

Worship Wars at the Dawn of a New Millennium: Lutheranism and the Means of Grace vs. the “Success Story” of American Evangelicalism

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INTRODUCTION

Worship wars are raging throughout the Christian church in America. In some denominations the connection between the church's confession and her worship is weakening and being devastated by expediency. In other cases marketing takes the place of proclamation, making sales replaces catechesis, and entertainment overshadows worship. Give people what they want, not what they need, seems to be the rule of many today. Emotions and feelings come before the facts of God's Word. Style precedes substance.

Such worship wars have been fought in the past. Orthodoxy contended with Pietism.¹ Perhaps that war has never been completed nor resolved. Ours may not be a new conflict. Samuel S. Schmucker² and his “American Lutheranism” appear to be alive and well in the Protestantism of America, which is typically more Reformed and Arminian than it is Lutheran. This contaminated ecclesiastical soil is poisoning a goodly number of American churches. We may feel that we in the WELS are standing on the sidelines of worship wars, but more and more of our people are drinking from tainted Reformed waters.

Worship is at the center of the church's life. It provides the greatest opportunity to reach the most people at one time on a week-to-week basis. The church that is weak in worship attendance or fails to communicate law and gospel will suffer in all other areas of church life. Robert Webber recently stated, “Ten years ago, when Christians moved into town they asked, ‘Where's the best preaching?’ Today when they come to town, they say, ‘Where's the best worship?’”³ I believe that to some degree such a paradigm shift is also the case in our own Synod. This is further complicated by the desire of many for speedy worship, truncated liturgy, and the demand to make people “feel good.”

The WELS will not be excluded from these worship wars. The consequences are grave. At stake is the heart and soul of our church. It is important that we contend for God's truth, yet, at the same time, reach out with the gospel. As we do battle in both of these areas, we dare not read our WELS history as an exclusive *Heilsgeschichte*. Too simplistic, also, is the implied demarcation between high-church liturgical guardians and mission-minded Lutherans bent on outreach to many cultures even within the boundaries of our own country.

Lutheranism and the *Una Sancta*

¹ Pietism was a movement in German Protestantism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. General characteristics of the movement include religious subjectivism and individualism, a tendency toward anthropocentrism rather than theocentrism, emphasis on regeneration and sanctification rather than justification, and emphasis on Christian life rather than Christian doctrine.

² Schmucker (1799-1873) is recognized as a precursor of the twentieth century ecumenical movement. In his *Elements of Popular Theology* (1834) he maintained that “orthodox” Christian bodies held a common faith based on “fundamental doctrines of Scripture.” Schmucker was consciously a birth-right American and in his own mind a deep-dyed Lutheran. His mission for “American Lutheranism” or modified Lutheranism was beaten back in his day with the defeat of the *Definite Synodical Platform*.

³ Gary M. Burge, *Christianity Today*, “Missing God at Church?” October 6, 1997, p 25.

According to the Lutheran Confessions, the Church of the Augsburg Confession does not see herself as just one sect among others.

By virtue of the pure marks of Christ's Church [it is] the legitimate outward expression and representative of Christ's holy, catholic and apostolic church. As such, she is the rightful heiress of the whole Christian patrimony, and gratefully treasures as her own even the historic practices of the Catholic Church.⁴

She, therefore, considers herself as standing in the line of Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, Bernard, Francis and the other fathers of the Church. She never planned to be a separate church body, but saw herself as the medieval and ancient church, reformed and purified. She was, thus, heir of all that went before. The Lutherans often argued that they had much more in common with the ancient church fathers than did the Church of Rome.

In contrast to the radical Reformers who sought to remove any semblance of Roman Catholicism from their churches, Luther retained the bulk of the liturgical and architectural heritage of the medieval church. Unlike Carlstadt, Zwingli, or Calvin, Luther saw his goal as retaining the truth that was preserved by Rome, while rejecting the paganism, legalism, and anti-evangelical features he also uncovered there.

As we examine liturgies, methods, and techniques from outside of our fellowship, we dare not be so naive as to believe they have been developed in a theological vacuum. We must critically sort out the good from the bad. We are told, "Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21,22). It has been said, "The ability to think is the ability to make distinctions." "Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

Have we lost our Lutheran self-understanding? Do we lack Lutheran self-confidence? It has been said that when a group lets itself become stigmatized, it gives power to others to control it.⁵ If we have become just another denomination, we have lost our distinctiveness.

A 1972 study reported that by a proportion of 77 to 19, Lutherans did not think of themselves as different Christians, and more than half denied that Lutherans believe more strongly in salvation by grace through faith than other Christians do.⁶ It seems that Lutherans have been deeply influenced by the outside views of themselves and have adjusted to them, partly by departing from the ancestral faith, and in the case of those who remain, by trying to deny they are a peculiar people. To put it another way, American Lutherans are remarkably unremarkable.

PART I: LUTHERAN DISTINCTIVES

The Means of Grace

The Lutheran Confessions speak of the means of grace as the God-appointed means or instruments through which (1) God offers and conveys his grace in Christ to me and through which (2) he engenders faith to accept this grace.

In order that we may obtain such faith, God has ordained the ministry, has given the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He bestows the Holy Spirit, who works faith where and when He wills in those who hear the gospel, which teaches that because of Christ's merits, not our own, we have a gracious God if we believe this.⁷

⁴ Kurt E. Marquart, "The Church of the Augsburg Confession as the True Ecumenical Movement," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* (Winter 1967-68), p 82.

⁵ Shelby Steele, "Wrestling with Stigma" (Convention paper presented at the National Association of Scholars, New Orleans, December 1997).

⁶ George Lindbeck, *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin*, "Lutheranism as Church & Movement: Trends in America Since 1980," Winter, 1991, p 46.

⁷ A.C. V (German text translation).

The gospel is the good news of the finished redemption won for all sinners by the now-exalted, victorious God-man Christ Jesus. Through his perfect obedience and all-sufficient death, which the sinner makes his own by faith alone, this gospel, in the first place, actually brings Christ to people. It is more than a mere historical record of God's great work in Christ.

The Lutheran Confessions repeatedly assert that the Holy Spirit and eternal life can be bestowed only through the God-appointed means, the Word and sacraments. In the gospel is everything needed for salvation. The gospel is not only the promise of forgiveness, but also the absolution itself, just as if Christ himself pronounced it. The gospel is more than a doctrine about reconciliation; it is the gift of a reconciled God.⁸

This gospel actually creates faith. Human beings by nature are spiritually dead, deaf, dumb, and blind; thus, incapable of comprehending the gospel or wanting divine grace. The Holy Spirit must work saving faith. This he does solely through the gospel. According to Lutheran theology: (1) the Holy Spirit is given only through the Word. (2) The Holy Spirit is always in the Word, and, thus, the gospel in all its various forms is always divinely efficacious. The gospel not only commands us to come to Christ, but is the power of the Spirit which enables us to do just that. The Lutheran Confessions protest against every form of "enthusiasm" which teaches that the Holy Spirit operates outside the specified means.⁹

J. T. Mueller has written,

The doctrine of the means of grace is a distinctive feature of Lutheran theology. To this central teaching it owes its sanity and strong appeal, its freedom from sectarian tendencies and morbid fanaticism, its coherence and practicalness, and its adaptation to men of every race and every degree of culture.¹⁰

The Sacraments

The sacraments are the "visible" word in distinction from the proclaimed word. The Confessions declare that the "visible" word is intended for the eyes, as the audible or spoken word is intended for the ears. The effect of both is the same – to incite the heart to believe. It has been said that the sacrament serves as a sign and seal of the grace of God to the individual and may be viewed as the "individualized word."

A true sacrament contains the promise of God's grace in Christ. It offers to all who receive it the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. The blessings offered and provided in the sacraments are not something in addition to, or beyond, the promises of the gospel, but the identical blessings.

