

EDIFICATION AND EDUCATION AS PRIMARY CONCERNS OF WORSHIP RITES IN
THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

BY

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Abstract

In recent years, “worship wars” have erupted in the Lutheran church. Different opinions concerning public worship have been advanced, varying principles have been cited, and papers, essays, and blog posts have been lobbed from either side of the battle lines. The starting place for investigating principles of worship must be the Holy Scriptures. As a Lutheran church investigating principles of worship, one must also consider what the Lutheran Confessions have to say on the topic. Having read what the confessions say about worship and, specifically, Lutheran worship rites, a multifaceted approach to ritual in worship became apparent. At the most fundamental level the primary concerns of Lutheran worship rites, according to the confessions, must be to edify and educate the people. The goal of this thesis is to trace the development of confessional Lutheran worship rites in their historical context as well as their use in the setting of public worship while keeping in mind the twin goals of edification and education. Along with this, this study will discuss a number of Confessional principles for practical application in worship as 21st century Lutherans strive to achieve the Lutheran middle road in public worship.

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Introduction

Edification and education as primary concerns for worship rites in the Lutheran Confessions: a fancy title for a seemingly transparent topic. Some would contend that developing a flashy or elegant title for a thesis project would endear the academics and deter the critics (although the converse may also be true). On the other hand, I would contend that the title of this study is quite transparent while the topic is not. Three of the main arteries of this thesis will, in fact, be edification, education, and the Lutheran Confessions. So, why the contention that the topic itself is not transparent? Given the recent “worship wars” within the Lutheran church, it would seem that, to some degree, pastors and worship planners across synod lines are not on the same page as it pertains to the form and function of Lutheran worship. Both sides of the battle demonstrate knowledge of Scriptural principles about worship but differ, sometimes greatly, in their interpretation and application of those principles. Both sides claim to have the Lutheran Confessions in their camp, promoting their particular brand of divine service. But in some cases, this may be an attempt to force the confessions to say something they never intended to say.

The purpose of this study is to trace the development of the concept of Lutheran worship rites within their historical setting and, ultimately, to let the confessions speak for themselves. After discussing the purpose and benefits of Lutheran worship as defined by Reformation theology, subsequent portions of this thesis will show themselves to be beneficial. Such portions include a discussion of the definition of the church according to the Lutheran Confessions and the undoubted need for a clear confession of that truth in public worship.

The transparent title of this thesis makes a bold promise to investigate worship on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions. Having studied and considered what the confessions have to say about worship, a number of principles for Lutheran worship rose to the surface. These include, but are not limited to, Christocentricity, gospel predominance, participation by the people, and maintaining a clear distinction between sacramental and sacrificial elements of the service. These, however, are not the thrust of this study. The two-pronged main link that connects these principles to the historic rites as they emerged from Reformation theology includes both edification and education. Boiled down to the most fundamental level Lutheran worship rites, according to the confessions, have as their primary concern both edification and education of the people. This point will become clear in the chapters concerning Confessional Lutheran worship rites: the Mass, Holy Baptism, and a brief study of the songs of the Ordinary.

Through the continual process of edification and education by means of worship rites, the Lutheran church boldly moves forward through the 21st century, having received impetus from our 16th century forefathers.

In the final three chapters of this study is where the theoretical rubber meets the practical road. Having investigated the history, benefit, and purposes of Lutheran worship rites in the confessions, every Lutheran reader will be led to ask a very Lutheran question: What does this mean? Since ritual in worship, generally speaking, is an adiaphoron how will we apply our freedom? What guidance do the confessions give in this endeavor? If the reader is seeking black and white answers to questions that often deal in gray, these final three chapters (including the conclusion) may disappoint, but it is this author's hope that they inspire. Included therein are several questions and issues for consideration, without concrete answers specifically stated. The questions and situations are not meant to be patronizing or pedantic, but rather to serve as an opportunity to seek to apply Confessional Lutheran principles to modern issues that pastors and worship planners may face.

The content of this thesis will revolve around both edification and education as primary goals of the worship rites in the Lutheran Confessions. In an attempt to cover adequately the topic, this thesis will discuss the need for a clear confession in public worship and the edification provided through that confession of truth, the need for and process of educating the laity through Lutheran worship rites, practical considerations for Lutheran worship rites as viewed in the context of Formula of Concord Article X, and finally pastoral concerns for Lutheran worship rites today.

Nowhere in the Lutheran Confessions do we read a rigid rubric for public worship with rites and ceremonies outlined in Levitical fashion. What can be gleaned from the confessions are a number of principles pertaining to Lutheran worship rites and corporate worship as a whole. This thesis will provide examples of those principles in action in the churches of the 16th century Lutheran Reformation as well as modern applications of confessional principles in 21st century Lutheran worship. Worship rites in churches that bear the name 'Lutheran' will strive to reflect the Scriptural and confessional understanding of our Lutheran forefathers. Worship rites proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and in so doing seek the edification and the education of the worshiper.

Edification and education as primary concerns for worship rites in the Lutheran Confessions: whether the title or the topic may seem transparent, this thesis will underline the importance of both edification and education in worship. This study of the confessions will follow after a brief literature review of some of the more beneficial resources available for this project.

Literature Review

Investigating the worship rites of Lutheranism in the context of the Lutheran Confessions is hardly a recent development in the church. From its earliest days, our Lutheran forefathers sought to walk the narrow, Lutheran middle road between the meritorious rubrics of Rome and the iconoclasm of Karlstadt. In an effort to avoid either of two extremes, Lutherans have searched to determine principles of worship and liturgy that the confessors and formulators deemed valuable in achieving this goal. Philip Moldenhauer's WLS senior thesis project, *Theological and Pastoral Criteria for Worship Forms in the Lutheran Confessions*, investigated this issue, at least in part, within the context of a broader umbrella known as "liturgical theology." As innocent as it may sound, liturgical theology does carry with it tendencies to elevate liturgy to the source of theology instead of an expression of theological truths. This concept has been gaining some traction among liturgical scholars in the Lutheran church in recent history. So, the need once again arises to investigate Lutheran worship and its forms in the light of the confessions.

Literature directly relating Lutheran worship to the Lutheran Confessions is a genre that has been by no means exhausted. There are, however, a number of books, articles, and essays that aim in this direction. James Brauer's, *Worship, Gottesdienst, Cultus Dei*, provides a useful starting point for a confessional perspective on worship, but does not go extensively beyond that. Since it is comprised almost entirely of citations from the confessions, it demonstrates the importance early Lutherans placed on worship but lacks sufficient pastoral applications in some respects. Offering more significant insight, albeit perhaps overly zealous insight, James Alan Waddell's *The Struggle to Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church*, views some contemporary liturgical issues in the light of exhaustive historical study. Joel Otto's *The Augustana and Lutheran Worship* clearly identifies current issues in worship and answers them

in light of the Augsburg Confession. Literature linking Lutheran worship to the confessions is available.

The challenge that exists in tackling a topic entitled *Edification and Education as Primary Concerns of the Worship Forms in the Lutheran Confessions* is that the topic is all too narrow and, at the same time, all too broad. It is narrow in the respect that the research moves out from under the umbrella of liturgical theology, as such, and focuses itself on only a fragment of the important Lutheran liturgical reforms at the time of Luther and the confessors. It is broad in the respect that on the surface, the topic appears quite transparent. Edification and education in worship? *Of course, both of these things happen...now let's move on!* Given both the ambiguity and the specificity of the topic, resources which directly engage this avenue of liturgical study are not abundant. But there are resources, nonetheless.

Noted liturgical scholars like Frank Senn and Luther Reed provided useful and easy to follow sketches and overviews of liturgical development in the Lutheran church. Narrowing down the wealth of material in their respective treatments to the point of *Edification and Education* in light of the confessions proved to be a bit more challenging. The aim of the research for this thesis is to offer an overview of Lutheran liturgical developments at the time of Luther and the confessors and to demonstrate their multifaceted emphasis on edification and education.

A study of Lutheran worship forms in light of the Lutheran Confessions will, of necessity, make ample use of the confessions which comprise the *Book of Concord*. Having studied what the confessions have to say about worship, a number of principles and emphases became evident. These will be outlined in the body of the thesis.

The Purpose and Benefits of Lutheran Worship As Defined by Reformation Theology

In the opening paragraphs of Article XXIV of the Apology, Melanchthon states in no uncertain terms the purpose and benefits of the rites and ceremonies of worship. “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 ceremonies.”¹ While Melanchthon and his fellow confessors would advocate gospel freedom in the realm of liturgical worship (as Luther did), they were careful not to sacrifice gospel content as it was clearly expressed through proper worship rites.

In the Apology’s watershed article concerning the Mass, the reader observes a multi-faceted approach to understanding the purpose of worship rites and ceremonies. Liturgical rites are beneficial for several reasons including the maintaining of good order, allowing the people to focus soberly on spiritual matters, educating the laity, and most importantly, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through concrete, visible means. This paper focuses primarily on the final two benefits and emphases of Lutheran worship rites in the confessions, namely, education and edification.

For purposes of clarity, it will serve the reader well to understand how the author will use the terms ‘edification’ and ‘education.’ Edification – The worship experience in the churches of the Reformation found their focus on the proclamation of the gospel for the building up of the believer’s faith. Through Word and sacrament, the unconditional gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed and through faith, the worshiper received these good gifts of God.² Education – Worship rites, as understood by the Lutheran confessors, advocated a fundamental change in understanding how the believer worships. Rites and ceremonies were not meritorious of salvation and could be changed, emended, or dropped entirely without harm to salvation. These worship rites would function both as teachers and as the thing taught. Another way of saying it: the people needed to be educated not merely *about* worship rites but also *through* worship rites.

¹ Ap XXIV: 3, Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

² This definition attempts to reiterate the confessors’ emphasis on the ‘direction of worship,’ specifically that God gives and the worshiper receives the promised blessings. This is not to say that some elements of Lutheran worship are not sacrificial, but more on this later.

Article XXIV of the Apology urges not the wholesale abolition of the traditional liturgical rites of the Mass, but rather a certain amount of continuity and adherence to historic worship forms. The confessors knew that ceremonies and rites in and of themselves were not worship and thus were not indispensable. Yet, in the minds of the confessors, the worship rites expressed in the Lutheran Confessions were essential insofar as they clearly proclaimed Christ. Thus, these rites served the ultimate purpose of keeping Lutheran worship Christocentric.

