

The Adiaphoristic Controversy:

Its Resolution in the Formula of Concord, Article X and Implications for the WELS Today

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An understanding of the history of the Formula of Concord is necessary neither to confess it with our mouths nor to adhere to its teachings. A quick look at our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod underscores that. Our *quia* confession is firm, no matter how shaky our grasp of Bente's "Historical Introductions" to the Triglott is. But when the controversy under discussion arises because of the historical-political forces of its day, a knowledge of its background can be helpful in avoiding honest, yet detrimental, misunderstandings and misapplications.

The Historical Background of Formula of Concord, Article X

The Saxon rulers traditionally divided up their realms among all their sons. This custom broke Luther's Germany into a patchwork of increasingly smaller duchies, electorates and landgraves. Shifting alliances and unreliable religious loyalty were the norm. Estates notable for our discussion are Saxony (Ducal and Electoral) and Hesse. Significant towns were:

Electoral Saxony: (Wittenberg, Torgau, Muehlberg, Altenburg, Zwickau, Jena, Weimar, Gotha, Erfurt)

Ducal Saxony: (Leipzig, Meissen, Dresden)

Hesse: (Marburg, Wurzburg)

Magdeburg

Wurtemberg

Brunswick-Wolfenbuettel

In 1485 Saxony was divided among two brothers, Ernest and Albert the Brave. The brothers had ruled jointly until the Emperor granted Ernest the Electorate. Ernest, in control of the Electoral Circle (Wittenberg), permitted Albert to choose two of the remaining three portions of Saxony. Albert chose Upper Thuringia and Meissen, leaving Ernest with Wittenberg and non-contiguous Thuringia. Subsequent negotiations provided a neutral corridor east of Leipzig jointly ruled between the two, a constant source of irritation.

Religious divisions dwarfed the physical difficulties of such interlocked nations. George of Ducal Saxony was a determined foe of Luther (especially after the Peasant Rebellion of 1525), and favored the Roman Catholic Church. The religious ties of Maurice, his nephew, are difficult to read. Maurice was for Maurice, greatly harming the Lutheran cause in his seizure of the Electorate, and continuing to harm it when he appeared to have returned to the Lutheran fold. Augustus, highly esteemed as a central figure in pressuring the theologians into colloquies which produced the Formula of Concord, was just as surely responsible for delaying the same colloquies by his earlier, blind adherence to Melancthon. In Hesse, Philip I (Luther's bigamist) could be as ambiguous in his faith as Saxony's Maurice. His leanings towards Calvinism continued under Philip II of Rheinfels and led to Maurice of Hesse (outside the scope of our paper) leading his people firmly into Calvinist ranks.

Outside pressures from the Holy Roman Emperor propelled events in Saxony and Hesse. After the battle of Muehlberg (1547), the Emperor punished rulers of both Electoral Saxony (John Frederick) and Hesse (Philip I) with long imprisonments. The Emperor transferred Electoral Saxony from John Frederick, the Ernestine branch, to the Albertine brand of the family, Maurice. Yet another Saxon ruler, John Frederick II, later suffered in the Emperor's prison and was executed. Further imperial meddling divided Saxony among the

sons of executed John Frederick II and the dying John William. Of the four rulers in Saxony from the death of Luther to the adoption of the Formula of Concord, two were imprisoned (one of whom was executed) and one suffered drastic division of his territory at the hands of the Emperor. These were troubled times as the religiously untrustworthy Albertine branch of Saxony progressively gained political power. Yet, by the grace of God, the Lutheran cause ultimately triumphed.

At the death of Luther, war broke out between the Imperial forces and the defensive Smalcald League, headed by Philip I of Hesse and John Frederick. Though the League's forces were formidable, their leadership was splintered and ineffective in the face of treachery from Maurice of Ducal Saxony. He had launched an invasion on John Frederick's Electoral Saxony. On April 24, 1547, Imperial forces clashed with the League near Muehlberg, 39 miles upstream on the Elbe. Imperial forces captured both Philip I and John Frederick. Only by the capitulation of Wittenberg a month after the battle was John Frederick's death sentence commuted to imprisonment. Maurice was now firmly in control.