The sacraments are means of grace, which create faith in the promises they make, faith in the gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Through them the Holy Spirit works regeneration and conversion. And where faith already exists, there the Holy Spirit, through the sacraments, strengthens and preserves such faith.

Baptism

Baptism is God's Word in the water. The two can never be separated. The Word is used three ways in baptism. First, there is God's command in the words of institution. This command puts God's glory and majesty into this simple act. There is, secondly, also the name of God. This is God's Word done in his name. God, not people, baptize, and through this act he makes us his own. Finally, in baptism we have God's promise that "whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved."

Baptism is not only a symbol of new life, but it actually creates what it symbolizes. It bestows forgiveness of the entire guilt of sin. Thus, baptism is a saving bath, a washing of regeneration. The fact that baptism is a gift of God, not a work of ours, we confess most incisively in our practice of infant baptism.

⁸ A.C. XXVIII, 9; XVIII, 3; Ap. IV, 67 ff 120; VII, 36; XXVII, 11, 40. S.A.P. III, Art. IV. F. C., Th. D, II, 5.

⁹ Mayer, p 163.

¹⁰ John T. Mueller, "Grace, Means of," *Lutheran Cyclopaedia*, ed. Erwin L. Lucker, St. Louis: CPH, 1975, p 344.

The Lord's Supper

On the basis of Holy Scripture, the Lutheran church maintains that the Lord's Supper is not only bread and wine comprehended in God's command, but also the body and blood of Christ. In this holy supper the earthly elements do not become nourishment for the soul, but because of the union with the Word, are the body and blood of Christ. The formula "the bread and the wine *are* the body and blood" rules out the Reformed symbolical interpretation of the words of institution.¹¹

The Lutheran formulation of the essence of the Lord's Supper was structured chiefly in contradistinction to the strictly physical presence of Christ in the Roman Catholic view and the Zwinglian-Calvinist position of a purely spiritual presence of Christ according to his divine nature. In antithesis to the views which reduce the real presence either to a mere physical or a mere spiritual presence, the Lutheran Confessions urge three points: (1) the union of the earthly and heavenly elements is a sacramental union (*unio sacramentalis*); (2) the communicants receive the body and blood of Christ orally (*manducatio oralis*); (3) the unbelievers truly receive the body and blood of Christ (*manducatio indignorum*).¹²

Reformed theology in general denies that the sacraments are mediums that convey the forgiveness of sins and insists that they are only symbols, reminders of the merits of Christ. But in the Lord's Supper Christ offers himself, his entire person, life, and work in all the words and elements to all communicants. The words "given and shed for you" are not merely a report of an historical event, but actually make the communicant a contemporary and participant of the glorious fact. We have a foretaste of what heaven will be like when we gather for his holy supper.

Law and Gospel

The proper distinction between law and gospel has been called the most brilliant light of the Lutheran Reformation. This statement has significance only in the light of the Lutheran understanding of the gospel as the means of grace. Any mingling of the law into the gospel is not only poor theology, but actually obscures the gospel and robs Christians of the gospel comfort.

The law judges and kills the sinner. It demands silence before a holy God. It strips the self-righteous and self-excusing sinner of any covering. Like Adam and Eve the sinner now stands naked and ashamed in his or her sin before a holy God. "Through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The law seeks and finds the sinner and then judges and kills the sinner it seeks. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). All die, for all are sinful.

The gospel resurrects from death to life. "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b). The life-creating good news is found only in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. The gospel justifies the guilty sinner. It declares the convicted sinner righteous with the "alien" righteousness of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-26). The great exchange of human sin for Christ's righteousness is made. This is done with the message of the cross and resurrection through spoken word, baptismal water, and bread and cup.

The gospel does not seek saving faith. It creates and sustains it. This newborn faith feeds on the gospel that gave it birth. Today in America many have a hard time believing in sinfulness – the fact that we are born in sin is a greater problem than sin, the freely chosen action of the will. Thus, countless American Christians, including many a Lutheran, have departed from the reformer's belief in the labyrinthine depths of human self-deception, and so they have lost the ability to feel, as Luther felt, the thrilling victory of God's grace in Christ.

¹¹ See Small Catechism, Large Catechism; Hermann Sasae, *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959).

¹² Only the Lutherans have both the spiritual and oral eating of Christ. Luther teaches that the individual communicant does not determine the character of the sacrament.

Lutheran Worship

The church must be visible. Its true marks, the right preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, are to be perceptible to the eye of the people. Though the church does not consist in external things such as ceremonies and rites, and though her true essence remains unknown to the unbeliever, the presence of the church is established by the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Lutherans insist that the church is not upheld by the piety of the believers but by the external means of Word and sacrament. As Luther said, "Where the gospel is, there is Christ. Where Christ is, there is the Holy Spirit and his kingdom, the true kingdom of heaven."¹³

The liturgy of the church is the word in action. It is properly referred to as *Gottesdienst*, or "divine service." The liturgy is God's *leiturgia*, his public service to his fallen creation through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The liturgy is comprised of the deeds and words of Jesus. They are cleansing words that bring forgiveness, life, and salvation. God is the subject, and we are the objects of his service. Unfortunately, in the English-speaking world, worship is most often understood primarily as something we do to recognize the greatness of God. Such a view stands in opposition to Lutheran worship. It turns worship into an anthropocentric activity defined by what we do and what we understand God to be. Lutheran worship will always emphasize the opposite idea, that worship comes from God to us. The gifts of God always stand at the center. Thus, worship is not just another program of the church, but it is the very heartbeat of our life with God as he comes with his gifts and we respond in our prayers, praise, and hymns.

God's Word in the liturgy continues the great work of holy baptism as it kills and makes alive. This two-fold work stands in contrast to the Roman one-track view of justification as a gradual progression from sinner to saint. It stands also in opposition to the semi-Pelagian notion of worship, that by this liturgy we merit God's grace and favor. In the liturgy the believer stands before God as a beggar crying out, "I – Lord, have mercy." The believer dies and rises with Christ, leaves justified, and is filled with the gifts of his Savior.

The Lutheran understanding of law and gospel shapes our understanding of the church at worship. The church is not a gymnasium in which the righteous bulk up their spiritual biceps and then gawk in admiration into the mirror of the law to see how well they are progressing. Nor is the church's worship an aerobics session for the pneumatically fit to recharge their batteries for another week of victorious living. The church is a sanitarium for the sick unto death with sin, in which the medicine of God's Word is applied in the liturgy – the law, which diagnoses and kills the deep, inherited disease of Adam, and the gospel, which brings new life in Jesus Christ by the healing balm of his blood.¹⁴

The law and gospel impart duality to the liturgy, sometimes expressed in the term's "sacrament" and "sacrifice." A sacrament is an external rite instituted by God, which delivers what Jesus won by his death on the cross. A "sacrifice" is the grateful response of faith towards God in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, and loving service to one's neighbor.¹⁵

Jesus Christ is always the center and focal point of the liturgy, whether we are speaking sacramentally or sacrificially. God justifies all people sacramentally, and justified people serve God sacrificially. In both directions, Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). People can give only what they have received.

Where there is confusion of sacrament and sacrifice, there is also a corresponding confusion between law and gospel. Worship that is focused on prayer, stewardship, and sanctification instead of on Christ's saving death and resurrection, is focused on the law and not the gospel. Sacrifice without sacrament is law without gospel. To worship God according to the law is idolatry, even if the God whom we are worshipping is the one, true God.¹⁶

¹³ Luther, Martin, "Second Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity" (1533), in *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, 3:100.

¹⁴ Ken Schurb, "The Church: Hospital or Gymnasium?" *Logia*, No. 1 (Reformation/October 1992), p 17-22.

¹⁵ Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M. H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p 126-213.

¹⁶ William M. Cwirla, "The Law and the Gospel in the Liturgy" in *Modern Reformation*, January/February 1996, p 24.