The confessors realized the need for change in the rites of the church in order for there to be a proper celebration of the Mass in their churches. In no way would they forsake the rediscovered gospel of justification by grace through faith. They would not even give a hint of that notion in their worship services. For the confessors, their understanding of worship as primarily an occasion of receiving from God was a reflection of their understanding of the gospel and invariably shaped the form and ritual of their worship rites. J.A.O. Preus III echoes this understanding, “Our Lutheran understanding of worship is inextricably related to our understanding of the church, and the doctrine of justification is the article upon which the church stands or falls.”³ Preus’ comments are in line with the principles demonstrated in the Lutheran Confessions. The Lutheran understanding of the gospel and the sinner’s justification before God are the emphasis and expression of the worship rites of the Lutheran Confessions.

The Need for a Clear Confession in Public Worship

In order to understand the need for Lutherans to give a clear confession in public worship, it will serve well to understand why the liturgical forms of Luther’s day needed reform. Arthur Just Jr. offers a brief overview of the historical interlude that elapsed between the liturgical practice of the post-apostolic and ante-Nicene church and that of the liturgy in Luther’s day.⁴ In a concise and historically accurate way, Just surveys over a millennium of church history relating to public worship.

The historic liturgy had served the Christian church for centuries as a beautiful, simple, and user friendly proclamation of the gospel in the order of service. During the medieval period

³ “What’s Lutheran About Worship: Theology from the Inside Out.” *Missio Apostolica* 8:2, 73.

⁴ Arthur A. Just. *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), Cf. Chapter 11, p. 237 ff.

(beginning ca. 600 AD), however, there was a noticeable shift in what was taking place during worship. Gradually, the people were removed further and further from the core of the worship service. The public reading of Scripture and the homily of the bishop were largely denied to the people. The songs of the Ordinary and the reception of the Sacrament were taken off the lips of the people and entrusted to monastic choirs and ordained clergy. Arthur Just made ample mention of this liturgical shift and his remarks are accurate. He wrote,

Perhaps the greatest changes took place in the Liturgy of the Lord's Supper. The Eucharistic Prayer became a vehicle to promote the doctrine of meritorious works, and instead of being a recital of the mighty deeds of God in saving His people, it turned the Mass into an unbloody sacrifice to God in which the priests offered the Father this Sacrament as their good work to earn His grace and favor. Not only that, but the Eucharistic Prayer was spoken so softly that only the clergy standing at the altar could hear what was being said.⁵

Luther's reformation was aimed not only at the public teaching of the church, but also at the Roman sacramental system. The Roman Church had imposed their seven sacraments onto the medieval church and effectually these became an integral part of the identity of the church. In an attempt to quell this notion, Melanchthon stated in no uncertain terms that different ecclesiastical practices did not necessarily destroy the church's unity. In the most straightforward way, he said, "We maintain that different rites instituted by human beings do not undermine the true unity of the church."⁶

Not everyone in 16th century Europe would agree with Melanchthon's statements concerning what constitutes the church. Although *post facto* to the Augsburg Confession, the Council of Trent declares,

If anyone saith, that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or, that they are more, or less, than seven, to wit, Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony; or even that any one of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament; let him be anathema.⁷

The Roman Catholic Church had made very clear in their writings that their seven sacraments were the identifying marks for membership in the Church universal. Thus, it was

⁵ Ibid. 246

⁶ Ap VII/VIII: 33

⁷ Session VII, Canon I

necessary for the Lutheran confessors to define clearly what constitutes the Church in every place. Would maintaining a different definition of “sacrament” exclude Lutherans from a status as a church? Were clergy obligated to follow Roman rubrics and ceremonies? The confessions answer these and many related questions dealing specifically with worship rites and the identity of the Church.

Defining the Church According to the Lutheran Confessions

Having dismantled the sacramental system in his writings⁸, Luther and his coworkers quickly realized the need for evangelical Lutheran worship as a confessional statement over against stringent enforcement of Rome’s seven sacraments. Their freedom to carry out this goal stemmed from their understanding of what comprises the church in every age. According to the Lutheran Church’s founding document when it came to worship, ceremonies were not important. The gospel was. Consider the confessional statement in the article concerning the Church:

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.⁹

In support of this truth expressed in the Augsburg Confession, the *Negativa* of the Formula of Concord Article X states,

Therefore, we reject and condemn as incorrect and contrary to God’s Word: When anyone imposes such ceremonies, commands, and prescriptions upon the community of God with coercive force as if they were necessary, against its Christian freedom, which it has in external matters.¹⁰

The confessors were not saying that some conformity is not allowed or even preferred, but rather conformity ought not to be enforced legalistically, or worse, meritoriously. The confessors maintained a proper understanding of what comprises the Church: where the gospel is

⁸ E.g., *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 1520, LW 36.

⁹ AC VII: 2-4

¹⁰ FC SD X: 9

preached and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution.¹¹ In the portions of the Lutheran Confessions that emphasize the worship life of the church, the confessors are careful to demonstrate that the essence of the church is not found in outward forms, rites, or ceremonies. Such was the notion of the Roman sacramental system and, thus, any attack on the seven sacraments of Rome would be seen as a sectarian assault.

But was it Luther's intention to start a new church? No, his sincere desire was to reform the Roman Church and correct its errors. Luther, himself, stated this fact, "We therefore first assert: It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use."¹² Luther's and, subsequently, the confessor's liturgical reforms of the Mass stemmed not from an objection to mere external form but as a reaction to Rome's fundamental misunderstanding of God's righteousness as a gift of grace through Christ. Yet, even with such weighty liturgical considerations in the scales, Luther's changes would need to come about deliberately and carefully, especially for the sake of the layperson. Arthur Just asserts, "Luther, through his application of the theological principle of justification by grace through faith, restored the historic liturgy to the simplicity and beauty¹³ it had before the decay it suffered during the medieval period."¹⁴ Just's comments are well said especially in light of the fact that for Luther and his coworkers justification by grace through faith was a pervasive emphasis of the Reformation, even when it came to worship rites. Yet, even with such a proper theological emphasis, changes would have to be made with care.

¹¹ "However, the church is not only an association of external ties and rites like other civic organizations, but it is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons. It nevertheless has its external marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ" (AP VII/VIII: 5). The Confessors also understood the proper, pastoral, and didactic role of ritual and ceremony even while allowing for variance in ritual. "[The Church] consists rather of people scattered throughout the entire world who agree on the gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether or not they have the same human traditions" (Ap VII/VIII:10).

¹² *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg*, LW 53:20

¹³ "The service now in common use everywhere goes back to genuine Christian beginnings, as does the office of preaching. But as the latter has been perverted by spiritual tyrants, so the former has been corrupted by the hypocrites. As we do not on that account abolish the office of preaching, but aim to restore it again to its right and proper place, so it is not our intention to do away with the service, but to restore it again to its rightful use" (LW 53:11).

¹⁴ Just, 237.

To the casual observer of history, the entire Lutheran Reformation might seem like a blur; as though it all took place on an October afternoon in 1517. The reality is far different. After the posting of the Ninety-five Theses, there were numerous debates and meetings until the issue culminated in an imperial Diet at Worms in 1521. Even the heresy of an excommunicated Augustinian took a few years for the medieval church to hammer out. If this was the time table for dealing with the church's doctrine, would it not stand to reason that such care and deliberateness be taken when it came to the most public expression of the church's teaching; the public worship service?

Luther Reed demonstrates the careful and intricate connection between doctrine and worship: "The reform of worship was reached only as the movement worked outward from its inner center and as the leaders and the people themselves became convinced of its necessity."¹⁵ Reed is correct in his assessment that a shift in doctrine would necessitate a shift in worship. The way the church worships is a clear reflection of its teaching and emphases. As the Lutheran Reformation moved forward and as the reformers became more and more convinced of the validity of Luther's teaching, the issue of worship rites was soon to be under discussion.

A faithful adherence to the truth of the gospel of justification by faith would necessarily be reflected in the worship of the Lutheran Church. But was Luther intent on drastically altering the order of service as he knew it? A cursory comparison between a Roman Catholic Mass and a Lutheran worship service would lead many to answer a resounding, "no." But more than external form, Luther was concerned about internal content. Luther Reed explains, "Luther protested against unevangelical features but never sought to abolish the historic order and substituted a new service built upon evangelical principles. He revered the forms which faith had built and which enshrined the Lord's institution."¹⁶ Reed accurately states that for Luther, the focus was not fixed on being refreshingly new, but on proper content while respecting the historic forms.

Worship forms, as they existed in the 16th century, had been tried and tested. Tested in the fires of controversy, the church had chosen to worship a certain way. Luther appreciated that. He realized that connection with the church of the past as well as the church of the future was a special blessing from God that came, in at least some way, through the worship rites of the

¹⁵ The Lutheran Liturgy. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947), 69.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 69.

church.¹⁷ Neither Luther nor the confessors would deny a presence of the gospel in the historic rites of the Roman Church. Even though the gospel content of the liturgy had largely been clouded by centuries of compromise in the teaching and practice of the medieval church, believers had been edified through the gospel content of worship forms in spite of the fact that barely any semblance of gospel could be heard from the pulpit.¹⁸

Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession and Apology discuss the most pressing issues concerning worship rites within the churches of the Reformation. In commenting on Article XXIV, Dennis Marzolf asserts “whether we read this article as description or prescription we realize that the Lutheran confessors saw a value in the continuity of the traditional mass form.”¹⁹ According to Marzolf, in whatever way one reads this important article, the fact will be evident that worship rites in the Reformation era received much consideration. The reformers found themselves in a tenuous position. Should they retain rites and ceremonies that had proclaimed the gospel in spite of poor practice and teaching or should they abandon the historic order of service in favor of creating their own?

In Luther’s estimation, what needed to happen in the churches of the Reformation were careful, yet purposeful, changes in the worship rites. With a deep appreciation for the Holy Christian Church and its worship *modus operandi*, Luther would alter the traditional order of service with a scalpel, as it were, and not an ax. When it came to the Canon of the Mass, however, it was beyond rescue. In Luther’s estimation, it was a cesspool smacking of sacrifice.

¹⁷ “Our liturgical worship forms have that; they are the living faith of the dead who have gone before us. They express the unity in the Holy Christian Church that we share with believers around the world. They communicate the joy we have of knowing this song doesn’t cease in death, but our worship will continue with the angels in heaven, and with saints on earth who follow the path we trod. Worship forms penned at the pastor’s desk on Tuesday night may certainly praise Christ and feed the flock. They cannot, however, lay claim to share the taproot of the liturgy that reaches through time and space to connect our worship to the past, the present, and the future worship of Christ. They cannot claim the pedigree of the living faith of the dead who have gone before” (John Schroeder. Rite Worship for North American Outreach, Plenary address at WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts, 20 July 2005, 4).