After the Emperor's victory, the Papacy lost no time in consolidating its religious gains. Within a year of Wittenberg's surrender, John Agricola headed the committee writing the Augsburg Interim. Lutheran clergy could keep their wives and the Lord's Supper would be administered in both kinds. In all else, Roman ceremonies and customs were restored, papal supremacy by divine right was upheld and all doctrines were to be accepted according to Rome's dogma, although in the mildest, vaguest terms.¹ Philip I of Hesse was released when he agreed to the Augsburg Interim. The Emperor ruthlessly enforced the Interim in the south. Cities faced loss of liberties and privileges if they rejected it. Clergy were banished or imprisoned. Churches manned by Interimist preachers stood empty as the people refused to attend worship.

The situation was explosive in Wittenberg. Maurice owed the Emperor his crown, yet the people blamed him for the imprisonment of saintly John Frederick and refused to comply with the Augsburg Interim. Into the breach stepped Melanchthon, pressured by Maurice, pressured by the closure of the University of Wittenberg and pressured by his very nature.

Melanchthon was both the most natural and the worst choice to save the Lutheran cause. With Luther dead barely two years, Melanchthon was the only recognized heir. He had penned the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. He was the head of the University at Wittenberg. Yet his temperament was that of a professor, not that of a prophet, like Luther. This was already clear in his failure to handle the Zwickau prophets in 1521, initially condoning them and then delaying action on them until Luther could be on the scene. "In place of dealing with difficulties, Melanchthon always tried to evade them."² Firm and confident in his own faith, he relied more on his reason and diplomacy in matters that concerned the welfare of the church. "Steadfast in doctrine—submission in all else for the sake of peace."³

The Leipzig Interim of 1548, penned by Melanchthon, toned down the language of the Augsburg Interim, while changing nothing. With ambiguous, even false, formulas it restored the seven Roman sacraments, included works as necessary for salvation, made faith one of many Christian virtues, conceded the primacy of the pope and reestablished all the ceremonies and observances of the mass. All this, in Melanchthon's view, to shield the weak from persecution.

Fierce opposition, centered around Flacius, arose to the Leipzig Interim. He maintained matters of indifference become matters of principle and conscience when they are "demanded as necessary, or when their introduction involves a denial of the truth, an admission of error, an infringement of Christian liberty, an encouragement to errorists and discouragement to the confessors and an offense to the weak."⁴ Flacius and the other opponents to the Interim were driven out of Wittenberg and took refuge in nearby, independent Magdeburg. From there they continued their withering attacks on Melanchthon and the Wittenbergers. The weak could not be strengthened in their weak faith by teaching and persuading them to deny it.⁵ A government

¹ Willard Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions*, p. 292.

² Theodore E. Schmauk, *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church*, p. 614.

³ F. Bente, "Historical Introductions," p. 98

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114

does not have the authority to forbid pastors to preach the pure Gospel.⁶

After two years, the Emperor ordered Maurice to silence Flacius by seizing Magdeburg. By this time Maurice had enough. On April 5, 1552 Maurice's army, raised for the attack on Magdeburg, invaded Imperial lands in the south, causing the Emperor to flee Germany. In the ensuing Peace of Passau, the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims were dropped. Politically, they became dead letters. The peace was legalized by the Peace of Augsburg with its famous, *cuius regio, eius religio*.

But the theologians did not forget as easily.

For the next twenty-five years theological wars raged as the implications of the Interims, stripped of their political element, were weighed. Were matters of indifference truly indifferent in the face of persecution?

