an interesting historical study, see Carl Schalk's book, *Music in Early Lutheranism*.

<sup>34</sup> Praetorius' first published collection of 1,244 compositions "ranging from overwhelming polychoral settings of the standard chorales... to simple harmonizations." (Schalk, pg 96)

<sup>35</sup> Schalk, pg 101.

<sup>36</sup> Stiller, pg 32.

<sup>37</sup> Stiller, pg 213, quoting Herbst, *Johann Sebastian Bach und die lutherische Mystik*.

With these historical references, I don't mean to say that Lutheran worship needs a "back to Bach" movement. But our Lutheran forefathers demonstrate the beauty and variety of music that can be employed to proclaim the gospel. The key is an emphasis on justification by faith in the message the music is proclaiming. Lutheran church musicians, a few of them actual musical geniuses, used their gifts in the context of the Lutheran liturgy and Lutheran chorales because the Word and sacraments were central. And so justification by faith was central.

### **III. American Challenges to the Augustana View of Lutheran Worship**

American culture presents unique challenges to confessional Lutherans, especially in the area of worship. American culture has a mindset that lauds the individual, praises a "can-do" spirit, and values personal experience. The American dream is captured in the frontier lifestyle, heading out into the wild, blue yonder to make a go of it on your own. This mindset is seen in the way Americans tend to cheer for the underdog, or the fallen hero who has picked himself back up and is striving to reclaim greatness. Literally every American enterprise has marketing departments that hold before me the positive experience I will enjoy by eating at their restaurant, staying at their resort, or using their product. American culture believes that people can do anything if they set their mind to it. American culture lives by the litmus test, "if it works, it must be all right."

A recent article in *Newsweek*, entitled "Spirituality in America," relates some of these philosophies of America to the religious scene in America.

There is a streak in the United States of relying on what Pacific Lutheran's Killen calls "individual visceral experience" to validate religious ideas. American faiths have long been characterized by creativity and individualism. "That's their secret to success," says Alan Wolfe, director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College. "Rather than being about a god who commands you, it's about finding a religion that empowers you."... Empowerment requires intensity of effort; Americans like the idea of taking responsibility for their own souls.<sup>38</sup>

American Protestantism, or today's most popular version of it, American Evangelicalism,<sup>39</sup> embodies these same ideals. Whether American Protestantism influenced American culture, or vice versa, is kind of a "chicken or egg" debate.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, the two are intertwined. American Evangelicalism, with its Arminian theology, focuses on the individual's abilities to become a Christian and his personal experience with Jesus. Naturally following is an emphasis on a personal response to God's grace and a personal relationship with Jesus. Mimicking the revivals of previous centuries, American Evangelical worship has a completely different definition and purpose than Lutheran worship. American Evangelical worship is all about appealing to the individual's perceived need to feel God's presence and be emotionally charged enough to "do what is in them"<sup>41</sup> and decide for Jesus. It's all about the spiritual experience.

Rick Warren, one of the most influential representatives of American Evangelicalism today, defines worship this way.

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<sup>38</sup> Adler, pg 52.

<sup>39</sup> I am using this term to describe the modern "mega church," like Saddleback Community in Orange County, California, Willow Creek Community in the Chicago area and Lakewood Community in Houston, whose worship is characterized by the "praise and worship" format.

<sup>40</sup> A similar debate exists on whether pietism had a direct influence on American Protestantism, or the two simply shared a similar Reformed theology.

<sup>41</sup> While this is a mantra from Roman Catholic theology, it fits American Evangelical theology, showing once again that Catholicism and Reformed are the same animal with different colored stripes.



The direction of worship is from believers to God. We magnify God's name in worship by expressing our love and commitment to him... At Saddleback, our definition of worship is "Worship is expressing our love to God for who he is, what he's said, and what he's doing."<sup>42</sup>

Among Warren's list of appropriate ways to express our love for God include listening and trusting. He even concludes with the thought that "God, not man, is the focus and center of our worship."<sup>43</sup> That's true to a point. Worshipers are praying to God, praising God, trusting in God, obeying God. But in Warren's definition the worshipers are doing the action. There is nothing in this definition of worship that speaks of God's actions through Word and sacrament. There is nothing about the worshipers receiving the blessings God gives through the means of grace. There is nothing in this definition that sounds like the definition of worship presented by the Lutheran confessions. Consider what the Apology says. "The service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God... The highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness."<sup>44</sup>

Worship in Warren's church revolves around this man-centered definition. The focus is on making the worshipers comfortable. Music is selected on the basis of cultural appeal rather than theological criteria. Whatever will make people feel joyful, happy and upbeat is acceptable. While he insists that what is important is the message, not the style, he doesn't practice that. He asks the question, "How does this tune make me feel?"<sup>45</sup> He advocates a selection and arrangement of the songs that will produce the desired emotional environment and experience with the goal of eliciting the desired decision.<sup>46</sup> His misunderstanding of worship comes out when he concludes:

Many of the gospel songs of the first half of this century tend to glorify the Christian experience rather than Christ. In contrast, today's most effective worship songs are love songs sung directly to God. This is biblical worship. We are told at least seventeen times in Scripture to sing *to the Lord*. In contrast, most hymns are sung *about God*. The strength of many contemporary worship songs is that they are God-centered, rather than man-centered.<sup>47</sup>

What Warren fails to understand is that when we sing about God, we're singing to God. And to sing to God, or to praise God, is to repeat what he has done for us.<sup>48</sup> Klemet Preus comments, "The greatest way to praise God is to tell everyone what he has done. The praise of God is neither in the use of verbs to describe me nor is it in the use of adjectives to describe Him. Praise of God is using verbs to tell what He did for us in Christ."<sup>49</sup> Just read the psalms. When the encouragement to praise God is given, it is usually followed by a proclamation of what God has done to make him worthy of praise.<sup>50</sup> Following this scriptural example means that what is sung in worship should primarily proclaim who the true God is and what he has done to save, not my love for Jesus or how I should respond. There is a place for such expressions of the believers' response to God's gift of eternal life, but always in the context of the proclamation of the gospel. Many great Lutheran and Christian hymns follow the example of the psalms and express the believer's reaction to the gospel, while also stating why the believer is reacting. In other words, these hymns proclaim the gospel. The same cannot be said for a majority of praise songs which express the believer's reaction without stating the basis for this reaction.