¹⁸ “But could it also be true 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?” (Joel Otto. The Augustana and Lutheran Worship. Essay presented at the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions, September 2005, 3). And a poetic way of expressing the truth: “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! Alleluia!” (*Christian Worship*, Hymn 248).

¹⁹ Dennis Marzolf. Recent Movements in Liturgical Renewal. WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts, July 2005, 2.

He would drastically cut the Canon of the Mass and shift the focus onto recitation of the Words of Institution. The Canon of the Mass was the height of false teaching in the order of service. There were, however, many other elements of the order of service of Rome that taught falsely or were practiced poorly. Luther and the confessors sought to identify and remedy those elements by going back to what Scripture says.

Abuses of Liturgical Forms in the Roman Church vs. Scriptural, Lutheran Teaching

Human beings are comprised of both body and soul. As physical creatures, we feed and nourish our bodies. As spiritual creatures, we worship. By nature, human beings can only worship themselves. Alive and well in every human creature is the *opinio legis*; the opinion of the law that humans are capable of doing something to merit God's favor. The structure and form of the Roman Mass was fueled by the *opinio legis* and, thus, Luther rightly identified this as false worship and idolatry. The Roman Mass confused God's *beneficium* with man's *sacrificium*.²⁰ Luther took this falsehood to task and said it well in his comments on the First Commandment:

There is, moreover, another false worship. This is the greatest idolatry that we have practiced up until now, and it is still rampant in the world. All the religious orders are founded upon it. It involves only that conscience that seeks help, comfort, and salvation in its own works and presumes to wrest heaven from God. It keeps track of how often it has made endowments, fasted, celebrated Mass, etc. It relies on such things and boasts of them, unwilling to receive anything as a gift of God, but desiring to earn everything by itself or to merit everything by works of supererogation, just as if God were in our service or debt and we were his liege lords. What is this but to have made God into an idol – indeed, an ‘apple-god’ – and to have set ourselves up as God?²¹

Some Roman rites promoted false doctrine by confusing and outright denying the foundation from which all true scriptural theology and practice flows: justification by grace through faith. The result was that in the minds of the people, rites became meritorious of God's grace. Melancthon wrote about such notions, “Some taught that human traditions were necessary acts of worship for meriting justification...From this the inexperienced have concluded that faith or righteousness of the heart before God cannot exist without these

²⁰ John Pless. “Toward a Confessional Lutheran Understanding of Liturgy.” *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology*, Vol. II, 2.

²¹ LC I: 22

observances. For about this point there are in existence many foolish writings by the summists and others.”²² The confessors’ concern was for the people. With a pastoral heart, the leaders of the Lutheran Reformation would need to clean up the order of service in order to edify and educate the people.²³

Worship rites were intended to be used for a number of reasons, none of which was to promote any idea of work righteousness or an *ex opere operato* working of the means of grace. Through the use of rites, the people could more soberly concern themselves with spiritual matters. Rites maintained good order in worship. Rites served to instruct the young and unlearned. Rites had great value for teaching the truth of God via concrete, visible means.²⁴ Through their statements, the confessors demonstrated a proper understanding of the benefits of worship rites. By investigating and altering the practices of their day, they sought to address a number of issues. What kind of faith is being encouraged and edified: the faith in self wrought works (*opinio legis*) or true faith in Christ and his saving work? And, about what teaching would rites communicate educational content to the people? These important questions about rites find their genesis in the connection between doctrine and ritual.

The Connection between Doctrine and Ritual

Rites and worship forms used by the church carry with them the onus of both edifying and educating the laity. The Lutheran worship rites sought to edify the true Christian faith and teach the same. Positively speaking,

God moves our hearts through the Word and the rite at the same time so that they believe and receive faith just as Paul says, “So faith comes from what is heard.” For just as the Word enters through the ear in order to strike the heart, so also the rite enters through the eye in order to move the heart. The Word and the rite have the same effect. Augustine put it well when he said that the Sacrament is a “visible Word,” because the rite is received

²² Ap VII/VIII: 32

²³ “When someone teaches that religious rites are useful for meriting forgiveness of sins and grace, Scripture calls such traditions the ‘teachings of demons.’ For this obscures the gospel, the benefits of Christ, and the righteousness of faith” (Ap XV: 4).

²⁴ Ap XV: 21B

by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect.²⁵

Just as rites can have a positive and edifying effect on the worshiper, so rites can also exert a negative and spiritually deadly effect. Negatively speaking: “The people were swamped by many different traditions and opinions and were in no way able to grasp the sum of Christian teaching.”²⁶ And again: “This resemblance [to the Old Testament sacrifices] deceives the inexperienced, so that they think that, just as in the Old Testament, we ought to have some ceremony or sacrifice for sins, applicable to the sins of others.”²⁷ Both positively and negatively speaking, the point becomes clear. Doctrine and ritual are closely connected, sometimes for good, sometimes for harm.

Changes that were made to the historic worship rites and festivals of the church so as to be suitable for Lutheran use were made for the spiritual benefit of the people. In other words, edification not only included pure preaching and teaching of the gospel in an active way, but also a ‘cleaning house’ of Roman celebrations that would undermine the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. In his *Concerning the Order of Public Worship*, Luther’s comments are straightforward and specific on this matter:

All the festivals of saints are to be discontinued. Where there is a good Christian legend, it may be inserted as an example after the gospel on Sunday. The festivals of the Purification and Annunciation of Mary may be continued, and for the time being also her Assumption and Nativity, although the songs in them are not pure. The festival of John the Baptist is also pure. Not one of the legends of the apostles is pure, except St. Paul’s. They may either be transferred to the [closest] Sunday or be celebrated separately, if one so desires.²⁸

Yet, even as positive and necessary changes were made to the order of service, the worship rites, and the Christian calendar, such alterations were made carefully, with instruction, and with the

²⁵ Ap XIII: 5

²⁶ Ap XXIV: 46

²⁷ Ap XXIV: 52

²⁸ LW 53:14

weak brother in mind. This consideration of the weak in faith also served to further the cause of edification through worship, lest the gospel be denied to such people due to offense.²⁹

The connection between ritual and doctrine is especially evident in the worship life of the church.³⁰ J.A.O. Preus is of the opinion that these two facets of church life (ritual and doctrine) are inseparable. This author agrees with his assessment. “There is an understandable tendency to dichotomize theology and practice as though distinctively separable, when in reality they cannot meaningfully be abstracted from each other. Practice, either consciously or unconsciously, will be informed by theology of some sort. It will be Lutheran or not, but it won’t just be nothing. Theory and practice are inseparable.”³¹ This truth is clearly seen in the most public practice of the church, the worship service.

Having considered the connection between doctrine and ritual, Luther knew that portions of the Roman Catholic order of service needed to change; some, to an extreme degree. Yet Luther also knew that the purpose and execution of such change must be carefully considered and even more carefully implemented. In Luther’s estimation, an overreaction to some of the abominable practices of the Roman Church would serve only to create a bigger problem. He was willing neither to dive head first into iconoclasm (as Karlstadt) nor to adhere to false Roman practice. In so doing, Luther arrived between legalism and license at the middle ground that would come to bear his name; the so-called ‘Lutheran Middle.’³²

To completely do away with the order of service of the Roman Church would do a disservice to over 1,000 years of Christian tradition. In making necessary changes to the order of

²⁹ “I have used neither authority nor pressure. Nor did I make any innovations. For I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one... Nonetheless, at the risk of bursting with anger, I must bear with them, unless I want to let the gospel itself be denied to the people” (*An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg*, LW 53:19).

³⁰ “The confessors were very aware that their churches were judged by what was happening on Sunday morning” (Joel Otto. *The Augustana and Lutheran Worship*. Essay presented at WLS Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions, September 2005, 1).

³¹ “What’s Lutheran About Worship: Theology From the Inside Out”, 72.

³² In his recent book, *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*, Professor Daniel Deutschlander explores the seemingly contradictory teachings of Scripture and how the human mind attempts to rationalize those teachings. In one portion of the book, Deutschlander touches on the issue of finding the middle in so-called “worship wars.” His clear statements, reviewing of scriptural principles, and modern applications will serve well anyone interested in exploring the narrow Lutheran middle of public worship.

service and the worship rites therein, Luther was not about to throw out the baby with the bathwater.³³ Luther openly stated that there was much good to be gleaned from the Roman Church's order of service:

We on our part confess that there is much that is Christian and good under the papacy; indeed everything that is Christian and good is to be found there and has come to us from this source. For instance we confess that in the papal church there are the true holy Scriptures, true Baptism, the true Sacrament of the Altar, the true keys to the forgiveness of sins, the true office of the ministry, the true catechism in the form the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the articles of the creed. . . . [Concerning radical reform of the enthusiasts. . .] This is not the way to blast the papacy while Christian saints are in his keeping. One needs a more cautious, discreet spirit, which attacks the accretion which threatens the temple without destroying the temple of God itself.³⁴

Achieving edifying worship and liturgical catechesis was a real need for Luther and the confessors. Such goals could not be taken lightly nor, unfortunately, could they be reached quickly. The need was there, but the process for meeting those needs had yet to be put in place.

Educating the Laity and Children

The results of Luther's Saxon visitation are well known. The people did not know the Lord's Prayer, the Apostle's Creed, or the Ten Commandments. Even in the wake of the Lutheran Reformation and reclamation of the gospel, the territorial churches displayed deplorable conditions, and not just among the laity. Priests were examined and found to be inadequate and incompetent teachers of Scripture and the faith.³⁵ In LW 40, Luther decried the

³³ After the Schmalkaldic War and the subsequent Leipzig Interim, the churches of the Reformation would not give a hint of returning to Roman practices. "Our Lutheran forefathers refused to reintroduce Roman Catholic liturgical practice that would have given the impression that they had conceded to Rome's doctrines and decrees. Our Lutheran forefathers refused to use ambiguous distribution formulas that could have allowed communicants to read their own interpretations into Jesus' words, 'This is my body,' and 'This is my blood'" (Preus., 11-12). Even though Rome would have settled with a mere "ritual resemblance" for the Lutherans, the churches of the Reformation understood the appearance they would be giving. Doctrine is reflected in ritual.

³⁴ *Concerning Rebaptism-In Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd Ed. as quoted by 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, CA, October 2009, 6.

³⁵ "The deplorable, wretched deprivation that I recently encountered while I was a visitor has constrained and compelled me to prepare this catechism, or Christian instruction, in such a brief, plain, and simple version. Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers. Yet supposedly they all bear the name Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, even though they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments! As a result they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and,

attitude and aptitude of the clergy. It became apparent that education was a necessity among the churches of the Reformation. These Saxon visitations prompted Luther to write his catechisms.