The Adiaphorists, led and sheltered by Melancthon, continued their teaching under the protection of Maurice and his successor (and brother) Augustus. The University of Wittenberg flourished, reaching enrollment levels even higher than that before the war.⁷ Melancthon, because of his monumental dogmatics text, *Corpus Doctrinae Christianae*, held sway in Hesse, Pomerania and Brandenburg as well as Electoral Saxony. This reputation provided him the opportunity to treat the Augsburg Confession as his own work, emending and changing formulas to fit his desire for reconciliation not only among the Lutherans, but also among the Calvinists and the Papacy. Cornered by Flacius, Melancthon admitted in a letter to Flacius that the Anti-Adiaphorists were right, but to the end he refused to publicly admit his error.⁸ Perhaps there was too much reputation at stake and too many positions at the University of Wittenberg to protect. Perhaps the aged theologian recoiled at what he perceived as overreaching attacks of a rash, young man, a former student and colleague at Wittenberg. At Melancthon's death in 1560, some were putting forward the body of his work as another confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Efforts at truly uniting the Lutheran Church would not go forward until Augustus saw through Melancthon's reputation as the heresies piled up.

The Anti-Adiaphorists, led by Flacius, continued their lengthy and strident battle, but by 1561, John Frederick II had enough, exiling Flacius and the more militant Anti-Adiaphorists.

The field was left to a group of men, students of Melancthon, but weaned from his personal views by years of experience away from Wittenberg. From their pens would come the Formula of Concord after a thorough study of the Scriptures and years of consultation. Turning their backs on Melancthon's dream of unity among larger Christendom, they would focus their attention on unifying the Evangelical Church, not with vague words and compromising formulae, but with true unity in doctrine.

In 1573 Jakob Andreae of Wuerttemberg published his "Six Sermons." In part they were a reworking of an earlier confession he had authored in the hope of using it to unify the Evangelicals, though his former effort was almost universally attacked. This time, he attempted to approach unity not in terms of scientific, theological investigation, but through the common, evangelical consciousness.⁹ The subtitle of "Six Sermons" is telling. "How a Simple Pastor and a Common Christian Layman Should Deal with Them [Divisions] on the Basis of His Catechism, So That They Do Not Become a Scandal For Them." He treated the controversies plaguing the Evangelical Church, named errorists and resorted to the Catechism. He saw it as a pastoral task rather than a theological one. The son of a blacksmith was starting on the path that would forge unity.

Six Sermons won a hearing for Andreae as a confessor of the faith. Chemnitz maintained the proper form needed was a confession, a task Andreae immediately took up, redrafting Six Sermons into his Swabian Concord. Securing the approval of theologians at Tuebingen and Stuttgart, he sent it to Chemnitz for discussion among the churchmen of Lower Saxony. Chrytaeus and Chemnitz redid the Lord's Supper and Free Will, along with many other changes, creating the Swabian-Saxon Concord of 1575. The Swabians objected to the ragged style and Melancthon quotations, preferring quotes only from Luther. At the urging Elector Augustus, newly repentant after discovering the extensive Crypto-Calvinism among his Wittenberg clergy, theologians convened at Maulbronn in Wuerttemberg. The resulting document, the Maulbronn Formula, was much shorter, lacked

⁶ Ibid., p. 109.

⁷ Schweibert, p. 605.

⁸ Bente, op. cit., p. 112.

⁹ Schmauk, p. 651.

technical Latin terms, removed Melancthon references and no longer treated controversies outside the Evangelical Church. With a favorable review from Andreae, and further suggestions from Chrytaeus, Chemnitz and Nicholas Selnecker (Augustus' theology professor from Leipzig), Augustus called for a general convention of theologians, held at Torgau in early summer, 1575. The resulting Torgau Book was essentially the Swabian-Saxon Concord with additional material from the Maulbronn Formula. Chemnitz, Andreae, Selnecker and Chrytaeus signed it as their personal confession. Sent to Augustus for review, he forwarded it to all the Evangelical princes and estates for review. The chief complaint: too long! Andreae, with Augustus' consent, summarized it as we now know it, the Epitome of the Formula of Concord. In March of 1577 Chemnitz, Andreae and Selnecker crafted the final version which became the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord.

From Brunswick to Pomerania, Mecklenberg to Wuerttemberg, the Evangelical Church was united. And troubled Saxony could now rest in the heart of it.

An Examination of Article X

What is the question Article X treats?