Lutheranism stresses the receptive role of the believer in its worship service. We hear, for example, expressions like, "hearing the Word of God," "listening to the Word" and "receiving the sacraments." In the sacramental act, the believer is, in reality, only a recipient. He is the object of the transaction; something is happening to him, something is being given to him. God is the acting subject in these ceremonies, who offers us his salvation through the Word and sacraments. It remains a paradox that while the worship service is filled with human participation, worship is not "an act performed by us, but a gift placed in our lap, which we may place in our hands and use as our doing."¹⁷

The Liturgy

Historically speaking, the liturgy is neither exclusively "Lutheran" nor "German." Luther reformed it and left his mark upon it, but the church was singing the *Agnus Dei*, the *Sanctus*, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the *Te Deum* long before Luther was on the scene. Much of today's negative propaganda against the liturgy is inaccurate. The western rite is a trans-cultural and multicultural product with roots from ancient times in North Africa, Syria, Palestine, and the like. This same frame of worship is shared by three quarters of a billion Roman Catholics, the many Eastern Orthodox Churches, the pre-Chalcedonian Churches, the Anglican Communion, and over seventy million Lutherans, the majority of whom are not German. However, despite the liturgy's roots in Judaism, it would most likely be difficult for first century believers in Judea to recognize it in its present form.

The liturgy did not arise spontaneously, nor is it to function as a fossilized relic of the past. The early church adapted the liturgy of the synagogue and the liturgy of the table for her services of Word and sacrament. The two-part service of Word and meal is discernable already in the apostolic church (Luke 24:13-35; Acts 2:42). Over the centuries, a framework of fixed texts and canticles developed to adorn the service of the Word and the service of Holy Communion. The liturgy continues to develop around this framework today.¹⁸

The liturgy, through its focused texts and canticles, has served to preserve the gospel as, for example, when the gospel was not preached clearly in the sermon, or when the law and gospel were confused by the church's teachers. Luther recognized the gospel content in the liturgy and reformed the extant liturgy by removing or revising only what obstructed the way of Christ crucified for the justification of the sinner. Luther proceeded cautiously with liturgical reforms. Neither the 1523 Latin Mass nor his 1526 *Deutsche Messe* represented radical departures from the western catholic tradition.¹⁹ His liturgical reforms had at the very core the doctrine of justification. God's action in Christ was to be clearly distinguished from all human effort. Luther understood worship, not as a human activity in which man achieves reconciliation with God, but as the receptivity of faith.

In the preface of his *Deutsche Messe* Luther deplored "the great variety of new masses, for everyone makes his own order of service." The implication is that not everyone can do it equally well. A variety of rites has always existed, states Luther, but "it would be good if the service in every principality would be held in the same manner, and if the order observed in a given city would also be followed by the surrounding towns and villages." "As far as possible we should observe the same rites and ceremonies, just as all Christians have the same baptism and the same sacrament (of the altar), and no one has received a special one of his own from God." (AE, Vol. 53, p 61ff)

Luther dealt with worship in a number of writings, but only in passing. He treats the doctrine of worship incidentally and casually rather than specifically. Luther's adherents followed his principle, and to this day many Lutheran theologians and hymn writers say relatively little regarding the theology of Christian worship. To them the issue seems self-evident, and they prefer to treat the doctrinal word rather than the doctrine of worship itself. Perhaps it was "this freedom, encouraged at least in part by Luther's hesitation to become prescriptive, that contributed toward the loss of a distinctively Lutheran worship practice in the seventeenth and

¹⁷ Brunner, p 200.

¹⁸ Ibid, p 25.

¹⁹ Ibid, p 26.

eighteenth centuries. Under increasing pressures of pietism and rationalism in the centuries following the Reformation, Lutheranism succumbed more and more to the temptation to forget its catholic character and heritage. The new spirit was one which Lutheranism would have to reckon with both on the Continent as well as later in the New World."²⁰

Some Conclusions on Lutheran Worship

Lutherans worship a certain way because they believe certain things. Lutheran liturgy is a natural outgrowth of church history and Lutheran teaching. Charles Porterfield Krauth remarked that Lutheran worship should be characterized with reformation and conservatism. Reformation is the attempt to rid the church of abuses and assure that scriptural principles are our guide. The gospel focus is not to be blurred by antiquarianism. Conservatism is the attempt to maintain conformity with what the church has done in the past. The accumulated wisdom of the ages is not to be pushed aside by this year's fleeting fashions. Conservatism keeps the church from taking the appearance of a human organization that was invented last week by Madison Avenue marketers. To place oneself under the discipline of the liturgy is to make available to the worshipping community the wealth and experience of the church at worship throughout the centuries, rather than placing it at the mercy of the more limited and less satisfying experience of the individual, or at the mercy of passing faddishness disguised as relevance.

It should also be asserted that the use of the western liturgy gives Lutheranism an ecumenical outlook in its confession of the *Una Sancta*. Theodore Hartwig has stated: "In matters of outward form, past Lutheran practice...has avoided the sectarianism of going it alone, being different, striving for the unique. Thus Luther kept with the church year and the general structure of the Mass inherited from the medieval church. ... Though far confessional reasons we live in a state of outwardly divided communions, the Christian church, nevertheless, remains a single catholic community of believers confessing one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."²¹

On the other hand, it needs to be recognized that American Lutheranism is in a process of contextualization. The culture and character of America have also shaped our WELS. Our worship and liturgy have peculiarities and distinctions native to our context. Too many naively think that in America our theology is not affected by our context. Somehow that process only happens in Africa, South America, or Asia. This process of inculturation will continue. It is part of the continual clash between Christ and culture.²² We hope and pray that our WELS does not become the realization of Schmucker's dream for "American Lutheranism." The path of Americanization is a dangerous one. The Lutheran emphasis that God saves in baptism, that God gives himself in the supper, that God announces his Word through the sermon, and that God is the best interpreter of his written Word are convictions that are easily lost today in the face of American confidence in human capacity.

PART II: EVANGELICAL EMPHASES

American Evangelicalism

At the Marburg Colloquy in 1529 the battle lines between Zwingli and Luther were drawn. There was supposed agreement on fourteen doctrinal points. Only one difference remained: the sticky point of the real

²⁰ Carl Schalk, *A Handbook of Church Music* (St. Louis, CPH, 1978), p 64.

²¹ Theodore Hartwig, "The Creeds in Contemporary English," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Summer 1989), p 203.

²² In *Worship in the Twenty-first Century*, "Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture," an ELCA publication, it is stated that worship is to be "*transcultural*, the substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. Second, it is *contextual*, varying according to local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is *counter-cultural*, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is *cross-cultural*, making possible sharing between local cultures." (p 5). Such concepts are similar to H. Richard Niebuhr's earlier *Christ and Culture*, where he speaks of Christ and his teachings vis-à-vis culture as the Christ against culture, the Christ above culture, and the Christ of culture.

presence. The long drawn-out discussion led Luther to the summation that these people had a "different spirit." Luther came to the conclusion that the problem was not just one single doctrine - serious as that might in itself be - but an erroneous approach to Scripture and an unwillingness to listen to scriptural truth, a resort to human reason. Luther stood firm, but others were swayed by the alien spirit.

This alien spirit has marched on. The Formula of Concord was an attempt by the Lutheran camp, after the death of Luther, to put its house in order. The Reformed vehemently opposed the Formula, because it so emphatically and distinctly rejected Reformed error, especially in Articles VII and VIII on the Lord's Supper and Christ's person and in Article XI on election.

Pietism and Rationalism further depleted doctrinal concerns in both camps. Finally, efforts to merge the two camps materialized in the Prussian Union of 1817. This union played a large and detrimental role in the first decade of our own church body. The young Wisconsin Synod was a sort of house divided against itself until a clear and decisive position was taken in the last year of the second decade of her existence.