Education of the people was a tremendous need and Luther sought to meet that need through his catechisms. But the education of the people would not be limited to the ‘question and answer’ catechisms through at-home wall charts or more formal instruction. Instead, through the regular worship of the people and through the rites used by the Lutherans, the people would receive further education. Thus, whatever the theological and practical reforms Luther would make to the worship forms, he would never lose sight of this pedagogical point of view.³⁶

In fact, as a matter of first importance before introducing his *Deutsche Messe*, Luther identified his foremost purpose and goal in producing this service: “First, the German service needs a plain and simple, fair and square catechism.” Obviously, Luther was not referring to a book, but to a process of catechization through parts of the order of service. Considering Luther’s intimate knowledge of how much education was needed, it is a telling statement that he would use his liturgical reforms to aid in that process.

Luther intended the *Deutsche Messe* itself to be a tool for instruction; not merely instruction about ceremonies, but liturgical catechesis about Christian truth aimed specifically at the young and unlearned.³⁷ The primary goal of Lutheran worship rites, as stated previously, is undoubtedly the edification of the worshiper through a clear, Christocentric proclamation of the gospel. A secondary, yet vitally important, goal of these rites is education of the worshiper. Lutheran liturgical worship would not merely teach people *about* the ceremony, but the ceremony itself would be the teacher.³⁸

despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have mastered the fine art of misusing all their freedom” (Preface to the Small Catechism, KW, 347-348).

³⁶ “Such orders are needed for those who are still becoming Christians or need to be strengthened, since a Christian does not need baptism, the Word, and the sacrament as a Christian – for all things are his – but as a sinner. They are essential especially for the immature and the young who must be trained and educated in the Scripture and God’s Word daily so that they may become familiar with the Bible, grounded, well versed, and skilled in it, ready to defend their faith and in due time to teach others and to increase the kingdom of Christ” (*The German Mass and Order of Service*, LW 53:62).

³⁷ 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, 232).

³⁸ “For [the reformers], the liturgy was not what was taught, it was the teacher. It wasn’t the subject of catechetics, it was catechetics.” Chris Hinkle. *The Doctrine of Worship in the Lutheran Confessions – 2nd Edition*, 21.

The foundational truth and, thus, the controlling factor for an accurate liturgical catechesis is the forgiveness of sins by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone. With this emphasis, the confessors would achieve the multifaceted goal of worship rites as outlined by Melancthon.³⁹ In order to achieve worship rites that would also be educationally beneficial, of necessity, the confessors understood that those rites must be intelligible. The Apology states, in no uncertain terms, that intelligible worship is beneficial worship: "No one has ever written or suggested that people benefit from the mere act of hearing lessons that they do not understand or that they benefit from ceremonies not because they teach or admonish but simply *ex opere operato*, that is, by the mere act of doing or observing. Away with such Pharisaical ideas!"⁴⁰ Maintaining the unconditional gospel at the center of the worship service and presenting it in an intelligible and understandable way would steer the formation of Lutheran worship rites. These intelligible rites would serve the edification and education of the people.

The second controlling factor for a true liturgical catechesis is a pure teaching and proper administration of the sacraments.⁴¹ In fact, James Alan Waddell asserts that this sacramental emphasis on liturgical catechesis is noticeable in the order of articles in the Augustana.⁴² In the confessors' desire to educate the laity through liturgical catechesis, they always held these two opposing extremes in balance: reliance on the rites themselves as meritorious, and contrarily, entirely abandoning rites and ceremonies of the historic church. As stated above, the confessors

³⁹ "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 ceremonies" (Ap XXIV: 3).

⁴⁰ Ap XXIV: 5

⁴¹ "If we define the sacraments as rites, which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added, it is easy to determine what the sacraments are, properly speaking. For humanly instituted rites are not sacraments, properly speaking, because human beings do not have the authority to promise grace, even though they perhaps serve to teach or admonish the common folk. Therefore, the sacraments are actually baptism, the Lord's Supper, and absolution (the sacrament of repentance). For these rites have the command of God and the promise of grace, which is the essence of the New Testament" (Ap XIII: 3-4).

⁴² "The sacraments administered in accordance with the divine word is the second necessary point of reference for a confessionally grounded liturgical catechesis of God's people: Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist. The Augustana's article on Baptism naturally follows Augustana's Articles VII and VIII on the Church... This is our necessary point of reference for a confessionally grounded liturgical catechesis of baptism... The Augustana's article on the Holy Supper of our Lord naturally follows its Article IX on Baptism... This is the necessary point of reference for a confessionally grounded liturgical catechesis of the Eucharist, which is faithful to the catholic marks of the church as these are defined by Augustana VII" (Waddell, 237-238). While the ordering of articles in the Augustana may not have been primarily intended to stress liturgical catechesis, Waddell's point is worthwhile.

valued the historic rites of the church for their gospel content as well as their connection with the Holy Christian Church of the past and future. But as good as the Lutheran rites may have been, the fact remained that the people would not ‘get’ ritual unless they were taught. The worshiper needed to know why things were happening in the service. So, edification and education *through* worship rites necessarily involved education *about* worship rites.

The Process of Education

The confessors understood that instituting and practicing worship rites that served the edification and education of the people would have to take some time. Balancing the good historic practices with new Lutheran forms would be a delicate process because individual Christians were at different places in their spiritual understanding and maturity. The people had grown accustomed to the rites and ceremonies as they had known them and so Luther and his coworkers needed to tread lightly.⁴³ Because of the confessors’ knowledge that doctrine is reflected in ritual, the worst case scenario and fear was that the people would be denied the gospel. This would be disastrous. Luther himself stated,

I have used neither authority nor pressure. Nor did I make any innovations. For I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one... Nonetheless, at the risk of bursting with anger, I must bear with them, unless I want to let the gospel itself be denied to the people.⁴⁴

For example: In the Roman Church, the examination for communion did not serve the purpose of edifying or educating the people. In Luther’s estimation, both the worthy and the unworthy would rush to the Lord’s Supper in the Roman Church. Luther assessed the situation thus, “There they seek only to communicate; but the faith, the comfort, the use and benefit of the Supper are not even mentioned or considered.”⁴⁵ Communion announcement and examination

⁴³ “The people had been worshipping one way for so long. To make drastic changes so soon could damage people’s faith. 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?” (Otto, Augustana, 3).

⁴⁴ *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg*, LW 53:19

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 33.

were Lutheran changes in practice for the benefit of the people. Specifically, this practice led to an edifying reception of the Sacrament and an education concerning the blessings and purpose of the Lord's Supper.

Education *through* worship rites necessarily includes at least some modicum of education *about* worship rites. This was done best on the level of the individual congregation. The confessors primarily sought the edification of their people through the pure preaching and teaching of the gospel and through the proper administration of the sacraments. Even a cursory glance at the confessions will demonstrate their desire to feed the people with the truth of the gospel and distance them from the notion of earning God's favor through human works. There is no doubt about this. A secondary objective, however, is also evident when examining confessional principles concerning the church's worship rites and ceremonies. This secondary objective is the education of the people.⁴⁶ The reformers desired the people not only to believe in Jesus Christ for full salvation, but also to know and appreciate the simple beauty of the gospel as it was expressed clearly, vividly, and memorably through the parts of the order of service. Again, note the emphasis on 'liturgical catechesis.'⁴⁷

An important distinction must be made in this regard: while the Roman Church viewed worship rites as an end in themselves and true worship of God, the reformers saw these ceremonies for what they really were, namely, means to an end. The formulators of the Formula of Concord stated, "[W]e believe, teach and confess that such ceremonies, in and of themselves, are no worship of God or any part of it."⁴⁸ For the reformers, every rite and ceremony needed to proclaim Christ clearly. Rites themselves are not worship and they lose their worth as soon as they fail to function as pedagogical tools⁴⁹ to teach people about Christ.⁵⁰ This principle encourages modern readers to reevaluate worship forms from time to time as to whether or not

⁴⁶ "The purpose of the gospel and the sacraments is to deliver the forgiveness of sins, while the purpose of liturgical ceremonies is catechetical" (Waddell, 230).

⁴⁷ Waddell, 229.

⁴⁸ FC SD X: 8

⁴⁹ "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: 33).

⁵⁰ Waddell, 231.

the people understand the usefulness and purpose. Worship rites are valuable because they teach Christ.

Luther himself was aware of this important purpose for ritual in worship as well as the knowledge of what would happen should these forms fail to meet their purpose.⁵¹ After all, in Luther's own opinion, "what chiefly matters is the teaching and guiding of the people."⁵² The Lutheran confessors were not ignorant of this purpose of worship rites. In fact, they stated the historic ecclesiastical precedent for viewing them as such.

[The holy Fathers] observed these human rites on account of their usefulness for the body, so that people 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. (For different seasons and various rites are valuable in admonishing the common people).⁵³

In order to demonstrate the process of edification and education in Lutheran worship rites, it will do well to review the confessional Lutheran mindset on the purpose of rites and ceremonies. Rites and ceremonies taught the people. God's people needed to know the faith and what God wanted them to believe.

Edification and education find their symbiotic relationship in confessional Lutheran worship. A specific example of this was Luther's *Deutsche Messe*, in the introduction of which he claimed edification and education of the people as two of that orders' chief concerns. The gospel content of Lutheran worship forms, in general, would serve those goals and encourage a worship life that employed a means of grace emphasis. Joel Otto's comments relating the use of worship rites and the means of grace are worthwhile:

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.⁵⁴

⁵¹ "For the orders must serve for the promotion of faith and love and not be to the detriment of faith. As soon as they fail to do this, they are invalid, dead and gone, just as a good coin, when counterfeited, is canceled and changed because of the abuse, or as new shoes when they become old and uncomfortable are no longer worn, but thrown away, and new ones bought" (*The German Mass and Order of Service*, LW 53:90).

⁵²Ibid. 80.

⁵³ Ap XV: 20

⁵⁴ Augustana, 4.

The value of well ordered worship is not found in mere continuity with other churches in one's fellowship, connection with the Holy Christian Church, or even continued growth in knowledge. In the Apology, Melanchthon made it clear what was the primary import of ceremonies; a gospel centered didactic experience that would ultimately lead to a building up of faith.⁵⁵

In the early stages of the Lutheran liturgical reform process, the confessors needed to determine which rites served the purpose of the gospel and which needed to be excised from the order of service. This was done rather quickly, especially when it came to the Canon of the Mass. Arthur Just opines,

Luther could see that the Gospel had been obscured and that much of the liturgy was meaningless to people because it had become hidden under layers of medieval compromise. Luther did not eschew the liturgy, for he knew that through this means Christ was present in Word and sacrament as He had been since its institution on the night in which He was betrayed. Luther submitted himself to its forms and desired to blow away the mists that had obscured the historic liturgy so that people could see the beauty of its clean structure and its salutary character as a means of preaching Christ. Luther restored the liturgy to the people so that they could worship as the church once had: hearing the Word of God, singing the Ordinaries, and receiving the body and blood of Christ.⁵⁶

Just's observations are historically accurate and valuable practically. For Luther and his coworkers, the difficult part of the process would be the introduction and inculcation of new forms at the level of the local congregation. Nevertheless, with their two pronged emphases of edification and education in place, the Lutheran Church was ready to employ the necessary changes in worship which would clearly reflect the truth of scriptural, Lutheran teaching.