Unfortunately, many American Lutherans have jumped on the Evangelical bandwagon. This is really nothing new. Benjamin Kurtz and Samuel Schmucker, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, recast the Augsburg

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<sup>42</sup> Warren, pg 239-240.

<sup>43</sup> Warren, pg 240.

<sup>44</sup> Apology IV:310 (Tappert).

<sup>45</sup> Warren, pg 286.

<sup>46</sup> Warren, pg 256.

<sup>47</sup> Warren, pg 289.

<sup>48</sup> One of the School of Worship Enrichment presentations brings this out. Praise is proclamation and proclamation is praise.

<sup>49</sup> Klemet Preus, pg 146.

<sup>50</sup> Consider, for example, Psalm 103.

Confession in their *Definite Platform*, attempting to remove anything that set Lutheranism apart from general American Protestantism. They also espoused the use of the so-called “New Measures” prevalent in revivalism at that time.<sup>51</sup>

While the confessional Lutherans of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rejected Schmucker’s attempts to “Americanize” Lutheran doctrine and worship, the same is not completely true today. David Luecke, an LCMS pastor, is one of the more vocal spokesmen for an Evangelical style of worship in confessional Lutheran churches. Schmucker and Kurtz tried to change the Augustana to conform Lutheranism to American culture. Luecke, and others like him, try to appeal to the Augustana and the other Lutheran confessions to support an Evangelical style of worship in Lutheran churches.

Luecke suggests that Lutherans adopt the Evangelical model of worship. Seeing the apparent growth and numerical superiority of many Evangelical churches, he pins their success, in part, on their style of worship. He sees nothing inherently wrong with an Evangelical definition of worship that strays from a focus on the Word and sacraments. Part of his problem is his positive view of Pietism. He recognizes the similarities between Pietism and Evangelical theology. But he sees this as something Lutherans should appreciate and try to reclaim.<sup>52</sup> He reinterprets church history to support his opinions.<sup>53</sup>

He then appeals to the Lutheran confessions. He claims that the confessors at Augsburg took a more conservative and traditional stance in worship matters because of the political situations at the time. On the other hand, the Formula of Concord, written fifty years later, indicates a more radical reformation in the area of worship. He uses Article X of the Solid Declaration in order to rationalize changing the structure of Lutheran worship.

We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every time and place has the right, power, and authority to change, reduce, or expand such practices according to circumstances in an orderly and appropriate manner, without frivolity or offense, as seems most useful, beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church. Paul teaches how one may yield and make concessions to the weak in faith in such external matters of indifference with good conscience (Rom. 14[:1–23]) and he demonstrates this with his own example (Acts 16[:3] and 21[:26] 1 Cor. 9[:10]).<sup>54</sup>

Luecke emphasizes the freedom to use whatever worship forms or style you want. There are to be no rules for the New Testament church. In that respect, he is correct. The Augustana repeatedly confesses that same freedom. Worship forms, rites and ceremonies are adiaphora. However, both confessions also stress responsibility in the area of adiaphora. Paul’s words ring true. “Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial.”<sup>55</sup> Article XXIV of the Augustana speaks about the retention of the Mass with its ancient ceremonies. Why does it say this? Is it because this was a politically astute statement to make in 1530?<sup>56</sup> The confessors at Augsburg retained those ceremonies and rites that served justification by faith. Does Article X of the Solid Declaration speak of variety and diversity because the Lutheran Church was firmly established by 1577?<sup>57</sup> Actually, the Solid Declaration continues in Article X about the importance of being responsible in using Christian freedom when the truth is at stake.

We also believe, teach, and confess that in a time when confession is necessary, as when the enemies of God’s Word want to suppress the pure teaching of the holy gospel, the entire community of God, indeed, every Christian, especially servants of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated

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<sup>51</sup> Examples of “New Measures” would be altar calls and the “anxious bench.”

<sup>52</sup> *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*, pg 86-92.

<sup>53</sup> As an example, he claims that most Lutheran churches in the century after Luther were celebrating Holy Communion on a monthly or quarterly basis. (*The Other Story of Lutherans at Worship*, pg 93-95)

<sup>54</sup> Solid Declaration X:9.

<sup>55</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:23.

<sup>56</sup> *The Other Story of Lutherans at Worship*, pg 64-66.

<sup>57</sup> *The Other Story of Lutherans at Worship*, pg 64.

according to God's Word to confess true teaching and everything that pertains to the whole of religion freely and publicly. They are to do so not only with words but also in actions and deeds. In such a time they shall not yield to the opponents even in indifferent matters, nor shall they permit the imposition of such adiaphora by opponents who use violence or chicanery in such a way that undermines true worship of God or that introduces or confirms idolatry.<sup>58</sup>

Luecke's problem, in the end, is that he promotes a definition of worship that is more in line with Warren than with the Augustana: "individuals expressing their submissive relationship to God in attitude, words and action."<sup>59</sup> In other words, public worship is man's action.<sup>60</sup> With such a definition, the Evangelical style of worship makes sense. But is this worship that can have Lutheran substance? Can Lutherans follow an Evangelical style of worship and still have worship permeated by the doctrine of justification by faith and centered on receiving the blessings God gives in Word and sacrament?

#### **IV. The Augustana's View of Lutheran Worship for Today**

##### *Defining Lutheran worship*

These various challenges to the Augustana's view of Lutheran worship are not really about musical style or whether the preacher should be vested or not. They can be boiled down to a difference in the basic definition of worship. The Evangelical "praise and worship" style offers a definition of worship that is man-centered and law-based. Even when Warren speaks about worship being God-centered he only means that our praise is directed toward God. The content of that praise is mostly musings about the individual's love for Jesus or desire to obey. Consider, for example, "As the Deer," a fairly popular contemporary song.

1. As the deer pants for the water,  
So my soul longs after you.  
You alone are my heart's desire,  
And I long to worship you.

*Chorus:* You alone are my strength, my shield.  
To you alone may my spirit yield.  
You alone are my heart's desire,  
And I long to worship you.