We sometimes use the term "Reformed" as an umbrella term that covers a vast array of theologies, movements, and denominations, including Calvinists, Arminians, Fundamentalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Adventists, Wesleyans, Black Evangelicals, etc. Our assignment here is more narrowly focused: to deal with Arminian Evangelicalism in America or American Evangelicalism. Even here there is a bewildering array of denominational tags and doctrinal emphases. Leonard Sweet has stated, "There are three indisputable facts about the Evangelical tradition in America. First, it is important. Second, it is understudied. Third, it is diverse."²³ It has been stated that defining Evangelicalism has become one of the greatest problems in American religious historiography. To be an Evangelical today is largely a question of mindset and style of personal piety. Bruce Shelley has observed "Evangelical Christianity is not a religious organization. It is not primarily a theological system. It is more of a mood, a perspective and an experience."²⁴ One way or another, the focus is typically on the lifestyle-Evangelical values, habits, and tastes have taken over the public spotlight. They seem to be everywhere.

Various Evangelicals have argued, competed, and even condemned each other. Some will insist that their brand of Evangelicalism is far superior to any other. Nevertheless, most Evangelicals recognize that the Evangelical house has many rooms and that the similarities that bind them are stronger than the differences that pull them apart. Evangelicalism is like an extended family, some of whose members feel close and others estranged from time to time.

To understand this extended family phenomenon we need first to make reference to John Calvin (1564†). For Calvin and his followers, the Word of God was a book of rules that needed to be obeyed. Individuals must personally appropriate the grace that is proclaimed. The more obedience one displayed, the more assurance one had that he or she was one of the elect. The sacraments were mere ordinances that Christians needed to practice to display their total obedience to God's will. Faith was not the confident and joyous assent of human mind, heart, and will to the promises of God, but the logical understanding and persistent doing of God's commands. The greatest joy and deepest comfort for Luther was to be found in the promises of God (divine acts). Calvin was most concerned about the evidences of God's sovereign choice in his life (human acts).

The double election and limited atonement of Calvin left the sinner without the comfort of the gospel of free grace for all. In this absence of gospel comfort, the Calvinist had to somehow assure himself by what he felt and did that God had chosen him for heaven and given him a share in the atonement. Great emphasis was placed on the conversion experience and the life that followed.

In time even some Calvinists sensed that there had to be a more comforting religion. Led by James Arminius (born in the Netherlands four years before Calvin died in 1564), they sought to correct Calvin's seemingly reasonable conclusion that God chose some people to be damned. Arminius maintained that the cause for a person's condemnation is his own rejection of the gospel. Like Calvin, Arminius was a humanist

²³ Leonard I. Sweet, "The Evangelical Tradition in America," in *The Evangelical Tradition in America*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), p 1.

²⁴ Bruce L. Shelley, *Evangelicalism in America*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p 7.

who agreed that theology must be understood in the light of human reason. Thus he came to teach that a person could also accept Christ through his own free will. Since he asserted that faith is gained or lost through the free will of the individual, he further believed that the Holy Spirit does not create or sustain faith through the means of grace. The real power, Arminius maintained, resides in the person who makes the decision whether to believe the gospel or not. Here Arminius totally broke with Luther.

In the early years of the Calvinist-Arminian struggle, Calvinism maintained the upper hand. The Council of Dort condemned the Arminians and endorsed the famed five-point theology of Calvinism. In time, however, Arminians achieved the majority status. Today true disciples of Calvin are rare, and even they often waive the double election paragraph of their old creeds. Arminians rule the "Reformed" roost today in America.²⁵ Their message fills the airwaves, pops up on TV screens day and night, and sells more books than anyone else around. It is the message of mega-churches, Promise Keepers, and the Church Growth Movement. Arminianism emphasizes personal choice in matters of salvation and, as a result, plays down God's appointed means of giving us his grace.

The church has always been tempted to locate the gospel in some place other than Christ and his gifts. American Evangelicals believe that the gospel is the good news about Jesus; however, the good news is not the power of the Holy Spirit, but a proclamation of the gospel that is so logical, joyous, and convincing that people will be logically and emotionally compelled to make wise and right choices. The American Evangelical gospel changes the good news of what Christ has done to a kind of how-to-do-it manual of personal salvation. Characteristically, modern Evangelicals preach "law" as principles for improvement, explanations for failure, and advice on how to get ahead. The gospel is preached as assurance of success and as the promise that God will reward our doing. Too often missing is what God has done in Christ for the salvation of every sinner. For Lutherans the law serves the gospel. For the Arminian Evangelical the gospel serves the law. Lutheran worship is theocentric, while Arminian Evangelicals have transported man into the center of their Sunday experience. These modern Evangelicals direct the alarmed and doubting believer to the experience of his or her "inward illumination" or sanctification.

The perversion of the doctrine of the means of grace always leads to the perversion of the central article of justification. Those who constantly disavow this teaching denounce also the very heart of the Christian religion. Thus the gospel for the Evangelical is the good news that God will renew a person, but renewal is never complete. "Blessed assurance" is not so blessed and not very assured.

Most Reformed theologians subscribe in some degree to Zwingli's maxim, "The Holy Spirit requires no vehicles," and consider the sacraments merely as outward badges of a person's profession to be Christian. Arminians believe that the sacraments are sacred acts Christians do as a witness to their acceptance of Christ. In point of fact, infant baptism is not practiced because babies and young children are not able to make logical and free decisions. The Arminian, on the basis of human reason, concludes that it is inconceivable to believe that something that is finite, like the human nature of Jesus, might be able to share in the properties of something that is infinite, like the divine nature of Jesus. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is reduced from a means of grace to a memorial meal through which believers have some kind of undefined spiritual communion with their Savior.

In the heart and life of the believer, American Evangelicals maintain God will be found. "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart." Or, "Jesus changed my life and he can change yours too." Love, joy, and contentment are feelings by which people demonstrate they have really made a decision for Christ. Some denominations require further demonstrations, such as speaking in tongues and the ability to do miracles. The standard Evangelical finds the reality of God not in the merits of Christ, but in its dim reflection on the shifting sands of the human heart. Faith for the Arminian is not a miraculous, Spirit-wrought assent to the promises of God, but a logical acceptance of God and an emotional attitude towards God.

An experience of conversion has become almost synonymous with Evangelicalism. The Evangelical is expected to have a subjective conversion experience, which is described by terms like "born again," "saved," or

²⁵ True Calvinists (the "Reformed" in the strict sense) find much to criticize in American Evangelicalism. See Mark A. Noll & Cassandra Niemczyk, "Evangelicals and the Self-Consciously Reformed," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton & Robert K. Johnston, WS Publishers, Pasadena, CA, 1997.

"initial sanctification," and then there will be a lifelong experiential life of sanctification. The flip side of this coin is a tendency to diminish the importance of the sacraments and toward a lowered respect for the office of the clergy and for doctrinal complexities. Along with such tendencies there is often emphasis placed upon evangelism and missions, social concern, and ecumenicity.

Many scholars point to the period of classical Pietism as a major source of contemporary Evangelicalism. Perhaps the greatest similarity is that both movements set out to reform lives, not doctrine. Thus, they view their mission differently than those whose purpose is to reform doctrine.

The Liturgy in American Evangelicalism

For many, American Protestantism is divided into two camps: liturgical and non-liturgical. In layman's terms, a liturgical church has a hymn book, set forms of worship, ministers who dress in gowns or robes, possibly a processional or recessional at the beginning or end of the service, and, generally, a sober and dignified method in worship. American Evangelicals typically have a non-liturgical worship. They refrain from those things done in liturgical churches: they offer prayers extemporaneously and avoid a prescribed order of service; ministers dress in suits or informally; no special festivity marks the beginning or end of services; they are marked by a lengthy sermon; the celebration of the Lord's Supper is occasional (monthly or bi-monthly); and the atmosphere is casual.