⁵⁵ "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" (Ap XXIV,3).

⁵⁶ *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 249

Lutheran Theology Clearly Reflected in Worship Forms

Christocentric

As demonstrated above, doctrine affects practice. Teaching is reflected in ritual. Since the hallmark of the Lutheran Reformation was the sinner's justification by grace through faith in Christ, it necessarily follows that this emphasis is carried through into the worship forms which the confessors developed and advocated. Joel Otto accurately identifies this important emphasis of Lutheran worship: "Throughout the Lutheran Confessions, the confessors never lose sight of "the heart and core of Bible lore" (CW 204:2), the teaching of justification by faith alone and the doctrine of the means of grace. Our justification is earned by Christ alone. The blessings of Christ's life and death are received by faith alone in Christ alone."⁵⁷ Anything that smacked of sacrifice or implied meritorious human works needed to be removed or changed. Anything that taught Christ and his work must be promoted and put into common use.

Christocentric emphasis in the order of service did not come without some difficulties for the Lutherans. What about those rites and ceremonies that had the potential to proclaim the gospel so long as they were understood properly? In Melancthon's estimation, maintaining a tainted tradition could be done as long as it was understood properly through teaching. In this way, the Lutheran Church demonstrated a liturgical 'purity' by understanding the proper role of rites: as servants and proclaimers of the gospel. "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."⁵⁸ Without proper teaching and understanding of what was going on during worship, false teaching could creep into the minds and hearts of the people. The Lutherans had fought the battle of doctrine before the emperor and councils alike. They were not about to let their mode of worship promote false teachings which they had fought so vehemently to deny.

⁵⁷ "Confessional Perspectives on Worship: Steering the Middle Course in Worship." *Worship the Lord*, vol. 56, September 2012.

⁵⁸ Ap XV: 38-39

The Augsburg Confession demonstrated that false ideas about justification were, at times, promoted via false emphases in worship. Christ was cast aside in favor of human tradition and false teaching. Melancthon wrote,

There are many faulty debates about the transformation of the law, the ceremonies of the New Testament, and the change of the Sabbath. They have all arisen from the false and erroneous opinion that in Christianity one would have to have services of God that correspond to the Levitical or Jewish ones, and that Christ commanded the apostles and the bishops to invent new ceremonies that were necessary for salvation. Christianity has been permeated with these kinds of errors because the righteousness of faith was not taught or preached with purity and sincerity.⁵⁹

The value of worship rites found their hinge on Christ centered content and communicating that truth to the people.

Gospel Predominance

The confessors understood that for the majority of the people they served, the Sunday morning *Hauptgottesdienst* was their only exposure to the Word of God. Thus, this gathering for the chief service of the week must be saturated with the gospel, both in Word and ritual. Edification was necessarily founded on Scripture and practically supplemented by ritual, form, music, and art. Whatever form Lutheran worship would or will take the desire is always the same: to proclaim the gospel fully and clearly. The confessors' concern was both practical and pastoral. The language of the church had been Latin for a thousand years, but Lutheran forms would not be slavishly bound to its use if it did not serve the people. Melancthon understood this basic, yet often overlooked truth: "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."⁶⁰

The litmus test for any old, revised, or new worship form was simply whether the people heard and understood the gospel. Beyond that, Christian freedom ought not to be unnecessarily bound by external forms. That's not to say that Luther and the reformers advocated a complete abolition of the order of service and liturgical forms. Karlstadt tried that; it didn't end well.

⁵⁹ AC XVIII: 61-62

⁶⁰ Ap XXIV: 3

Ceremonies were neither arbitrary nor mandatory which made the task of reforming them so difficult. The confessors were sure to carry out this work with a pastoral heart. Aaron Christie says, “Remember *why* the confessors retained the ceremonies they did! Ceremonies and ritual help communicate the Gospel. They could not cut out these well-loved ceremonies without offense to consciences. Continuity with the early church was also important to them. They were no sect.”⁶¹ With a sincere pastoral understanding, the confessors advocated the proper use of ceremonies that clearly proclaimed the gospel.

A predominance of the unconditional gospel of Christ, which was a clear emphasis of Lutheran teaching, would need to be just as clear of an emphasis in their worship life. This is why Luther and the confessors turned the focus of the service to the proclamation of the gospel. As Melancthon stated, “The chief worship of God is to preach the gospel.”⁶² The predominance of the gospel in worship, however, was never intended to rule out or remove Scriptural instruction and encouragement for holy living.

[O]ur priests attend to the ministry of the Word. They teach the gospel about the blessings of Christ, and they show that the forgiveness of sins takes place on account of Christ. This teaching offers solid consolation to consciences. In addition they teach about the good works that God commands, and they speak about the value and use of the sacraments.⁶³

In Lutheran worship the gospel remains front and center, even and especially when there is teaching about good works. Justification always precedes sanctification. Justification enables, motivates, and empowers sanctification. The message of justification is the message of forgiveness for shortcomings in the area of sanctification. This clear Lutheran distinction between justification and sanctification needed to be proclaimed just as clearly in the worship service. This was especially true since the primary audience on Sunday was believers.

Lutheran worship keeps the gospel front and center, both in Word and sacrament. Through the means of grace the Holy Spirit builds his church where and when he pleases.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Worship in the Confessions: Christ at the Center. Presented at the WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts, 19-20 July 2005, 18.

⁶² Ap XV: 42

⁶³ Ap XXIV: 48

⁶⁴ “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” (AC V: 1-3).

Gospel predominance includes a means of grace emphasis. Where the Roman Church had made sacrifices and meritorious works, the Lutherans sought to bring back the sacramental emphasis of worship and give the people the opportunity to participate properly.⁶⁵

Participation by the People

Participation by the people (rather, non-participation) was an issue in the Roman Church. Through the course of medieval history, participation in the liturgy was taken out of the hands of the people. The cause of this was a series of pastoral judgment calls based on social, cultural, and practical factors. Arthur Just traces these alterations beginning at the time of Gregory (d. 604 AD) which were sparked into motion by the first barbarian invasion in 410 AD.⁶⁶ The priests would conduct the service and the people would earn merit for attending. People merely attending worship was not the problem at hand. What was an issue was the teaching that undermined the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, namely the Roman notion of the sacraments working *ex opere operato*.

At the time of the Reformation, the historic liturgy of the church no longer found its focus on Christ and the gospel, but on the works of the people. Both clergy and people came to believe that they were saved by works; the clergy by doing the Divine Service and the people by their devotion to the cult of the saints.⁶⁷ Acquiring appropriate participation by the people would require a clear statement about the evils that had crept into the liturgical service. Melancthon stated, “It is taught that all rules and traditions made by human beings for the purpose of appeasing God and of earning grace are contrary to the gospel and the teaching concerning faith in Christ.”⁶⁸ And again, “No one can earn grace, become reconciled with God, or make satisfaction for sin by observing the aforesaid human traditions. That is why they should not be

⁶⁵ 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 before... Therefore, we should and must insist that *God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament*” (SA III, viii.3.10, emphasis added). And again, “The word and the rite have the same effect. Augustine put it well when he said that the sacrament is a ‘visible word,’ because the rite is received by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect” (Ap XIII: 5).

⁶⁶ Just, 242.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 248.

⁶⁸ AC XV: 3-4

made into a necessary service of God.”⁶⁹ Participation by the people was certainly a goal of Lutheran worship, but this participation needed to be taught properly.

If participation by the people was going to be an emphasis of Lutheran worship, it would have to be the right kind of participation. The confessors had witnessed the abuses in the Roman Church. They understood that a false idea could undermine justification by faith. In Lutheran worship the confessors wanted not only bodies that were present to witness the work of the priests. Instead, they also wanted hearts that were roused to faith through the gospel and faith that was involved in receiving God’s gifts through his Word and sacraments.

One particularly practical way in which Luther accomplished this goal was through his reworking of the songs of the Ordinary. What had previously been the exclusive property of priests and choirs would once again be placed on the lips of the common people. In his *Deutsche Messe*, Luther’s settings of the *Gloria*, *Kyrie*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* were understandable, able to be sung by the laity, and available to the people. Even through such historic portions of the service as the songs of the Ordinary, Luther both built up the believer and taught the faith.⁷⁰ Lutheran worship rites in general seek to give the people a practical and consistent means for participation in the service. These means would not merely be a mindless repetition of words or phrases, but consistent ways of worshiping the Savior and also consistent tools for learning about who Christ is and what he has done. The return of the Ordinary to the people played an important part in their participation in worship and learning about Christ. These benefits are perhaps even more evident in the reintroduction of hymn singing by the congregation and the subsequent encouragement for the penning of Lutheran hymns.

The structure of the church year itself served as an edifying and educational blessing. Through centuries of poor emphases and false teachings, the church year in the Roman Church had become shackled by observance of obscure saints’ days. Luther’s reform in the church’s worship life moved the focus off of saints as mediators of divine grace and fixed the attention squarely on the life of Christ. These changes to the structure of worship have had long lasting effects. Arthur Just rightly connects the current use of the church year with Luther’s insistence

⁶⁹ AC XXVI: 21

⁷⁰ While the *Deutsche Messe* featured more involvement by the people in the songs of the ordinary, this was not the case with Luther’s *Formula Missae*. In the latter service, the choirs took the lead in singing the songs of the ordinary. In some settings, choral involvement continued to be extensive.

on proclaiming Christ consistently. He writes, “The church year in use today is the result of Luther’s Christological focus on proclaiming Christ and His Gospel every Sunday. This focus caused Luther to throw out anything that did not clearly proclaim that we are saved by grace and not by works of the Law.”⁷¹

The Lutheran worship reforms would have far reaching effects beyond reintroducing the liturgy to the laity. Concerning this important principle of participation by the people, noted liturgical scholar Luther Reed opined that Martin Luther’s work “eventually made possible congregational participation and worship in every land and established hymn-singing by the people as a characteristic and important feature of Protestantism.”⁷² Reed recognizes the impact of this important Lutheran worship principle as evinced in hymn singing. The hymns of Luther had a didactic emphasis while, at the same time, edified the faith of the worshiper. These hymns, along with the reincorporation of the people into the liturgical service, and the retooling of the songs of the Ordinary were all means for proper participation by the people.