2. You're my friend, and you're my brother,  
Even though you are a King.  
I love you more than any other,  
So much more than anything. *Chorus*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Solid Declaration X:10. A question to consider in this regard: When an Evangelical style of worship flows from such a non-confessional view of the means of grace, must Lutherans insist on not using that style and format as a confessional statement? I leave the debate to another essayist. It is an interesting question to consider.

<sup>59</sup> Luecke, pg 46.

<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that Luecke eschews a regular celebration of the Lord's Supper, even going so far as to claim that Holy Communion was celebrated less than weekly, even quarterly, within a few decades of Luther's death (Luecke, pg 93-95). That this is historically inaccurate can be seen from studies of early Lutheranism. The advent of Pietism, with its low view of the sacraments, led to a less frequent celebration of Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, the influence of Pietism followed many of the Lutheran immigrants to America, especially those involved with founding the Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota Synods. So it is not surprising that throughout the history of the WELS, monthly and even quarterly Communion was the norm. That historical fact, however, does not mean that such a practice was the ideal, nor the common practice of early Lutherans.

<sup>61</sup> *Let All the People Praise You*, pg 14-15.

While the song begins with an almost direct quote from Psalm 42, it quickly develops into a love song to Jesus without mentioning his name or what he has done to be worthy of our worship. Another popular example is “Shout to the Lord.”

My Jesus, My Savior  
Lord there is none like you  
All of my days, I want to praise  
The wonders of your mighty love  
My Comfort, My Shelter  
Tower of refuge and strength  
Let every breath, all that I am  
Never cease to worship you

Shout to the Lord, all the earth  
Let us sing. Power and majesty, praise to the king.  
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar  
At the sound of your name  
I sing for joy at the work of your hands  
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand  
Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.<sup>62</sup>

Theologically, there is nothing unscriptural about this text. In fact, there are allusions to various psalms. It is rather what is missing. There is no description of the “wonder of your mighty love,” no proclamation about what “my Jesus, my Savior” has done to save me. In addition, while the song is sung to Jesus, the focus is on the individual, even to the point of professing to love him forever and stand forever. While a similar vow is made at confirmation, it is always made with the prayer, “And I ask God to help me.” And the fulfillment of the vow is never made without a connection to Word and sacrament. Sacramental emphases are largely missing from “praise and worship” music even among Lutherans who tend to rely on repertoire developed outside of Lutheran circles.

Lutherans historically have referred to public worship as *Gottesdienst*, divine service, with the emphasis on God serving his people. Klemet Preus offers this expanded definition.

Most people, when they think of the word *worship*, think of something that we do. By this way of thinking, we are active in giving God our honor and praise and God is passive in receiving our worship. Actually, the primary direction of the communication in worship is the other way. In true Christian worship we are passive and God is active. We are receiving and God is giving. We are learning and God is teaching. We are getting and God is giving.<sup>63</sup>

Article IV of the Apology backs up this definition of worship.

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.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Darlene Zschech.

<sup>63</sup> Klemet Preus, pg 138.

<sup>64</sup> Apology IV:49.

Lutheran biblical worship places worshipers on the receiving end of God's gifts given in Word and sacrament where God has promised to come to us and bless us. Paul's words to the Colossians find application here. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual song with gratitude in your hearts to God."<sup>65</sup> It is true that worshipers are also serving God in worship. We are expressing "gratitude in our hearts to God." Worshipers are moved to respond, but their response is always gospel-motivated and gospel-centered. That's how we truly "teach and admonish one another with all wisdom." When we praise God, we proclaim why God is to be praised. And so we proclaim the gospel. When we pray to God, we thank him for his gifts, especially the spiritual gifts given through Word and sacrament, and ask that he continue to bless us in this way (cf. the Lord's Prayer). Even when we give our offerings, we are merely giving in response to God's gifts of grace to us. Jaroslav Vajda brings this out well in his hymn, "All Things Are Yours."

"All things are yours, My child,  
so live like the heir that you are,  
entrusted with all that you have.  
Be faithful, be prudent,  
be daring, be caring,  
as giving as I am toward you,  
All things are yours and you are Mine."<sup>66</sup>

It wasn't just for political purposes that the confessors retained the historic liturgy. What makes the historic Lutheran liturgy what it is? Scripture-based, gospel-centered canticles; music that carries and solidifies the Word of God without obscuring it; sacramentally-focused confession and absolution; well-worded prayers and responses; theological hymns; Christ-centered Church Year; and meaningful art and symbolic action. Lutheran worship as carried out in the historic liturgy revolves around justification by faith because it is focused on the words of Jesus and centered in the means of grace.

One simply cannot say the same thing about the modern Evangelical style of worship. It has an entirely different focus: man's actions toward God. Upbeat emotional responses and decisions for Jesus are the intended results. These results are elicited by a culturally popular style of music and texts that express my love for Jesus. This is contrary to Scripture and the Augustana where the intended result of worship is the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments so that the worshipers can receive the blessings Christ won. Lutheran worship points people to Jesus in the means of grace. So is it wise and beneficial for Lutherans to adapt and adopt a style of worship that flows from a non-biblical and non-confessional theology?

### *Connecting with the Holy Christian Church*

With our biblical fellowship practices, confessional Lutherans can often feel isolated. I may not be able to worship or pray with every other Christian, but I can express fellowship through the historic forms. The confessors recognized this by the way they devoutly retained the ceremonies and traditions of the Mass, jettisoning and changing only when doctrinally necessary. The Apology even states, "With a grateful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances..."<sup>67</sup> When we sing the songs of the church, when we confess the ecumenical creeds, when we use hymns that have history, we are expressing a fellowship that goes beyond the four walls of our church or even the boundaries of our synod. We are expressing a fellowship that transcends

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<sup>65</sup> Colossians 3:16

<sup>66</sup> Vajda, pg 34. This is the fourth stanza. Each of the first three stanzas addresses a different Person of the Trinity, praising that Person for certain specific gifts unique to that Person. This makes for a hymn encouraging sanctification and stewardship characterized by a beautiful balance of law and gospel.