The Evangelical hostility to liturgical worship dates to the heyday of revivalism and mass evangelism in America. Its roots are especially traceable to George Whitefield and his supporters during the First Great Awakening (1740s). Few historians of that revival study Whitefield's liturgy, and for good reason. The meetings in which Whitefield spoke, whether out in the field, in the market, or within a church, were not services of worship to the triune God. Instead, they were vehicles designed to move individuals to an experience of converting grace. Whitefield's audiences may have sung praise, he may have led them in prayer and confession of sin, and he might have even begun with an invocation, but the chief reason why people came to hear him was to hear his message, not to worship God. James White, the eminent historian of worship, describes this frontier-revival tradition: "The essential discovery of the frontier churches was a form of worship for the unchurched."²⁶ The modern equivalent of Whitefield's revivals is not a church service, but rather the mass meetings sponsored by Promise Keepers.²⁷

Charles Finney²⁸ (1820s and 1830s) expanded on Whitefield's Calvinistic theology and worship. He codified the main feature of the revival, namely, the altar call. The altar call, reserved for revival meetings and still used by Billy Graham and many others today, eventually became a regular feature in Evangelical worship. James White observed that American revivalists "agreed that, in order to move people spiritually, it was also necessary to move them physically."²⁹ Thus it became standard practice for Evangelical churches to conclude sermons with an invitation by the pastor to come forward to accept Christ or to rededicate oneself to a holy life.

Revivalism also reconfigured the purpose of worship for Evangelicals. Worship is primarily orientated to reaching the lost rather than ascribing power, honor, and glory to God. Once the gathering of the saints and the proclamation of the Word gives way to "reaching the lost," worship moves from its proper God-centered orientation to one where pleasing men and women, preferably the lost (or in today's lingo, "seekers"), becomes the over-reaching goal.³⁰

²⁶ James White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) p 171.

²⁷ D. G. Hart, "Why Evangelicals Think They Hate Liturgy," *Modern Reformation*, January/February 1996.

²⁸ Although not a household name to Lutherans, Charles Finney is a great hero to many American Evangelicals. Finney's moralistic thrust envisioned a church that was in large measure an agency of personal and social reform rather than one in which the means of grace were made available to believers. Finney contrived an American gospel that brought practical usefulness to the individual and to the nation. He is the greatest catalyst in the shift from Reformation truths to Arminian revivalism in America. His "New Measures," like the contemporary church growth movement, made human choices and emotions the center of the church's proclamation.

²⁹ *Protestant Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989, p 174.

³⁰ Hart, p 18.

Evangelicals insist that genuine piety or faith must be expressed in an individual's own words. The use of prayers written by dead Christians suggests that someone is going through the motions and hasn't experienced a real outpouring of grace, which would automatically express itself in personal and intimate language. Thus Evangelicals often ridicule the elements of various liturgies as dead and boring. Because forms are not good barometers of the human heart, Evangelicals look for other clues. The clue that seems to be the most convincing is experience, especially a religious experience that testifies to a dramatic and immediate work of God in an individual's life.

Today this frontier tradition dominates radio and TV images of how Christians are to live and worship. Make it lively and entertaining and all will want to join in. American Evangelicals have inherited such pragmatism and freedom from service books from their frontier tradition.

Pentecostalism

Another influencing stream in contemporary American Evangelicalism is that of Pentecostalism, a twentieth century American phenomenon. The main characteristic of this worship is "its unstructured approach to worship, in which the Holy Spirit is trusted to prompt not only the contents of the service, but also its sequence."³¹ Such worship is dominated by speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophecy, ecstatic singing, dancing, or laughter. Here the emphasis is on "the immediacy of the Spirit, and not on scripture. The focus is on the Spirit present in the people."³² The minister here follows the Spirit wherever it may lead in the service and seeks the highest degree of active participation. The service is spontaneous, and the sources are oral rather than written. Such Spirit-filled worship abounds in prayer.³³ It is filled with testimonies of God's activity in one's life. Singing is often comprised of choruses or repeated hymn stanzas. Solo music typically has introspective texts sung with the expectation of spontaneous physical response. Perhaps such worship is popular today because of the apparent immediacy of the Spirit or because of the fervent response of the people. Pentecostal-spawned charismatics have birthed a style of worship that identifies worship with praise and praise with worship. Within such churches the directors of music typically replace the pastor as the worship leader of the congregation, which gathers primarily for the performance of praise. This praise is often divorced from its divinely instituted connection with the absolution, preaching of the Word, and celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Newsweek magazine recently concluded,

Personal experience is what Pentecostalism is all about Pentecostalism is the most democratic form of Christianity. And, from its lower class origins, it has been the blindest to racial differences. The Spirit is available to everyone. Anyone can become a prayer minister. The preacher is there only to initiate the visceral call-and-response between pulpit and pew that gets the Spirit moving. The congregation's sense of release from sin as the Spirit takes hold inside each of them is almost orgasmic In its populist forms, American religion has always prized experience over doctrine.³⁴

For centuries the Holy Spirit was never a sporadic visitor to his church, much less needful of musical introductions. To the Pentecostal the Spirit is the symbol of freedom, experience, and ecstasy. Evangelical Pentecostals seek to know God personally rather than to know about God from doctrines and creeds. Orthodox Christianity trusts in the Son who at a given point in human history became incarnate in human flesh and saved us by a bloody death. He now comes to us in real means of grace.

Today we are confronted with such Evangelical worship styles as new members join our congregations and as old ones ask the loaded question, "What are the growing churches doing?" Such practices and supporting

³¹ White, 192.

³² Ibid, 194.

³³ Ibid, 203.

³⁴ Woodward, Kenneth L., *Newsweek*, "Living in the Spirit," April 13, 1998, p 58.

theologies need to be analyzed before they are employed. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit especially needs to be assessed and reviewed. Today contemporary Evangelical worship seeks pragmatism, bookless liturgy, and a focus on a Spirit filled response.

Michael Horton relates in his recent book, *In the Face of God*,

Humankind wants a god we can feel, touch, see and hear on its own terms, and this is why highly emotional religion has sold well throughout the ages. A distant God seems too irrelevant and impractical to our felt needs. We want a god who is "up close and personal," a buddy who is just as close as our locker room pals. So when we hear the report that God has made an appearance in all his glory, to be touched, experienced, heard and seen directly, we are quick to make airline reservations and become part of the action.³⁵

Some Conclusions on American Evangelical Worship

American Evangelicalism, with its typical abhorrence of creedal formulas and the absence of strong ecclesiastical structures, is always susceptible to the cult of personality, a weakness that has been magnified by TV and video.³⁶ Evangelicals have been infected by the culture of celebrity. Quite often the standard quote is not "Did you read what the Scriptures said," but "Dr. Dobson says . . ." or "Chuck Swindoll related on the radio . . ." or "Robert Schuller says . . ."

Evangelicals today are intoxicated with the theology of glory. We see this most specifically in the Church Growth Movement, but also in celebrities who become Christians, in marches in Washington, and the pride of influence in the halls of government. It can be seen in the massive religious musical productions that pass for divine worship or in the mass crusades where hundreds or thousands make decisions for Christ but few become worshipping disciples.

Horton states,

We "celebrate" our way into God's presence, climbing a sentimental ladder, singing songs that replace Christ and his cross with me and my desire to see God's face, to experience his power, to see his glory, to feel his touch. Meanwhile, despite all the pomp and show, secularism continues its steady march uninterrupted as the noise from the theology of glory drowns out any dissent that might be heard coming from the ranks of the faithful.³⁷

Another common trait of contemporary Evangelical worship is its misplaced emphasis on the sermon. Often labeled "expository sermons based on the biblical text" such sermons seek to distill from the text "biblical principles," which are then applied to current issues facing people's lives as Christians. The sermon is the platform to outline the legalistic "biblical principles" of contemporary Evangelicalism. God has placed into the Bible principles for maintaining health, including exercise and diets, regulating of fat and alcoholic intake; how to acquire and maintain wealth, including principles for investing and saving money; psychological happiness, sinless lives, happy marriages, successful parenting, and the like. Personal problems can be solved by a combination of "biblical principles." Such preaching often centers in stories and not theological truth. Also, its neglect of the sacraments and its subjective gospel, which demotes the body of Christ, teach too many to believe that worship is passive reception of gospel entertainment.