Clear Distinction between Sacramental and Sacrificial

The confessors made a clear distinction between sacrament and sacrifice. The former speaks of receiving the benefits of Christ’s all atoning sacrifice through the gospel. The latter is an offering of praise from those who have received the former. When Christians come together for public worship, God speaks to them through his Word and they, in turn, speak to God in prayer and praise. Through the centuries of the medieval Roman Church, this distinction had been obscured. Melanchthon outlined the distinction in this way,

Now there are two, and no more than two, basic kinds of sacrifice. One is the atoning sacrifice, that is, a work of satisfaction for guilt and punishment that reconciles God, conciliates the wrath of God, or merits the forgiveness of sins for others. The other kind is the Eucharistic sacrifice. It does not merit the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation but is rendered by those who have already been reconciled as a way for us to give thanks or express gratitude for having received forgiveness of sins and other benefits.⁷³

⁷¹ Just, 257.

⁷² *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1947), 86.

⁷³ Ap XXIV: 19

The primary “direction of worship,” as defined by the confessors is from God to man; not the other way around.⁷⁴ In the worship service and through the worship rites of the Lutheran Church, believers do offer their prayers, thanksgiving, and singing to God. These things all take place, but in the historical context of the confessors, anything that smacked of sacrifice (even in a small way) was a way of thinking and speaking that should be avoided.⁷⁵

The celebration of the Mass was the primary portion of the order of service which boldly proclaimed *sacrifice* instead of *sacrament* in the Roman Church. The Augustana speaks in no uncertain terms about the Mass.

[A]n abominable error was also rebuked, namely, the teaching that our Lord Jesus Christ had made satisfaction by his death only for original sin and had instituted the Mass as a sacrifice for other sins. Thus, the Mass was made into a sacrifice for the living and the dead for the purpose of taking away sin and appeasing God... Meanwhile, faith in Christ and true worship of God were forgotten.⁷⁶

In order for the people to receive a beneficial reception of the Sacrament, their faith would have to be informed and instructed. This would take place, at least in part, at the *Hauptgottesdienst* through the liturgical catechesis offered by the Lutheran worship rites. Maintaining a clear distinction between sacrament and sacrifice in worship would serve not only to promote pure teaching, but also to assure the believer of the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice on his behalf.

Some of Luther’s initial alterations to the Mass effected a vast theological change without causing a tidal wave of offense. Frank Senn relates one example within the context of the Mass,

By retaining the outward ceremonial act of the elevation at the place where it usually would have occurred, Luther was able to effect a radical change in the rite of the Mass: the virtual elimination of the canon and the relocation of the *verba institutionis*. No sense

⁷⁴The primary German word used in reference to the worship service is *Gottesdienst*. In *Ein Kleines Theologisches Wörterbuch*, Professor Daniel Deutschlander defines the word in this way, “It is the ‘service of God,’ i.e. our serving Him in obedience to the Third Commandment; but it is also and more importantly His serving us in His Word and sacraments; the word *Gottesdienst* is a constant reminder to both the shepherd and the flock that they have gathered as His people ‘nach seinem Wort und Willen,’ not merely to ‘do their own thing’” (1).

⁷⁵ “The culture of rubricism that permeated the medieval Catholic Church, and the semi-Pelagian theology proclaimed by its theologians led to the opinion that the mass was not God’s action toward human beings, but a good work which a priest offered to God on behalf of the people. As far as Luther was concerned, this view was especially seen in the canon, or Eucharistic Prayer, that surrounded the celebration of Holy Communion. Luther had little good to say about this portion of the mass” (Johnold Strey. “Neither Papistic nor Karlstadtian: Luther’s Principles of Adiaphora Applied to the Liturgical Life of the Church,” Essay delivered to WELS Arizona-California District Pastors’ Conference, St. Paul’s First Evangelical Lutheran Church, North Hollywood, CA, October 20, 2009, 3).

⁷⁶ AC XXIV: 21-23

of change was conveyed to the ordinary worshipers. This was because the *verba institutionis* would have been sung in Latin (like the proper prefaces) and the people would never have heard the rest of the “silent canon” anyway. This stroke of pastoral genius has to be unequalled in the history of liturgy: to have effected a radical revision of the heart of the Mass without the worshipers necessarily noticing any outward change.⁷⁷

Thus, it is evident that Lutheran worship rites demonstrated both theological and pastoral emphases. Theological and pastoral motivations are evident throughout the confessions’ discussion of both the sinner’s justification before God and how to communicate that truth in the setting of worship. The Apology’s article on justification makes this point very clearly:

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.⁷⁸

Or another way of saying it, Lutheran worship rites concerned themselves with edification and education.

The purpose of Lutheran worship rites can be distilled to two: edification and education. Lutheran worship rites demonstrate the proper emphases of Christocentricity, gospel predominance, participation by the people, and maintaining a clear distinction between sacrament and sacrifice. Those purposes, emphases, and principles come together into a cohesive unit as demonstrated in confessional Lutheran worship rites.

Confessional Lutheran Worship Rites

The Mass

First and foremost among the Lutheran changes to the order of service was the Canon of the Mass. Through centuries of the medieval church’s theological and sacramental decline, the Mass had degenerated into a show to be observed instead of a sacrament to be received. The cup was withheld from the laity and eventually, the participation of the people was relegated to their scurrying to find a seat after hearing the ringing of the bell which indicated the moment of real presence. The laity would then commune with their eyes by observing the elevation of the

⁷⁷ *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*, 278-279.

⁷⁸ Ap IV: 60

elements and the communing of the priests.⁷⁹ The laity had largely been removed from receiving communion and the distinction between the Mass as a *sacrament* and the Mass as a *sacrifice* had been lost. In fact, the entire *ordo Missae* had been warped into an unbloody sacrifice to God instead of a gracious sacrament of God given to his people.

The practice of the medieval Roman Church was to speak the Canon of the Mass, or the Eucharistic prayer, after the Words of Institution. Included in this Canon was oblatinal language indicating that the body and blood of Christ were being offered to God. When it came to the Mass, the concern of Luther and the confessors was purity of teaching as well as the edification of the people. Roman ceremonies that surrounded the Mass had obscured the clarity of the gospel. Perpetuating those ceremonies as they existed in the early days of Luther's Reformation would only have served to confuse the laity and give an impression of a false teaching about the Mass.

According to the Apology XXIV, the pomp and procession of the priests officiating at the Mass were partly to blame for this and would only serve to send the wrong message to the people. The impression of a similarity between the Old Testament Levitical priesthood and that of the priests officiating at Mass only propagated the false notion of the Mass as a sacrifice. Melancthon identified and decried this deception, "This resemblance deceives the inexperienced, so that they think that, just as in the Old Testament, we ought to have some ceremony or sacrifice for sins, applicable to the sins of others."⁸⁰

The over-adornment, pomp, and procession so common in the medieval church cast a cloud over the clarity of the gospel during the Mass.⁸¹ The priests' mumbling of the *verba* and the Canon left people in the dark as to what was happening at the altar.⁸² These abuses played a part in the laity's ignorance of the gospel. Melancthon accurately noted the connection between

⁷⁹ Just, 246.

⁸⁰ Ap XXIV: 52

⁸¹ "But to appeal to the barbarian propensity for complexity and ornamentation, the liturgy began to grow in places where it was unnecessary to expand the rite. Examples of this abound. Normally, two candles appeared on the altar, but soon candelabras appeared and the table became cluttered with unnecessary vessels. Processions grew and expanded, and instead of being utilitarian, they became events unto themselves. In the end, the clutter obscured the simple fivefold structure (entry, word, preparation, eucharist, communion) of the historic liturgy of Word and sacrament, accompanied by the ordinaries" (Just, 243-244).

⁸² This was done to preserve the aura of "mystery" surrounding the sacrament and to preserve the elevation of the clergy over the laity.

priestly pomp and the people's ignorance, "The people were swamped by the many different traditions and opinions and were in no way able to grasp the sum of Christian teaching."⁸³ The worship rites of the Lutheran Confessions would need to employ their multifaceted purpose and serve the edification and education of the people. The Lutheran changes to the Mass needed to direct attention away from the work of the priest and fix the eyes of the people squarely on what Christ was doing for them. The Lutheran worship rite concerning the Mass directed the attention away from the notion of sacrifice and returned it to sacrament. By dismantling "the greatest and most terrible abomination,"⁸⁴ the Mass, Luther directed the worshiper's focus to Christ's Words of Institution and the reception of the Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins.⁸⁵

One practical way in which the Lutheran celebration of the Mass carried out this proper focus on Christ was in its process of communing the people. In *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*, Frank Senn described the Lutheran process of examination for and distribution of communion. Prior to receiving the Sacrament the people were directed to make their request, in person, to the pastor. At this announcement, the pastor could examine the faith and life of the communicant. The communicant should also be able to recite the Words of Institution and to state the benefits of receiving Holy Communion. When it came to the distribution and communion itself, Luther urged that those who would receive the Sacrament should be grouped together in the chancel area so as to be seen by those who were not receiving communion. This was not a dictum of law, but a good practice, "in order that [the communicants'] lives may be better observed, proved, and tested."⁸⁶

This method of distribution as well as the communicant's 'registering/announcing' for the Sacrament served both as a teaching tool and as an encouragement to come to the Sacrament. The people were instructed concerning proper reception of the Sacrament and the blessings that come from it. At the same time, those who refrained from the Sacrament would be encouraged

⁸³ Ap XXIV: 46

⁸⁴ SA II: i

⁸⁵ "[Luther's] liturgical solution was to eliminate any statement of oblation between the consecration (the proclamation of the words of Christ) and the communion. This utter lack of oblationary language, and often of a full Eucharistic prayer, became the telltale mark of a Lutheran liturgy." Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 274.

⁸⁶ *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg*, LW 53:34.

by the witness of their fellow believers who did commune. It is clear that the aim of the Lutheran alterations to the Mass served a dual purpose. The primary goal was to bring about an edifying, proper reception of the Sacrament for the people. The secondary goal was the education of the people in their faith through the rite itself.

Holy Baptism

The Lutheran revision to the traditional medieval order of baptism did not feature such sweeping alterations as the Canon of the Mass.⁸⁷ At the same time, the Lutheran baptismal rite sought to use the rite itself as a proclamation of the sinner's justification by grace through faith. Through the renewed emphasis on the power and promise of baptism, the Lutheran rite educated the people about baptism and urged them to return daily to their baptisms and God's promises made therein.