<sup>67</sup> Apology VII and VIII:33.

time and space and includes believers who have gone before us and are now standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

This is no small matter to dismiss. Some may argue that by using the historic liturgy, we're ignoring fellowship with a segment of Christianity that chooses a different worship style. But this brings us back again to the definition of public worship. While there are many unscriptural teachings in Catholicism and Anglicanism, these other liturgical churches do have a high view of the sacraments, unlike churches with an Arminian bent. And although the gospel may not be heard from the pulpit in non-Lutheran churches, Christ is sung in the hymns and confessed in the creeds. The same cannot be said of an Evangelical style of worship where too often you are left to the whim of the preacher to hear the gospel.

In his little book, *Why I Am a Lutheran*, Rev. Daniel Preus devotes several pages to the fellowship value of Lutheran worship. He draws this conclusion at the end of the chapter.

When we unite in worship, we experience a marvelous fellowship. Through faith in Jesus Christ, Christians have become one family, sharing the same Father who made us, the same Brother who gave Himself for us, and living by the power of the same Holy Spirit who brought us to life through the Gospel. It is wonderful to gather together and use the prayers, songs and stories that have been in the family for generations. In this way we not only preserve our Christian heritage, we also affirm our delight in our identity as children of the heavenly Father, celebrating with those who have gone before us in the faith and with those who are still to come.<sup>68</sup>

In our internet age, people spend a great deal of time isolated, staring at a screen in the darkness of a cubicle. They long for community, for a connection with something bigger than themselves. Use of the historic Lutheran liturgy provides a connection that goes beyond the church at this time and place, but extends to the past and future and around the world.

It is interesting to note that this connection to the historical church is what some who have come out of the Evangelical camp into Lutheranism have greatly appreciated. Craig Parton, who migrated from Evangelicalism, where he had been involved with Campus Crusade for Christ, to confessional Lutheranism, makes this statement about his spiritual pilgrimage to Lutheranism. "I found a link to the historic and universal (i.e., catholic) worship of the church."<sup>69</sup> This link is not found in a service designed last week by the pastor. It is not found in made-up creeds and abandonment of the historic canticles. This link is found by retaining "traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things."<sup>70</sup> This does not mean that we try to replicate exactly what was done in worship in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the 16<sup>th</sup> century or the 1950's. What it does mean is that we use forms, symbols, creeds, prayers and hymns that have been used by Christians across the ages and around the world to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments. Rev. Harold Senkbeil sums it up nicely.

In the worshipping congregation we are not alone; the saints who have gone ahead into heaven are still alive and with us in the fellowship of the church. Uniquely and especially in the liturgy we are surrounded by the company of this great cloud of witnesses. Misery loves company, and so does faith. In the divine service the worshipping congregation is part of a vast invisible company of believers, living and departed, who join in continual praise to the God of heaven and earth. This is the timeless community of faith.<sup>71</sup>

### *Teaching through liturgy, hymnody and symbolism*

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel Preus, pg 191.

<sup>69</sup> Parton, pg 11.

<sup>70</sup> Apology XXIV:1.

<sup>71</sup> Senkbeil, pg 126.

Rev. Chad Bird, in an essay entitled, “Lutheran Hymnody: Orthodoxy in Song,” has this to say about the educational value of liturgy and hymnody.

I have heard seminarians say that they learned as much (or more) theology in the daily chapel services as in the classrooms or study. The same could be said by any layman who confesses the creeds, prays the liturgy, sings the hymns, and listens to the sermons in his congregation.<sup>72</sup>

Worship is not mere instruction of facts or “how-tos.” Worship is the proclamation of Christ crucified and risen in Word and sacraments. That Word can be read, preached, sung or depicted in art and symbolism. When that Word is proclaimed, instruction happens. People learn what God wants them to believe and do. That’s another reason the confessors at Augsburg held on to the ancient worship of the church.

No noticeable changes have been made in the public celebration of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung alongside the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people. For after all, all ceremonies should serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ.<sup>73</sup>

Evangelical worship also intends to teach. But that teaching is limited to the sermon. In fact, the sermon is primarily designed to teach. But what is it teaching? Craig Parton offers this summary from his own experience in Evangelicalism.

The Gospel of Christ’s saving work for sinners... was not the source of “power” for the daily life of the repentant and forgiven Christian. I needed help in practical Christian living. I needed “how-tos.” If I knew better, was the assumption, I would do better.<sup>74</sup>

In other words, the focus of Evangelical worship is the law, not the gospel. This makes sense when we consider the purpose of worship in Evangelical circles – “expressing our love to [God].”<sup>75</sup> This requires a law emphasis centered on man’s work. In contrast, Parton relates what he discovered in Lutheran worship.

In Lutheranism I indeed found the evangel – the Good News – as the focus of its prayed, spoken, and sung confession. Yes, I found some things I thought were foreign additions – vestments, altars, candles, pipe organs, corporate confession of sin, kneeling benches, old hymns, written prayers, and a “liturgy” (whatever that was) conducted according to an equally unheard of “church year.” But I also found Christ at the center of all of it and the reason for all of it.<sup>76</sup>

What he discovered in Lutheran worship was justification by faith proclaimed in Word and sacrament, taught in the ceremonies, rites, hymns and preaching. Lutheran worship pointed him to Christ’s work, not his own.

As a father and a parish pastor, please permit me a few anecdotes about the teaching value of Lutheran liturgy and hymnody.

A couple of years ago, our congregation began introducing the Common Service from *Christian Worship: New Service Settings*. At the time, my three children were ages 7, 6, and 4. The first canticle introduced was the Agnus Dei. Merely through hearing it sung during school chapel and regularly in worship, they were able to pick up the simple melody and repetitive words. This enabled them to participate in worship

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<sup>72</sup> Bird, pg 1.

<sup>73</sup> AC XXIV:2-3.

<sup>74</sup> Parton, pg 16.

<sup>75</sup> Warren, pg 239.

<sup>76</sup> Parton, pg 11-12.

in a meaningful way. It also served to solidify in their hearts and minds the truth that children know to answer when the teacher asks how God showed his love for them: Jesus died on the cross to take away my sins.

Last fall, I was teaching a Bible class on Galatians. We were discussing the need for God's law as a mirror to prepare for the gospel. Much to my surprise, in his response to one of my questions, a layman included in his answer the words from "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice."