We dare not underestimate the appeal of this approach to our people. Who does not need good advice today? People seek success and instant gratification, but such good counsel belongs to rational knowledge and not the gospel. With Luther we maintain that without Christ, the Scriptures are nothing.

However, we, too, should question why Evangelical churches so often grow faster than Lutheran ones. We dare not forget that they also use the means of grace. Their message may be flawed, but they use it. They

³⁵ Michael Horton, *In the Face of God* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), p 12.

³⁶ Randall Balmer, "Still Wrestling with the Devil," *Christianity Today*, March 2, 1998, p 36.

³⁷ Horton, p 173.

typically stress adult Bible study more than we do. They are not afflicted with the "confirmation-graduation syndrome" as we are. The multiplication of small group Bible studies in many of these churches, often criticized by us because of memories of the Pietistic movement, serves both as a means to get people into the Word of God and as a means of assimilation and accountability (delinquent prevention). The Holy Spirit, after all, works when they study the Bible just as when we do! Nevertheless, the growth and emergence of American Evangelicalism closely parallels today's shift in theology from the divine to the human role in salvation.

Evangelicalism and the Future

Evangelicalism, once regarded as marginal, has now become mainline. The Christian future of Protestant America seems increasingly to belong to Evangelicalism. Some regard this development with disbelief and resentment, while others view it as the salvation of Christianity in the West, giving a new dynamism and purpose to a church that increasingly seems to have lost its way.³⁸ Evangelicalism seems to be positioned to explode into the next millennium. In a 1990 survey of the 500 fastest growing Protestant congregations in the United States, 89% were considered Evangelical.³⁹

This acceleration of Evangelicalism is being felt around the world. In Latin America, traditionally a stronghold of Roman Catholicism, various forms of Evangelicalism are expected to dominate by the year 2025.⁴⁰ Study after study demonstrates that Evangelicalism is drawing people, especially young people, away from mainline churches. Part of the success of Evangelicalism is due to the failures and irresponsibility of the dominant liberal trends in western Christianity since World War II.⁴¹

In Europe, Evangelicalism has had a lesser impact and is often regarded as an English-language movement. In general, however, Evangelicalism is young and strong and views the future with a sense of expectancy and anticipation.

PART III: LUTHERAN-EVANGELICAL CONTRASTS

Lutheran and Reformed Relationships

The Reformed churches have always viewed Lutherans as an incomprehensible phenomenon - the pope is called the antichrist, and yet, altars, crucifixes, sculptures, and paintings remain in Lutheran sanctuaries. Lutherans rightfully critique the mass and cleanse it, but fail to replace it with an entirely new Evangelical service. Such tolerance and timidity are an absolute mystery to the Reformed.

To them the reformation of the Lutherans is incomplete. Lutherans have not yet "renovated" their church. They got justification down pat, but then they stopped. They failed to get back to the Bible. Restoration, to the Reformed, means a return to the proper kind of church body that God has laid down in his Word. They maintain that the external and forensic doctrine of justification by grace through faith has made contemporary Lutheranism guilty of the sin of complacency. To the Reformed it is unfortunate that Lutherans have rejected the pragmatic conclusion of the Pietists that the Christian faith is "done" as much as it is "believed."

Lutherans view themselves typically in the middle-between Catholicism and the Reformed. The Reformed, however, see Lutherans as a backward portion of the one evangelical, reformed church, a church that needs help to finish the process of becoming completely reformed. Lutherans refuse to "complete" their reformation. If they assert that they constitute a church which is entirely separate from the Reformed, they are charged with a lack of charity and brotherliness.⁴² This accusation has been heard from Marburg all the way to countless community ministerial associations today. The Reformed church is typically esteemed as a tolerant

³⁸ Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1995, p 10.

³⁹ John N. Vaughan, "North America's Fastest Growing Churches," *Church Growth Today*, 5 No. 1 (1990), p 1.

⁴⁰ See David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

⁴¹ McGrath, p 184-185.

⁴² Herman Sasse, *Here We Stand*, p 108.

faith community, eager to tune out differences and to cooperate with Lutherans. Lutherans, on the other hand, are stigmatized as being narrow and exclusive. Their confessionalism breeds intolerance and unbrotherliness. Their liturgical traditions and hymnody are culturally irrelevant and socially offbeat. In addition, Lutheran worship "is not attractive to those we need to reach."⁴³

American Evangelicals view the Reformation as an episode in history which, despite its doctrinal diversity (Wittenberg, Zurich, Geneva, and Strasburg movements), produced Protestantism that is essentially unified, despite its variety of confessional tendencies.⁴⁴ In the eyes of the Reformed, all the churches that arose out of the Reformation were essentially one in opposition to the false Roman church of the Middle Ages.

Luther viewed Zwingli's doctrine of the Lord's Supper and the way in which the Lord's Supper was administered in the Zurich Reformation not as a reformation but as a revolution, not as a purification but as a destruction of the church.⁴⁵ The Evangelical Lutheran Church has chosen a clear ecclesiastical life to separate it, not only from Rome, but also from the Reformed churches.

For Luther and Lutherans the doctrine of justification, as *The Apology* states, "alone opens the door to the entire Bible." This was a theological presupposition of the Reformation. This makes the relationship between an understanding of the Scriptures and the doctrine of justification quite clear: Christ is the essential content of the Scriptures. The Reformed church repudiates this. As Karl Barth maintains in his *Dogmatik*, "One might go so far as to say that this is an overemphasis, made with that kind of impetuous willfulness which is at once the secret and danger of Lutheran teaching."⁴⁶

Music

Music is not a means of grace. No form of music is, as such, a means of the Holy Spirit. Lutherans, however, have always recognized that, if music is combined with Christ's word of grace, it can be used by the Holy Spirit to move our hearts, bring us into the fullness of God, and turn our entire life into doxology to the one true God. The spiritual power of music has certainly been acknowledged and proclaimed in every generation. For Lutherans music will have to serve the word of the gospel. Music is not to be used to draw attention to itself; it is out of line if it obscures the gospel.

In contrast to Calvin, who only grudgingly permitted music a place, and Zwingli, who banished it altogether from corporate worship, Luther accorded music the highest place next to theology. The others unfairly saw music as potentially troublesome and in need of control and direction. Luther, in the freedom of the gospel, could exult in this great gift of God, rejoice in its power to praise its Creator and glory in its ability to touch the heart.

It is often difficult to analyze music, since it is the most abstract of the arts and because, normally, it is measured only by one's own taste and experiences. Yet it is clear that there is a clear correlation between musical style and the theological motivation which produces it. This can be seen in contemporary Evangelical music. For example, Amiri Baraka, an advocate and practitioner of high-energy gospel-style music maintains that "getting emotionally removed from one's normal self - that's part of the religion. The majority of people knew they couldn't embrace a God - you couldn't embrace the Creator - unless you actually got into it. And the music was the way you raised the intensity."⁴⁷

For Luther music was an art that one practiced and performed, that delighted the soul and brought life to the gospel. Music to Luther was *viva vox evangelii*, the living voice of the gospel. In the thought and writings of Martin Luther, certain themes or "paradigms of praise" are repeatedly stressed. These shaped his understanding of the role of music in the *cultus Dei*. These "paradigms of praise" include (1) music as God's creation and gift;

⁴³ Charles Evanson, *Evangelicalism and the Liturgical Movement and Their Effect on Lutheran Worship*, Morning Star Music Publishers, St. Louis, MO, 1990, p 15.

⁴⁴ Sasse, p 109.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p 113.

⁴⁶ Karl Barth, *Dogmatik* (first edition 1927), I, 1, p 326.