The Lutheran Confessions do not speak at length concerning abuses to and alterations of the baptismal rite. The formulators of the Formula of Concord, however, do have this to say concerning the water of baptism in connection with Roman adoration of earthly sacramental elements. "It is the same way with baptismal water. When it is used to consecrate bells or to heal leprosy or when it is exhibited in some other way for adoration, it is no sacrament or baptism."⁸⁸ Here again in the Roman Church, the focus had shifted from the Word and institution of Christ. Since such practices as baptizing bells or adoring baptismal water has no backing in Scripture, these would certainly be avoided in the Lutheran rite.

Revisions to the order of baptism were relatively minor by appearance. The slight changes included a condensing of the numerous exorcisms and moving the creed to take place during the catechetical portion of the rite. Perhaps the most significant alteration, as it pertains to this thesis, would have to be the inclusion of Luther's *Sintflutgebet*, or 'Flood Prayer.'⁸⁹ In the

⁸⁷ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to the riches of his mercy (Eph. 1:3, 7) has preserved in his church this sacrament at least, untouched and untainted by the ordinances of men, and has made it free to all nations and classes of mankind, and has not permitted it to be oppressed by the filthy and godless monsters of greed and superstition" (LW 36:57, as quoted by Senn, 287-288).

⁸⁸ FC SD VII: 87

⁸⁹ Almighty and eternal God, who has through the flood, according to your righteous judgment, condemned the unfaithful world, and, according to your great mercy, has saved faithful Noah, even eight persons, and has drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh with all his in the Red Sea, and has led your people Israel dry through it, thereby

Sintflutgebet, Luther employed another educational tool with extensive references to Bible history (especially the Old Testament). This baptismal prayer afforded more opportunities to emphasize biblical narrative in a time and culture in which biblical illiteracy was rampant.⁹⁰ Through the words of this prayer, the worshipers would be instructed about the meaning of baptism, led to cherish its blessings, and encouraged to live in their baptisms all the days of their lives.⁹¹

One of Luther's primary concerns in altering the baptismal rite was the benefit and participation of the people. His *Baptismal Booklet*, included in the Small Catechism, encourages not only sponsors, but all worshipers present to pray earnestly with the priest. In this way, those present at a baptismal service would come to learn the importance of baptism and be edified through remembrance of their own baptisms.⁹²

The Songs of the Ordinary

The most evident means of edification and education through Lutheran worship rites are seen in the renewed preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. There was, however, another beneficial development in Lutheran worship following the Reformation. Proclamation of the gospel, edification, and education are clear emphases of Luther's re-tooling

prefiguring this bath of your holy baptism, and through the baptism of your dear child, our Lord Jesus Christ, has sanctified and set apart the Jordan and all water for a saving flood, and an ample washing away of sins: we pray that through your same infinite mercy you will graciously look upon this N., and bless him/her with a right faith in the spirit, so that through this saving flood all that was born in him from Adam and all which he himself has added thereto may be drowned and submerged: and that he may be separated from the unfaithful, and preserved in the holy ark of Christendom dry and safe, and ever fervent in spirit and joyful in hope serve your name, so that he with all the faithful may be worthy to inherit your promise of eternal life, through Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Senn, 289).

⁹⁰ 21st century Lutherans can relate to a growing culture of biblical illiteracy. Luther's wording of this prayer demonstrates a fine principle not only for Lutheran worship, but also for work as a leader in the church. Make the most of every opportunity to teach the Bible to the people!

⁹¹ Of interest to WELS Lutherans: the *Christian Worship: Pastor's Companion* utilizes Luther's *Sintflutgebet* almost verbatim. It can be found in the order for private baptism, 16-17.

⁹² "Because daily I see and hear with what carelessness and lack of solemnity – to say nothing of out-and-out levity – people treat the high, holy, and comforting sacrament of baptism for infants, in part caused, I believe, by the fact that those present understand nothing of what is being said and done, I have decided that it is not only helpful but also necessary to conduct the service in the German language. For this reason I have translated those portions that used to be said in Latin in order to begin baptizing in German, so that the sponsors and others present may be all the more aroused to faith and earnest devotion and so that the priests who baptize have to show more diligence for the sake of the listeners" (SC: Baptismal Booklet, 1).

of the songs of the Ordinary. These songs sought to edify the people through gospel content and offer them an opportunity to praise God while, at the same time, educate the people about Christ and the Scriptures.

Having undertaken the difficult and immense task of reforming the teaching of the church, Luther understood that in order for the pure teaching of God's Word to remain in the hearts of the people, someone or something was going to have to put it there. Of course, as stated earlier, the hallmark of Lutheran worship is the preaching of the gospel. Luther made no exceptions about this. Luther's love for music, however, is well documented. His devotion to theology and love of music resulted in his writing hymns and reworking traditional songs with a dual purpose. These songs of the Ordinary and hymns were a concise and memorable way of expressing the truths of theology to the common people while still functioning in their proper place as a part of the order of service.

As mentioned above, what had previously been the exclusive property of priests and choirs would once again be placed on the lips of the common people. Specifically in his *Deutsche Messe*, Luther's settings of the songs of the Ordinary: *Gloria*, *Kyrie*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* were composed in the vernacular and were able to be sung by the laity. Lutheran worship rites in general seek to give the laity a practical and consistent means for participation in the service. Lutheran worship rites were not concerned with rote repetition of words or phrases, but with consistent ways of worshiping the Savior and functioning as consistent tools for teaching Christ.

The need for Christocentric, gospel predominated, means of grace emphasis worship did not end with the death of Luther. The changes Luther had made to the order of service were primarily a response to the Roman Catholic position. But what would happen when the issue of worship, specifically adiaphora in worship, became an issue among the heirs of the Reformation? By going back to Scripture and Luther's writings, the formulators of the Formula of Concord (finished in 1577) drew up articles to settle disputes among feuding followers of Luther. Article X of the Formula of Concord speaks specifically to the issue of matters of adiaphora. For the purposes of the next chapter of this thesis, the formulators' article on adiaphora will serve as a transition from a discussion of Confessional Lutheranism in 16th century Europe to an application for Confessional Lutheranism in 21st century America (and beyond). Since the need for Christocentric, gospel predominated, means of grace emphasis worship is still prevalent, it

will do well for pastors and worship planners alike to investigate the freedom in worship rites addressed in the Formula of Concord, Article X and apply the principles of Confessional Lutheran worship to today.

Freedom in Worship Adiaphora: Formula of Concord Article X and Today

Article X of the Formula of Concord concerns itself directly with the practice of worship rites in the churches of the Reformation. The whole article reads with an air of freedom, but it is somewhat restrained freedom. The Lutheran Church would not insist on a particular set of worship rites in a legalistic way, nor would it allow pure license without regard for brothers and sisters in the faith. Worship rites that obscured the gospel, gave an impression of false teaching, or proclaimed a false unity with Rome were still to be avoided. The formulators said it this way,

Therefore, we believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every time and place has the right, power, and authority to change, reduce, or expand such practices according to circumstances in an orderly and appropriate manner, without frivolity or offense, as seems most useful, beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church.⁹³

Given that the Formula's freedom is 'restrained,' how much freedom does Article X allow? The formulators realized that different circumstances sometimes required different practice. The Apostle Paul understood and applied the appropriate flexibility in dealing with issues of idol meat in Romans 14 and Timothy's circumcision prior to his mission to the Jews. Luther also understood this principle. His "*Deutsche Messe* was neither a slavish following of the liturgies of the past nor a freewheeling rejection of what had been inherited from earlier centuries."⁹⁴

Once again, the Formula of Concord does not offer a rubric for New Testament Lutheran worship rites. It does not praise or decry certain church ceremonies beyond the principles for Lutheran worship outlined above. Do these rites proclaim Christ? Do these rites keep the gospel

⁹³ FC SD X: 9

⁹⁴ Daniel Deutschlander. The Narrow Lutheran Middle: Following the Scriptural Road. Northwestern Publishing House. Milwaukee, WI. 2011, 208. And furthermore, "The people are 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" (AC XXIV: 2-3).

in Word and sacraments front and center in worship? Do these rites give the impression of unity where there is none? Do these rites promote a false understanding of Scripture's teaching on a certain point?

Since modern Lutherans cannot practically follow all the worship forms utilized by our 16th century forebears, what does endure are the principles found in the confessions. A pastoral heart will seek to meet the needs of the people he serves. Edification remains a primary concern of any worship rite. Like our Lutheran fathers, pastors will not be bound with mandates in matters of freedom. Yet, such freedom does not imply license. The 21st century Lutheran pastor exists in a different historical setting than the formulators. Lutheran pastors in 21st century America are not likely facing persecution or loss of home. Time, circumstance, and culture all have a bearing on our actions – even our ritual actions. But what must remain front and center are worship rites that proclaim Christ to the people; serving both to edify their faith and educate their understanding of the faith.

Some view the confessors as radical agents of change in the liturgical service, which simply is not the case. Of course they cleaned house so as to rid the order of service of all elements of meritorious sacrifice. As a necessity, they carefully evaluated historic rites of the church to see if they would be beneficial for the edification and education of their people. But the confessors were also tremendous respecters of the historic rites of Christianity and cherished the connection they had with the Holy Christian Church.⁹⁵ They were no sect and did not desire for their order of service to make them appear as such. It's no wonder, then, that the Book of Concord begins with the three ecumenical creeds of the church. The standard of Lutheran confession begins by declaring its status as part of the Holy Christian Church.

When one considers what our Lutheran worship heritage is, it will not do for us to hold rigidly to the use of *Deutsche Messe* or *Formula Missae* in our churches. Luther himself said, "An order is an external thing. No matter how good it is, it can be abused. Then it is no longer an order, but a disorder."⁹⁶ Furthermore, the Lutheran confessors would have considered themselves failures if their descendents in the faith would understand 16th century Lutheran worship rites as authoritarian for posterity. They had fought, thought, and wrote in order to be freed from legalism in the realm of human rites. James Tiefel makes an accurate distinction and appropriate

⁹⁵ "With a very grateful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances" (AP VII/VIII: 33).

⁹⁶ *The German Mass and Order of Service*. LW 53:90.

encouragement in this regard: “The confessors’ worship practices, practices they observed and promoted in their congregations, must be considered descriptive and not prescriptive among us. Their desire and commitment to the scriptural truth that the gospel must be heard when Christians gather is prescriptive and not descriptive.”⁹⁷

In considering our Lutheran heritage in the realm of worship rites, would it not be proper to adopt the same attitude as Luther and his coworkers in this matter? The gist of their logic was that if someone could find better and more edifying worship rites in his individual setting, then that person should go ahead and do it. In his *Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg*, Luther stated, “let us approve each other’s rites lest schisms and sects should result from this diversity in rites – as has happened in the Roman Church.”⁹⁸ The way in which a church worships should never bind the consciences of another or insinuate that such rites are meritorious. Melancthon echoed Luther’s sentiment in the Augustana, “However, people are also instructed not to burden consciences with [church regulations] as if such things were necessary for salvation.”⁹⁹ Lutheran worship rites will avoid such burdening at all costs.