Yet deep and deeper still I fell;  
Life had become a living hell,  
So firmly sin possessed me.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps I would not have been so surprised if he had been a graduate of Northwestern Prep and spent four years in Professor Zabell's music classes with his hymn memorizing and hymn recognition tests. But he was an adult confirmand. His two sons had attended our school. Somewhere along the line, he took the time to memorize this hymn. He understood its value for his faith.

One final anecdote. The hymnody of the church serves people throughout their lives. Clara was over 90 years old. Until she had fallen a few years earlier, she would walk ten blocks to church every Sunday. She had a little piece of paper listing the hymns she would recite on her walk to prepare her for worship. Many she still knew in German. As a shut in, after receiving the Lord's Supper, she would pray several stanzas of "O Living Bread from Heaven." The repetition of those words helped her remain connected to her church, even when she could not physically attend. At her deathbed devotion, as she was surrounded by her sisters, we prayed the Lord's Prayer in German. The nurse came in. Clara had been called home to heaven with familiar words of Jesus ringing in her ears.

I only relate these stories to illustrate the practical nature of our Lutheran hymnody and liturgy. The Augustana did not speak of retaining the Mass just to be politically safe or because that was all anyone knew at the time. The historic liturgy was teaching the faith to God's people. And the hymnody of the Lutheran church added to the depth of teaching with its law-gospel emphasis, its focus on the sacramental nature of Christian faith, and the centrality of Christ's work for the world.

Some would argue that modern Americans cannot understand the intricacies of the poetry. They are too biblically illiterate to catch the biblical allusions in many hymns. They don't have an appreciation for the melodies that are labeled as too European or too classical.<sup>78</sup> Without spending too much time dealing with each argument, I would only say that perhaps worship leaders have failed both to intentionally teach the value of the liturgy and hymnody, and to use the liturgy and hymnody to teach God's people. Perhaps we need to use more frequently the actions and art of worship, as well as the canticles, prayers and hymns, to illustrate sermons. Make mention of the centrality of the cross, the stained glass artwork, the symbolism on the paraments or the pastor's stoles. This can especially make an impression on children in a school chapel service. Solidify a truth in a sermon by quoting what the congregation or choir is singing that Sunday. Maybe we need to get back to having the children sing hymns from the hymnal, or new theologically Lutheran hymns, instead of going right to *Let All the People Praise You*, or some other songbook. These hymns are a treasure of Christ's church. They proclaim theology – orthodox theology. And, as Martin Franzmann said, "Theology is doxology; theology must sing."<sup>79</sup>

A quick perusal of Lutheran hymnody reveals hymn after hymn that teach both the basic Bible history where our salvation was purchased, as well as what these events mean in terms of our justification and sanctification. Some of the best hymns, like those of Luther, Gerhardt, Franzmann and Vajda, give expression not only to the teachings of Scripture, but how those teachings play out in the life of the Christian and the life of the church as a whole. They do not speak merely about loving Jesus and longing to worship him. They proclaim the need for Jesus and what he has done.

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<sup>77</sup> *Christian Worship* 377:2

<sup>78</sup> Both Luecke and Warren present these arguments in their writings.

<sup>79</sup> Franzmann, pg 92.



Yet as the Law must be fulfilled  
Or we must die despairing,  
Christ came and has God's anger stilled,  
Our human nature sharing.  
He has for us the law obeyed  
And thus the Father's vengeance stayed  
Which over us impended.<sup>80</sup>

They do not invite a superficial emotionalism or contrived happiness. They proclaim a joyfully authentic response to the gospel in terms of a theology of the cross, recognizing the reality of life in this world.

Dear Christian friend,  
On him depend;  
Be of good cheer and let no sorrow move you.  
For God's own child  
In mercy mild  
Join you to him – how greatly God must love you!<sup>81</sup>

They do not attempt to find Christ in our hearts or in our exuberance. They proclaim the reality of Christ's presence and God's gifts in the Word preached and the sacraments administered.

Is this for me?  
I am forgiven and set free!  
I do believe  
That I receive  
His very body and His blood.  
Oh, taste and see – the Lord is good.<sup>82</sup>

While some hymns may employ Elizabethan English in their translations, there are many newer hymns, such as "What Is This Bread," that proclaim profound thoughts in simple poetry. Numerous hymns of this nature will be in the new LCMS hymnal, as well as the forthcoming WELS hymnal supplement.

The Augustana's use of the historic liturgy and the best of Christian hymnody, art and symbolism can continue to serve the church as it struggles to proclaim the gospel in our American culture that has become post-Christian. The placement of cross, altar, pulpit and font, the use of symbolism and art, the poetry of hymnody and the repetition of the canticles are tools to teach the centrality of justification by faith.

Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies. We keep the Latin for the sake of those who learn and understand it. We also use German hymns in order that the [common] people might have something to learn, something that will arouse their faith and fear.<sup>83</sup>

*"For the sake of peace and order"*

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<sup>80</sup> *Christian Worship* 390:4

<sup>81</sup> *Christian Worship* 40:3

<sup>82</sup> *Hymnal Supplement* 98:850:4

<sup>83</sup> *Apology* XXIV:3.

As has been mentioned earlier, one key reason for retaining the ceremonies, rites, and festivals of the Mass was for the sake of peace and order. “Our side also retains many ceremonies and traditions, such as the order of the Mass and other singing, festivals, and the like, which serve to preserve order in the church.”<sup>84</sup> Some might contend that this orderliness was a trait of the Germanic culture of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>85</sup> Or they might argue that the degree of orderliness, or the way orderliness might appear, is culturally driven. For example, most of our congregations find it disorderly when children are milling about during the service and parents don’t seem to care or be in control. My observation during Hmong services was that the adults were not fazed by what I thought were distractions from children walking around during the service. Is this unique to the Hmong culture or just lack of experience from newer Christians? Or is it a product of the sinful nature? Probably a little bit of everything. So there needs to be a certain level of sensitivity to the cultural environment of the congregation.