⁴⁷ Quoted from a video presentation entitled *The Story of Gospel Music* (BBC Television, 1996).

(2) music as proclamation and praise; (3) music as liturgical song; (4) music as the song of royal priests; and (5) music as a sign of continuity with the whole church.⁴⁸

Today for many American Protestants, music is a "means of grace." It is a form of crowd-attracting entertainment. Although rarely broadcast as such, this pervasive view of the relation between music and worship is rampant today in American Evangelicalism. Some "praise and worship" leaders say you must have at least twenty minutes of a certain type of singing to get people into the presence of God. They have a highly structured approach that starts at the "gate" of the temple, with certain kinds of songs. It progresses into the Holy Place and finally the Holy of Holies where one is truly "in the presence of God." This approach is probably one of the most influential worship trends in America today. Music is viewed as a momentary diversion, a psychological change of pace, titillating our ears in ever new and exciting ways.⁴⁹ It is assumed that a church which "attracts" has a "successful" music program. And the way to attract in this competitive market is to entertain. Such an attitude is nourished by the popular view (as first critiqued by Soren Kierkegaard) that sees worshipping members as spectators. The idea is that we come to church to listen, watch, and be entertained. If your church does not measure up, look out. In the realm of the liturgy, however, church music is not primarily something one listens to, but in which the faithful participate.

Luther viewed music as the *viva vox evangelai*, praising God and proclaiming his Word to the world. In part, this is done with music associated with texts that speak clear and distinct words of law and gospel, sin and salvation. Thus, church music is to be functional (not an end unto itself). "Pure" music, i.e., music for its own sake, is a modern concept that is completely alien to biblical thinking.

Since the day of Luther we have gained from the historical studies of thought and music. This has not meant a change in the position of Lutheranism towards music. The principles remain the same; the line of demarcation over against the misuse of music-, however, will need to be drawn more distinctly. In conclusion, the medium, whatever the form, is not the message. The message is the message. The medium, in this case music, is to breathe life from the divinely appointed means of grace and, hopefully, not stagnant air recycled from the religious experiences of fellow Christians. Certain styles of music will be less appropriate than others for worship. The music must serve the text and not overpower it with other messages. Style is not neutral but bound with the substance it proclaims. When any music in worship becomes performance only and a form of entertainment, it ceases to be praise offered to God.

Hymnody

Today Arminian songs are flooding the marketplace and the regular worship of Evangelical churches throughout our land. These hymns typically shift from an objective focus on God's character and his saving work in Christ to the individual believer's subjective experience of God. Often they have lots of "Jesus talk" but little gospel. Such songs and hymnody have also made inroads into Lutheran circles. Young people are attracted to them because they mirror popular music of our day. The music sells. It "works." It should, as it reflects the Arminian theology of glory. Has the true biblical theology of the cross ever been popular in the marketplace?

If the song of the church is to accomplish its Evangelical and devotional function, it must be culturally sensitive and relevant in choosing the right kind of music and poetry to move the hearts of people in their particular cultural context. Now this will obviously vary from culture to culture, from ethnic group to ethnic group, from country to country, from generation to generation. The kind of poetry and music that moves an Aboriginal Lutheran in the center of Australia will differ from the kind of poetry and music that moves an American Lutheran of Germanic descent in the Midwest of the USA. The hymns that speak to my heart may not move my children. Much discernment is required here. And patience. Matters are most complicated in dealing with Generation X and beyond in mufti-cultural America, where we have many

⁴⁸ Carl F. Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*, CPH, St Louis, 1998, p 32.

⁴⁹ Schalk, p 50.

musical sub-cultures but no common musical culture anymore. I do not believe that there are any set criteria to guide us in this. It is, rather, a matter of trial and error. Most of all, it involves the test of time. Most hymns go as quickly as they have come. They speak only to a particular group of people at a particular point in time. Only a few have the power to transcend their original cultural context, and these eventually are sung over the world and appear in one hymnal after another.⁵⁰

With such thoughts in mind, it might be best to take a middle of the road approach to new worship creations in the area of hymns and songs. We should be neither overly condemning nor enthusiastically and naively pushing continually for the creation of the new. Each generation should be encouraged to attend to its unique cultural context and to use Scriptures to create new songs that speak in and out of that cultural setting.⁵¹ With this "long" view we might see that some songs will not just be songs of the few, of a church body or synod, but might also become songs of the church and of the ages - songs of the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Continuity with the past is important to the common memory of the congregation. If there is a complete revolution in singing within a congregation, the common memory of the congregation is shaken and damaged, and certainly the piety of some is disturbed. There is something reassuring in the recitation of old hymns, something that links us with history and tradition.

The Apology XV urges a cautious conservatism, stating that liberty should be used moderately lest offense be given to the weak: "Nothing should be changed in the accustomed rites without good reason, and to foster harmony those ancient customs should be kept which can be kept without sin and without great disadvantage" (Ap. XV, 51). Good and solid hymns will put an emphasis on Christ and his work for us, on God's mercy and grace, on the means of grace, on doctrine and spiritual themes and motifs. Great hymns will emphasize God's grace, not only a person's emotional response to God's grace.

The Lutheran Liturgy: An Adiaphoron?

What exactly is the liturgy? Some have the idea that it is a particular service in a worship book, e.g., page 15 in *Christian Worship*. While this may be an expression of the church's liturgy, the two are not the same. Some also have the mistaken idea that there is but one way to worship with no deviations. Such views fail to recognize the richness of the church's liturgy. The liturgy, handed down over the centuries, is a living, breathing structure. It includes standard texts (e.g., the Creed, *Kyrie*, *Agnus Dei*, *Sanctus*, etc.) that are set within a framework which provides for variety based on the theme of the day as provided in the lectionary. Far from being a straitjacket, the liturgy provides for constancy, as well as creativity. The genius of the church's liturgy is that it is not the product of one time or place, but rather the very wisdom of the church from every time and place. Liturgy is more than "forms and ceremonies, which are in themselves indifferent. It is first and foremost a firm theological content, namely the holy gospel and sacraments of God."⁵²

Must our liturgy be changed? It is certainly acknowledged that liturgy is an adiaphoron. However, questions then begin. It is understood that slight language and music changes can and do occur. It appears, however, that today some would discard the liturgy because their criterion for a successful church is affirmation by contemporary culture. To some, success is not judged by biblical models, but contemporary ones. Numerical growth can be a contemporary gauge of success in which the ends (growth) justify the means (abandoning the historical Western liturgy of the church). Are we somehow trying to give the impression that our faith does not differ much from others, or that what we are teaching is not seriously opposed to what they teach? Even if the liturgy could be made less of a stumbling block to "seekers" and "boomers," we could never remove the greater

⁵⁰ Kleinig, "The Function of Hymnody in its Cultural Context," Conference paper delivered at LCMS Worship Symposium, Jan. 1998, Fort Wayne, IN, p 7.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kurt Marquart, "Liturgy and Evangelism," in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, Fred Precht, Editor, CPH, St. Louis, 1993, p 61 ff.

obstacle: Jesus Christ himself, who is the "stone of stumbling and the rock of offense" (Rom. 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6-8).

While the liturgy is an adiaphoron, we might further state that there are right and wrong reasons for employing it and right and wrong reasons for not employing it. Many Lutheran congregations are abandoning the Lutheran liturgy. The heart issue is not that they abandon the liturgy, but why they do. Are the unregenerate setting the agenda for the worship of Christ's church?

How will we worship? Styles that make our message superficial and transient or debase it to mere entertainment are certainly to be avoided. On the other hand, Christian love and sensitivity, hopefully, will make us aware that the worship of some may be different from ours. Great music of the church will invite all to join in song. It will incorporate a variety of styles and traditions as it relates to people of differing backgrounds. It will be music that reminds us that the song of God's people has been sung throughout the centuries - a song that is not ours alone, because it is a part of God's grace-filled gift of salvation that is offered to all.⁵³

The New Testament does not give us a constitution, nor service and hymnbook. It does give us Jesus Christ, seen and known amidst such ordinary things as water, words, and a meal. The very centrality of both word and table, while not handing us concrete answers to these and other questions, does present to us some characteristics of the model of our celebration. If the worship of the church seems strange and foreign to people of this world, that's because it stems from a culture that, though very much in this world, is not of this world.