Luther’s own orders of service, *Deutsche Messe* and *Formula Missae*, each had specific audiences in view. *Formula Missae* was intended for urban centers and university cities where Latin was still the common language of commerce. *Deutsche Messe* was penned for country parishes and smaller towns where the German language prevailed. The situation in 16th century Luther-land is not unlike the 21st century situation in WELS. Will one order of service, one set of worship forms, and one corpus of hymns serve all the various congregations in the synod? Absolutely not.¹⁰⁰ Yet remembering our Lutheran heritage does not necessarily mean binding ourselves slavishly to a certain order of service in every given geographic or cultural context. Is there wisdom in retaining historic worship rites for their edifying and educational value? Luther thought so. Is there freedom from authoritarian worship rites that don’t serve the people? Luther fought for it. But with such great gospel freedom comes great responsibility. The pastoral heart

⁹⁷ “Confessional Perspectives on Worship.” WELS Commission on Worship, Vol. 57, November 2012.

⁹⁸ LW 53:31.

⁹⁹ AC XV: 2-3

¹⁰⁰ Many factors come into play, specifically concerning a corpus of hymns. The size and make-up of the congregation and community will be a factor; as will the geographic location of the congregation, the culture of the congregation, and the number and availability of musicians and instrumentalists.

of the worship planner realizes that the edification and education of the people always trumps his own desires and ideas.¹⁰¹

Thus far, this thesis has hopefully evinced the point that edification and education were primary concerns for worship writes as understood by the Lutheran Confessions and should be equally important for 21st century Lutherans. The difficulty for the reader may lie in the application of the principles of Lutheran Worship and the matching of emphases as outlined by the confessions. What follows in the final chapter is meant to be not a cut and dry list of methodology, but more of a collection of thought provoking concepts to consider as pastor and people alike seek to apply Confessional Lutheran principles to 21st century Lutheran worship.

Continual Process of Edification and Education in 21st Century Worship

As heirs of the Lutheran Reformation, spiritual descendents of the confessors, and grateful recipients of solid worship forms, it is not as though we and our people have it all figured out. Every day we live on this side of heaven, we will have a continual need for more growth in our faith through the gospel and further education through the same. This is our understanding of God's Word and this understanding will necessarily be reflected in the way we come before God in worship. The multifaceted emphasis of Lutheran worship rites is still the thrust of our own. "We should consider the edification of the lay folk more important than our own ideas and opinions."¹⁰²

Prosper of Aquitaine's principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* is still in effect. The law of praying is still the law of believing. Whatever philosophical or theological concerns one may have with that ancient adage, the point is clear. Aaron Christie properly states, "When you function in whatever leadership role you find yourself in worship, you are not trifling with toys. What you say and do – and how you say and do it – is forming the faith of the people you serve. This will happen no matter what you do."¹⁰³ Given the onus which our Lutheran worship rites must shoulder, the question every worship planner must ask himself is this: What do our styles of

¹⁰¹ "We should consider the edification of the lay folk more important than our own ideas and opinions...For even though from the viewpoint of faith, the external orders are free...you are not free to use this liberty, but bound to consider the edification of the common people" (*A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians Concerning Public Worship and Concord*, LW 53:47).

¹⁰² *A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians Concerning Public Worship and Concord*, LW 53:47.

¹⁰³ *Worship in the Confessions*, 10.

worship say about our theology? Even more than that, what does the content of our hymns, our use or misuse of art, and our church architecture say about our theology? What ought to be the focal point of Lutheran worship? The focal point must be and remain Christ. But how do we communicate that in our churches? Will that focus be well maintained by a prominently positioned cross or crucifix or by a band of singers and a drop down Power Point screen? How will the gospel predominance and means of grace emphasis be communicated in our worship service? Perhaps by the font, altar, and pulpit, or maybe by some other creative means. The point of this litany of questions is not to badger, but to move the reader to think about these issues, their importance in worship, and the expression they give of biblical truth.

The pastor must consider what worship rites and forms will give the clearest proclamation of the gospel in his personal context. In our freedom to choose worship forms that best communicate the gospel, we want to do just that: communicate the gospel. When Lutherans insist on adopting wholesale methodology and ‘ritual’ from a mega-church paradigm, people may get the impression that there is no difference in the teachings of these two churches, considering the services are so similar. Such an insinuation can be an upheaval of the clear confession in worship that the Lutheran Confessions advocate.¹⁰⁴

The ‘direction of worship’ can also easily be confused. J.A.O. Preus offers a fitting reminder:

Worship, therefore, is primarily defined as God’s service, God’s work. It is the *locus* of God’s church-creating and sustaining activity. To some degree Lutherans have adopted an understanding of worship that comes from foreign theological soil, which is truly harmful. So many of us think of worship as what we do, as if we are the actors and God is the audience. That our theology is Gospel-centered, however, that we are *evangelical* Lutherans, implies just the opposite. Worship is the place primarily where God gives and where we receive. It is only secondary what we do, what we say back to God, what we give back to God.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ “The Reformed Christian likes to view the worship service above all as a work of the believer which he owes to God, as a duty to God, a proof of his gratitude, so that he even comes very close to applying the idea of sacrifice to the service. For the Lutheran, on the other hand, the worship service is primarily a service which God renders to us, a way by which he bestows his grace on us, the high point of which is the sacrament, which, viewed as our activity, is a seeking for grace, an enjoyment of God.” (Pieper, August. “The Difference Between The Reformed And The Lutheran Interpretation Of The So-Called Third Use Of The Law.” WLS Essay File, <http://www.wlssays.net/files/PieperDifference.pdf>, 4.

¹⁰⁵ What’s Lutheran About Worship: Theology From the Inside Out, 76 (emphasis original).

The key question the worship planner must ask himself is this: “Will our practices edify others by a clear proclamation of the gospel, or can our practices inadvertently send the wrong message?”¹⁰⁶

Doctrine effects practice and practice effects doctrine. Good form and function can serve to solidify good theology in the hearts and minds of the people, but the converse is also true. Calling on the scriptural and Confessional understanding of Christian worship is not a bad place to start. Paul’s encouragement in 1 Corinthians 14 emphasizes good order in worship that strives for edification. Melancthon concurred, “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 ceremonies.”¹⁰⁷ With these basic principles in mind, the worship rites we use will proclaim the gospel boldly. Our worship will reflect a Lutheran understanding of the gospel. Our worship will continue to edify and educate the people, all while striving to achieve the narrow Lutheran middle.

Conclusion: Striving to Achieve the “Lutheran Middle”

In the 16th century, confessional Lutherans came to know an important principle of worship that will assist us 21st century confessional Lutherans in achieving a “Lutheran middle.” Rites and ceremonies were not worship. They served a purpose in worship. But, properly speaking, they were not worship. Rites and ceremonies were maintained (at least the good ones) because they proclaim the gospel and keep Christ as the center of worship. In speaking about the Christocentric focus of Lutheran worship, Joel Otto points out a number of the precipices of confessional Lutheran worship rites:

Notice what is taught in the ceremonies, rites, symbols, songs, creeds, hymns, and sermons: the person and work of Christ, the meaning and comfort of the Lord’s Supper, warnings about false teachings. Notice the purpose of such teaching: that people ‘know about Christ’ and that they are ‘drawn to communion’ for the comfort of forgiveness. In other words, Lutheran worship walks the narrow middle by teaching people about the middle, namely, justification by faith alone and the power of the means of grace.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Strey, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Ap XXIV: 3

¹⁰⁸ Joel Otto. “Confessional Perspectives on Worship: Steering the Middle Course in Worship.” *Worship the Lord*, vol. 56, September 2012.

The Lutheran middle in worship will not necessarily look the same in all places and under all circumstances.¹⁰⁹ The application is flexible, but the principles are not. Lutheran worship will endeavor to avoid two ditches: the one removes all rite and ceremony because they do not teach well; the other maintains rites and ceremonies that teach falsely.

Given our confessional Lutheran emphasis on keeping Christ and his gospel as the center of our worship, the desire for at least some general commonality in worship should not be classified as ‘legalism.’ The demand for complete uniformity would, of course, be legalism. But the apostle Paul’s reminder that “Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial” (1 Corinthians 10:23) may lead us to agree in a brotherly way to use forms that are widely recognized as good forms because they are clear, Christ-centered communications of the gospel.¹¹⁰ Even so, the “worship wars” continue.

Will a renewed encouragement to study confessional perspectives on worship bring about an immediate ceasefire in these “worship wars”? Probably not. As stated above, both sides claim to have Luther and the confessions on their side. What this study sought to accomplish was to demonstrate the multi-faceted approach of edification and education which the confessions emphasize in worship rites. Tracing the development of Lutheran worship rites within their historical context and understanding the emphases the confessions employed will serve to help us in our endeavor to be faithful stewards and careful innovators in the realm of worship. The only way to accomplish this task and to continue to study this topic will be to let the confessions speak for themselves. It is our task to learn what our Lutheran forefathers say and not to shoe-horn our own notions about worship into their writings.

The study of the Lutheran Confessions and their perspectives on worship is a topic whose surface has just been scratched. This thesis was not intended to be an exhaustive investigation into every worship principle and concept the confessions outline. Rather, the purpose of this paper was to explore a very narrow avenue within confessional perspectives on worship. Lutheran worship rites have, as their primary concerns, both edification and education.

¹⁰⁹ Consider how Lutheran worship looks in foreign mission fields. The form of the worship service across our synod’s mission fields may vary as much as the people we serve, but in general, the structure of the liturgy often remains in some fashion.

¹¹⁰ Strey, 4-5.

What does Lutheran worship look like and what purpose does it serve? The look will be different from place – including rites that vary from a crucifix processional to a service that incorporates electric guitars. The purpose of Lutheran worship rites has been the purpose of this thesis. Lutheran worship rites keep Christ at the center, let the gospel predominate, edify, and educate. Confessional Lutheran worship fosters an attitude of respect and appreciation for our heritage while, at the same time, avoids mindless repetition and careless innovation.¹¹¹ Lutheran worship rites are valuable and useful because they not only build up the faith through gospel content, but also teach the faith by means of the same.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Preus, 76.

¹¹² Some ideas for future research: Alternate forms of worship viewed and evaluated through a Confessional lens; Applying the principles of Confessional Lutheran worship in an outreach setting.

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