At the same time, however, there is a certain objective orderliness that historic Lutheran worship provides. Recall the reason for peace and order in the church – so the gospel may be proclaimed and the sacraments administered. In worship we are dealing with the mysteries of God, the sacred, the tools of the Holy Spirit. As worship leaders, we need to remember that we are not “trifling with toys.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, we approach worship in God’s house with a sense of dignity and decorum. These are holy things. Dr. Gene Edward Veith, a former Evangelical and currently Executive Director of the Cranach Institute at Concordia Theological Seminary, commented about the different atmosphere he noted in a Lutheran church.

After worshipping in that church for many months, I realized what was different about it. I was experiencing what I had never really known before, a sense of holiness. The robes, the rituals, the art, the music served to “set apart” what was happening from ordinary life. “Holiness” literally means “set apart,” and in America at least, with our egalitarianism, casual ways, and laid-back attitudes, nothing is set apart and, as we say, nothing is sacred. But church, I was learning, was a place where something sacred could be found. The way the pastor would bow to the cross and to the Word of God on the altar, the way the congregation would rise and kneel, the majestic language of the liturgy convinced me that something different, something extraordinary is going on here.<sup>87</sup>

The message proclaimed in Lutheran worship is extraordinary. It runs against the culture, and really against the sinful nature. Therefore, the environment in which the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered is going to look different than the everyday world. Pastors vest, not to be ostentatious, but because the message they proclaim is what’s important, not their personality or style. The altar, font and pulpit hold the prominent places in the chancel because they represent the means of grace, the focal point for Lutheran worship. The band and singers jamming in the front<sup>88</sup> or a screen lowered in front of the altar have a tendency to blur the focus from the means of grace.<sup>89</sup> Precision of language in prayers and the use of chant say that what is happening in worship is special and important.

At the same time, orderliness is not necessarily defined by genuflecting, elevating, processing or wearing a collar. We do well to follow Luther’s example of finding the middle road, neither insisting on

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<sup>84</sup> AC XXVI:40.

<sup>85</sup> “The liturgy is neither exclusively ‘Lutheran’ nor ‘German.’ ... Much of today’s negative propaganda against the liturgy is inaccurate. The western rite is a transcultural and multicultural product with roots from ancient times in North Africa, Syria, Palestine, and the like. This same frame of worship is shared by three quarters of a billion Roman Catholics, the many Eastern Orthodox Churches, the pre-Chalcedonian Churches, the Anglican Communion, and over seventy million Lutherans, the majority of whom are not German.” (Krause, pg 171)

<sup>86</sup> Christie, pg 8

<sup>87</sup> Veith, pg 108.

<sup>88</sup> While not every congregation has a balcony, there are ways to place instrumentalists, choirs and soloists so that they do not obscure the pulpit, altar and font.

<sup>89</sup> I am not against the use of visual technology in worship. My parish has a video projection system used primarily for sermons. But keeping the screen(s) to the side of the chancel or projecting on one of the side walls of the chancel allows the cross and altar to continue occupying center stage in the chancel.

retaining every ancient ceremony, nor jettisoning something just because it doesn't seem to reflect popular culture. Rather, we retain the dignity of vestments and the orderliness of the church year and the flow of the ancient liturgy because these things serve the gospel and keep the focus on Word and sacrament.

*Understanding the freedom of the gospel*

Some voices in the church today argue that uniformity in forms is important for the unity in a church body. The Augustana states differently.

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere.<sup>90</sup>

The New Testament proclaims gospel freedom. The Lutheran confessors rightly understood the freedom of the gospel. There are no new laws regarding worship forms or church government. The Augustana goes to great lengths to make this clear. Consider this example.

The same applies to the regulation of Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, or similar festivals and customs. For those who think that the sabbath had to be replaced by Sunday are very much mistaken. For Holy Scripture did away with the sabbath, and it teaches that after the revelation of the gospel all ceremonies of the old law may be given up. Nevertheless, the Christian church instituted Sunday because it became necessary to set apart a specific day so that the people might know when to assemble; and the church was all the more pleased and inclined to do this so that the people might have an example of Christian freedom and so that everyone would know that neither the keeping of the sabbath nor any other day is necessary.<sup>91</sup>

The same article, however, also says this about the establishment and use of ceremonies, rites and forms.

How, then, should Sunday and other similar church ordinances and ceremonies be regarded? Our people reply that bishops or pastors may make regulations for the sake of good order in the church, but not thereby to obtain God's grace, to make satisfaction for sin, or to bind consciences, nor to regard such as a service of God or to consider it a sin when these rules are broken without giving offense. So St. Paul prescribed in Corinthians that women should cover their heads in the assembly [1 Cor. 11:5] and that preachers in the assembly should not all speak at once, but in order, one after the other [1 Cor. 14:30-33]

Such regulation belongs rightfully in the Christian assembly for the sake of love and peace, to be obedient to bishops and pastors in such cases, and to keep such order to the extent that no one offends another—so that there may not be disorder or unruly conduct in the church.<sup>92</sup>

So we have freedom. But that freedom is exercised with responsibility. The freedom comes because the gospel gives that freedom. The responsibility is exercised for the sake of the gospel. Applied to worship, we have freedom in what we do. But what we do must be about justification by faith. It must have the duality of "giving the gospel" and receiving the blessings of the gospel. So how is this balance of freedom and responsibility carried out in Lutheran worship?

Lutheran worship cannot be equated with page 15 of *The Lutheran Hymnal* or *Christian Worship*. Forms, ceremonies, rites and even musical styles cannot be dictated. A congregation has the freedom to genuflect or not, to elevate the host or not, to kneel for Communion or not, to use page 26 or page 15 or both.

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<sup>90</sup> AC VII:2-3.

<sup>91</sup> AC XXVIII:57-60.

<sup>92</sup> AC XXVIII:53-55.