The Confessions argue for a distinction between divinely instituted ceremonies and ceremonies established by men.⁵⁴ Human ceremonies must be distinguished from the genuine worship of God; they may not be given the same status as divine commandments (FC SD X, 8, 26). There will be secondary matters in any Christian service. It must be asked how they are arranged, so as to disclose and assist the things that are primary. Therefore, ceremonies are evaluated not by citing a biblical text to determine whether or not it was practiced in New Testament times, but, instead, from the standpoint of the doctrine of justification. Ceremonies which are used to obscure or contradict this doctrine are not to be tolerated, for they rob Christ of his glory as the only Redeemer and enslave consciences in despair (AP. IV, 157). Thus, human ceremonies, no matter how venerable their history, can never be afforded the same status as Word and sacraments.

Lutheran worship at its deepest is comprised of a participating assembly, served by its minister(s), gathered around the Word, table, and the font which speak and proclaim Jesus Christ, the salvation of the world. Moreover, this Christian worship - the proclamation of the Word, the baptismal washing, the Holy Supper - is a saving encounter with Christ. In our worship we meet the living Christ, not merely the memory of one who lived, died, and rose two thousand years ago.

There are many open questions in Christian worship. Uniformity in worship practices is a great blessing for the Lutheran church and certainly for our synod. Nevertheless, our history teaches us that not everything that is disputed or marked by diversity has to be settled uniformly for there to be Christian unity.

It is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies of human institution should be observed uniformly in all places (*Augsburg Confession*, VII).

Sometimes there can be a concern about the "essentials" which pushes legitimate diversity aside; sometimes this may be done for the sake of an illegitimate desire for uniformity. Some have the false idea that "right worship" belongs to my group and me. This shallow, legalistic approach is not echoed in Holy Scripture. In the Revelation to John (21:22-27) the many nations, with all their diverse treasures, are flowing into one city, the city which has God and the Lamb at the center of its worship. Together they praise Christ for creating a new people from every tribe and language and people and nation.

⁵³ Gordon Lathrom, *Open Questions in Worship*, "What are the essentials of Christian worship?" Vol. 1, Augsburg Fortress, p 30.

⁵⁴ AC VII, 3; XXVI, 2, 42-44; XXVIII, 2; AP. VII-VIII, 30-31,46; XIII, 2-6; XV; XXIV, 17-18, 32-43; XXVII, 55-58; SA II/II 1-7; XX/IV, 14; III/XII, 1-3

There are two extremes in the area of uniformity. One extreme is that every church in our fellowship should be able to do whatever it wants when it comes to worship, "to do their own thing" without any regard for any other church in the synod. The other extreme is that somehow every church must worship the same way every Sunday - same liturgy, without any deviation, variety, or change. Both of the extremes are unacceptable. Not to be debated is that the liturgical mode of worship is the best and most natural setting for the priceless jewels of the means of grace.

CONCLUSION

We stand at the end of one millennium of faith in Christ and look out towards the beginning of a new one. Scholars tell us that we have moved into the post-modern era. Today the very fiber of our culture - our values, entertainment, government, music, and arts have all turned from reason to emotion. The hallmarks of our age are individualism, autonomy, and diversity. There is, supposedly, no such thing as absolute truth. Added to this are the dangers of passivity (TV and computer) and isolation, along with a loss of the art of singing. Our culture is "consumer orientated, with people who carefully guard their individualism yet hunger after community; it is a culture built around entertainment, creating expectations that all human transactions will occur in the entertainment mode; it is a culture which fosters relativism, that is, the willingness to embrace other opinions, often at the expense of one's own."⁵⁵

Authentic Lutheranism is neither "old" nor "new," "liberal" nor "conservative." It is "confessional." We dare not seek to be old-fashioned for the sake of tradition nor "new" as an attempt to redefine ourselves in more worldly correctness. We are not to be so "liberal" as to allow people to do whatever they want, nor so "conservative" as to preserve the status quo for the sake of harmony.

It is true that liturgical practice at all times must build upon what it has discovered from earlier epochs. The sad results of the clash between Orthodoxy and Pietism were that they became mutually exclusive and that Lutheranism lacked the energy to produce a real reform whereby the conservative and the reforming elements could have been reconciled in the proper manner. The church of the evangelical reformation wishes to be neither a new-fangled sect nor a biblicistic one, which imagines that it can bypass the whole intervening history of the church. Piercing questions remain for us. "Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people who have been reached by the gospel?" (1 Cor 14:36).

In this present debate it appears that, as the church seeks to be relevant in this generation, it is running to popular culture for advice and counsel. The central message of Lutheranism, namely, justification, must show forth clearly and not become lost in a world of entanglements. Nothing in the liturgy dare cloud or contradict the fundamental confession of the truth of the gospel. We express justification and all our theology by the words we use and the songs we sing. Our service is not a matter of indifference but confession. Yet sound theology is not bound by culture or tradition. Rather, it transcends both culture and tradition. The debate between transcendence and relevance will continue. Congregations need to learn and review what Lutheran worship is all about. It is dangerous when a congregation just does the worship service without knowing why. Many and severe are the dangers that arise when a congregation's only explanation of why it worships as it does is "Because that's the way we've always done it."

The effectiveness of the Church's worship ultimately does not depend on the quality of its execution. Nevertheless, appreciation for the historic worship of our church is hurt when the service is done "by rote," with a lack of feeling and joy, or when the pastor stumbles over words, or does not speak clearly and loudly with proper emphasis on what he is saying. Practice by the pastor and organist is essential. The goal is excellence. A well-done liturgical service lifts the spirit and draws one into the very presence of God who wishes to be with us in Word and sacrament. A poorly conducted liturgical service, on the other hand, will detract from the very necessary hearing of the Word and may well lead to comments that worship is "wooden and unimaginative."

⁵⁵ *Worship in the Twenty-first Century*, p 7.

It is the task of the church to address the age in which it lives. It does no good to proclaim salvation in a language no one understands. Using styles from Arminian Evangelical churches brings danger. Apparently innocent surface changes may be a sign of more serious mischief deeper down. At risk are not only our worship but also our theology. Is not the *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the principles of worship express the principles of faith") valid also for our age? To draw a line around one's particular style of worship and claim it as part of the substance of one's faith is also clearly erroneous. The question of Schmucker regarding how to be a Lutheran in America is again being raised. The answer for his generation was postponed by boatloads of immigrants. As in past eras in the New World the temptation is to look to American Evangelicalism for un-nuanced answers. In America today (except perhaps in the Midwest) it is hard to be a Lutheran. Lutherans have never been a part of the establishment. Our faith is in many respects a deep one and, unfortunately, not typically a home for those who are shallow in faith. It has been said, "Lutherans have not been able to develop a truly American Lutheran theology."⁵⁶ The uniqueness of Lutheranism leaves us isolated on the American church landscape. If a classically orthodox Christian subculture in America seeks to effectively reach the larger culture as the great commission demands, limitations will need to be recognized and choices made amidst available options.

This debate will continue throughout our lives. People want simple answers, but there are many gray areas. Myriad denominations are experiencing worship wars. I would hope that in place of war we might experience communitarian conversation that might result in a blending of old and new treasures to be found in the word and music. Let our practice be driven by our theology. May the historical experience of the church warn us to be slow in bartering our liturgical treasures for the illusion of huge evangelistic successes. God willing, we are at the dawn of a bright, new, and glorious Christian millennium and not experiencing the twilight era of confessional Lutheranism.

⁵⁶ Mark Ellingsen, "Lutheranism" in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ch. 13.