There is freedom in these areas for variety. And there should be variety. Decades of exclusively using page 15 is not what the confessors had in mind. But a style evidenced by Kermit Moldenhauer's arrangement of the Common Service<sup>93</sup> is a beautiful use of variety in musical style while still communicating the text in an appropriate manner. Congregations should be urged to use appropriate variety in settings of the canticles and new hymns. The Commission on Worship should be urged to encourage the production of new musical settings of the liturgy on a regular basis. These things are a testimony to the freedom of the gospel.<sup>94</sup>

Yet, this is not an absolute freedom to do entirely as one pleases. This freedom needs to be tempered by responsibility. In fact, the Augustana states just that with the words, "For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously *according to a pure understanding* and the sacraments are administered *in conformity with the divine Word.*"<sup>95</sup> What we do, whether it is in worship, evangelism or education, must always accurately proclaim the gospel and properly administer the sacraments. Doctrine and practice go together. Doctrine, in fact, will always determine practice. And, unfortunately, practice often affects doctrine. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves: can worship forms and methods be borrowed from a theology that does not properly understand the power of the means of grace? Can we run the risk of letting a practice that flows from a different theology affect our Lutheran, scriptural theology?

In the end, what we learn from the confessors is to find and follow the Lutheran middle road.<sup>96</sup> We are neither Roman Catholic nor Evangelical/Reformed. Rather, we're evangelical catholics and confessing evangelicals.<sup>97</sup> We are not liturgical tyrants who insist that older is better and judge confessional integrity by liturgical purity. We are not freelancers who reshape worship according to the latest wind of change in popular Christianity and culture. Instead, we endeavor to follow the Lutheran middle road, respectful of our place in the history and spectrum of Christ's church, mindful of the gifts of music and art God has given to his church of the past and present for the proclamation of the gospel and the praise of his people. And above all, we understand the centrality of justification by faith in the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions and the life of the church. Therefore, we will strive to direct the weekly gathering of God's faithful flock to the cross of Christ and the blessings of his victory he distributes in Word, water, wheat and wine.

## Conclusion

Bach inscribed on many of his music manuscripts the initials "INJ" and SDG." "In Nomine Jesu." "Soli Deo Gloria." Isn't this the Augustana's summary of Lutheran worship? We worship in the name of the Jesus. We come together to receive the gifts Jesus won for us on the cross. Those gifts are given to us through the words of Jesus – words preached by the pastor, sung and chanted by God's people, confessed in the creeds, connected with bread and wine in the Supper. Justification by faith is at the center of it all. Since justification is all God's work, since worship is really God's work as he gives us forgiveness, life and salvation, he receives all the glory. Through the words of Jesus and using the words of Jesus, God's people are moved to give God all the glory with hearts and hands and voices.

May we never lose sight of the connection our Lutheran theology has with our Lutheran worship. Law and gospel. Justification by faith. Word and sacraments. God serving his people through the proclamation of the gospel. His people serving God and each other by proclaiming what he has done and using his gifts of

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<sup>93</sup> *Christian Worship: New Service Settings*.

<sup>94</sup> Martin Franzmann's thoughts in this regard deserve reading.

So at the Reformation, when the Word of Christ dwelt richly in men's hearts once more, when the peace of God was allowed to rule in men once more, there followed a burst of song almost without parallel in the history of the church. Here, too, the Reformation was not a revolution. It gave up nothing of the ancient song of the church that was good and profitable, and the Church of the Reformation ever since, when it has been true to its origin, has always welcomed each good new song. (*Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, pg 92)

<sup>95</sup> AC VII:2.

<sup>96</sup> For a broader view of the Lutheran middle road, see Prof. Deutschlander's essay.

<sup>97</sup> Veith, pg 123-124.

music, language and the arts to do this. We have a song of glory to sing. This song was begun when our Lord won the victory with his resurrection. We prepare this song of glory when we use all of God's gifts to proclaim the message of justification. We repeat this song, week after week, year after year, in the name of Jesus and for the glory of God, until at last we join the saints around the throne of the Lamb repeating the song for all eternity.

Begin the song of glory now:  
the Son has risen from His grave!  
The night of mourning long is past;  
Life has a purpose after all.  
Our Samson smashed the gates of hell,  
And we are free at last, at last!  
Begin the song of glory now:  
The Son has risen from our grave!

Prepare the song of glory now:  
The Son has risen from His grave!  
Composers, players, find new sounds  
For every instrument and voice:  
A note, a chord, an aria  
A Kyrie, a Gloria.  
Prepare the song of glory now:  
The Son has risen from our grave!

Repeat the song of glory now:  
The Son has risen from His grave!  
Complete the Easter overture,  
And join the Alleluia choir  
"In Jesus name" the song begin,  
and end: "All praise to God alone!"  
Repeat the song of glory now:  
The Son has risen from our grave!<sup>98</sup>

✘ *SOLI DEO GLORIA* ✘

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<sup>98</sup> Vajda, pg 48.

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# The Augustana and Lutheran Worship

## A Reaction

In his presentation, *The Augustana and Lutheran Worship*, Pastor Otto addresses an issue with which our church is struggling today: How does a congregation together with its pastor and worship planners balance New Testament freedom in the selection of worship forms with the New Testament commission to baptize and teach all nations? The Scriptures address this question and so do the Lutheran Confessions, as we might expect. Pastor Otto summarized Scripture, Luther, and the Augsburg Confession when he wrote:

- The church is perfectly free from all prescribed forms, rites and ceremonies because the gospel has given us that freedom.
- The church is bound to use forms, rites and ceremonies that proclaim the gospel in Word and sacraments.

It is difficult to suppose that anyone in our circles would disagree with this summary. The struggle comes, however, in the second sentence below:

So the Augustana made it clear that because of gospel freedom the forms of public worship are adiaphora. Yet, the Augustana insisted on using the ancient forms of the liturgy because they served that gospel freedom by centering on the means of grace.

Some would contend that the obligation to use forms, rites, and ceremonies that proclaim the gospel is not on the same level as the practice of the 16<sup>th</sup> confessors to use the ancient forms of the liturgy. And they would contend rightly. They could also contend, and some do, that New Testament freedom also allows them to designate how many forms, rites, and ceremonies will proclaim the gospel and that, in freedom, some forms, rites, and ceremonies may have other purposes besides proclaiming the gospel, e.g., to elicit joy, to afford comfort, to breach cultural differences, etc. And they would contend rightly.

There must be a clear and on-going agreement among us that the obligation to use forms, rites, and ceremonies that proclaim the gospel is not only fulfilled in the traditional forms, rites, and ceremonies of the Christian or Lutheran Church. New forms may come to stand beside old forms, and new forms may proclaim the gospel in different ways than the old forms. A man-made form such as the liturgy is not a surer proclaimer of the gospel than a man-made form that is not the liturgy. Hymns with profound texts, e.g., “Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands”, will not get more people into heaven than hymns with simple texts, such “God Loves Me Dearly.” Not the form but the gospel enlivens, enlightens, and enthuses faith.

We need to be sensitive to the appeals to freedom and adiaphora that we hear around us. In many cases these appeals come from congregations in which pastor and people are deeply concerned about flat growth, back door losses, disintegrating families, lazy stewardship, and a host of other spiritual woes. One might wish and pray that more churches would be willing to change, to assess ministry, to evaluate forms, to strive for what is excellent and worthy of the gospel of Christ.

We need to be aware of our limitations, however. Our commission is to enable the Spirit’s work, not perform the Spirit’s work. We may be able to find ways to grow church, but we cannot grow the Church. Only the Spirit can do that, and he indicates to us he chooses to that only through the gospel in Word and sacrament. If we are on fire to help the heathen, whoever they may be, we dare let our fire lead us to abandon or obfuscate the only means the Spirit has chosen to help the heathen, whoever they may be. A reliance on the means of grace to grow the Church and a responsibility to use gospel-filled forms, rites, and ceremonies in public worship is not a part of adiaphora. One might suggest that before we cry, “Adiaphora!” we had better assess our worship forms to see how much gospel is really there.

In a recent “editorial” delivered at a contemporary worship conference in Green Bay, Pastor Paul Kelm wrote:



Article XV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession and Article X of the Formula of Concord testify to Christian freedom in worship. Apologists for liturgical worship may be quick to affirm that worship forms are a matter of adiaphora, neither commanded nor forbidden by God. However, there is typically a large “But” which follows. But, as 1 Corinthians 10 says, “not everything is beneficial or constructive.” In other words, to give up the songs and hymns of liturgical worship is to settle for something at best inferior, at worst spiritually harmful.

Isn't the “But” the essayist bemoans here exactly the “but” Paul intended to use in 1 Corinthians? Wasn't Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 10 that freedom requires responsibility? Even Article X of the FC notes an exception to the principle of freedom: “except in the case of confession.” Consider how Paul limited freedom in worship in 1 Corinthians 14. We would not be walking in the footsteps of the Augustana if we fail to help our members—and our brothers--balance freedom and responsibility in areas of adiaphora.

Pastor Otto pointed out to us that the confessors understood the teaching function of worship forms, rites, and ceremonies. His citation from Article XXIV is typical: “...all ceremonies should serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ.”

As we would expect, many of the liturgical conservatives in the LCMS agree with this perspective. Pastor Otto quoted the well-known Klemet Preus:

Most people, when they think of the word *worship*, think of something that we do. By this way of thinking, we are active in giving God our honor and praise and God is passive in receiving our worship. Actually, the primary direction of the communication in worship is the other way. In true Christian worship we are passive and God is active. We are receiving and God is giving. We are learning and God is teaching. We are getting and God is giving.

Of course, Preus is correct to understand that such passivity exists in the realm of the gospel and faith; the gospel gives and faith receives. This concept is a classic tool for teaching Christian worship: God gives and we respond. But I have set aside that concept in teaching about worship for this reason: I believe it minimizes the gospel proclamation contained in the people's song.

In his definitive study of Lutheran worship Peter Brunner wrote:

The congregation's Spirit-effected response to the gift of salvation, conveyed in Word and Sacrament, is itself Word. Also where this response involves a physical gesture, this gesture is not mute, but vital through the words accompanying it. This responding, confessing, thanking, and glorifying word of the congregation will always recall the great and saving deeds of God's might; it will acknowledge, laud, and glorify them prayerfully, and in this manner also proclaim and present them to others. It is precisely the priestly service of the congregation that thus becomes a proclamation of the wonderful deeds of God (Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, p. 122-124).

Without this understanding of the work of the people and with a sense that only the pastor delivers the gift from God in absolution, lessons, sermon, and sacraments, it is easy to take the next step and determine that what the people speak and sing is not all that important as long as the sermon gets it right. There is a growing attitude in our circles that the people's song can be minimized. Pastor Kelm wrote in the previously mentioned editorial: “Perhaps music should reinforce basic Christian truth and express praise and prayer, leaving teaching to the sermon.” This is a critical issue in our church today: Can't we abandon the teaching function of music in worship and allow the sermon to assume the primary teaching function?

The answer to the question is: Of course we can. There are no ceremonial laws in the New Testament. But another question needs to be asked here: Where does this concept come from? Does it find biblical or ecclesiastical precedents?

It certainly isn't the perspective of the Augustana, as we have seen in Pastor Otto's essay, nor does one find this concept on the pages of the Scriptures. God himself added to the voices of the prophets the ritual of

the temple and testimony of the psalms. The message of the angel was joined by the song of the angels, and the ecstatic songs that accompany the birth of Christ (Mary's, Zechariah's, and Simeon's) are filled with teaching. Paul encouraged that the Word of Christ should be taught and sung in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; one thinks of the christological hymn in Philippians 2:5-11. Luther was a preacher and a hymnist; the angel of his Christmas hymn announced: "Glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will *say* and *sing*." C.F.W. Walther reestablished the core hymns of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in his St. Louis congregations and in the Missouri Synod and insisted that an orthodox hymnal was as important as orthodox preaching. Hans Koller Moussa deplored the paucity of confessional hymns in the Wisconsin Synod and worked hard to convince reluctant Missouri leaders to work on a hymnal for the entire Synodical Conference.

The point is that there is little evidence in the confessional Christian and Lutheran Church that supports a hymnody that is something other than a teaching hymnody. In the experience of millions of Christians before us, the song of the congregation, whether in the liturgy or the hymns, stood alongside the sermon as that which taught and proclaimed the gospel.

Pastor Otto has helped us to deal with worship issues that stand before our church today. We stand between two poles: our desire to claim and reclaim the lost and the straying and the freedom in form we have as New Testament believers. What bridges those poles must be the gospel.

James Tiefel