“The chief question, however, has been whether, in time of persecution and in case of confession, even if the enemies of the Gospel have not reached an agreement with us in doctrine, some abrogated ceremonies, which in themselves are matters of indifference and are neither commanded nor forbidden by God, may nevertheless, upon the pressure and demand of the adversaries, be reestablished without violence to the conscience, and we may thus have conformity with them in such ceremonies and adiaphora.¹⁰

It affirmed.

1. Church rites neither commanded nor forbidden by God have been established only for the sake of propriety and good order. They are, in and of themselves, no divine worship, nor even a part of it.
2. The congregation of God anywhere and at any time can change such ceremonies according to its circumstances for the benefit of the congregation of God.
3. Avoid frivolity and giving offense, especially to the weak in faith.
4. In time of persecution, when a plain confession is required, we should not yield to the enemies in regard to such adiaphora. For in such a case it is no longer a question of adiaphora, but concerning the truth of the Gospel, Christian liberty, sanctioning idolatry and prevention of offense to the weak.
5. No Church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles.

If church rites are not even a part of divine worship, worship must be only what God has commanded, what God gives and what God imparts to those who gather before him. Worship is when God comes to us with his grace, promising forgiveness of sins, life and every blessing. “These means actually constitute the liturgy.”¹¹ Therefore, divine worship is the Word of God, the Lord's Supper, Baptism, Absolution. So some would have us believe--Worship is sacramental, alone.

But, like Andreae, go back to the Catechism. In Baptism, part Third, Luther writes: “It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water and faith which trusts this Word used with the water.” Faith, produced by God's work (“This is the work of God, to believe in the one he has

¹⁰ Formula of Concord, Epitome: X:2. All quotations from Concordia Triglotta.

¹¹ John Pless, “The Relationship of Adiaphora and Liturgy in the Lutheran Confessions,” p. 197.

sent.”) responds in worship. This worship is the work of God where the Holy Spirit comes to us through the Gospel, he creates faith in our hearts, the obedience God looks for and provides, he strengthens faith and moves faith to responsive action. “True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).” Stripping worship of its ceremony and ritual reveals worship to be God coming to us and us responding to God. Worship is both sacramental and sacrificial.

The Solid Declaration (SD X:19) alludes to this in its citation of Luther’s Smalcald Articles. Luther would permit Roman bishops if they were true bishops, that is, bishops who attended to the preaching, teaching, baptizing and administering the Lord’s Supper—the very thing the minions of the Anti-Christ would not do! The Evangelical Church would cling only to the Gospel. The Roman Church would cling only to its rites and ceremonies, seldom useless, generally harmful, as they obscured the Gospel with meritorious acts of men.

The purpose of church rites is to provide order and a sense of propriety where the means of grace can be offered, to assist in teaching the Gospel to the people of God gathered around the Word. Consider the traditional baptismal ceremony. The ceremonies which we have freely chosen to use have great benefits in displaying the Gospel. Admonition declares the need for baptism. The sign of the cross reminds us of Jesus’ death as payment for our sins. The sponsors are addressed to encourage the child in his faith. We pray for the new Christian. None of these are useless or harmful to the faith. Yet all of them can be stripped away and there would still be a baptism, as the formula for Emergency Baptism proclaims. In urgent cases any Christian may administer Holy Baptism. Apply water to the person and say: I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”¹²

Much is made of the connotations of the word, “worship.” It turns our attention to the person who recognizes what is worthy.¹³ The focus of worship is man’s actions towards God, just the opposite of our confessions. So say those who would see worship as only sacramental. Would any other word really be much better? Many put forth the German—Gottesdienst, “the service of God.” God serves us with his Gospel in Word and sacrament. Our Supplement is introducing this phrase into our circles, “Divine Service.” Yet natural man can just as easily turn Gottesdienst on its head, too, making and emphasizing it as the service man renders God. *Cultus dei* fares no better. A word does not exist that the devil cannot corrupt. The only safeguard we have is to return to the confessional truth, worship is what God does as he comes to us with his grace and the response of faith the Holy Spirit rouses within us.

The people of God do not have the power to change the sacramental portions of the worship. God will have his way and his way is to pour out his love upon us in Christ. But the people of God do have the power and right to change these customs and rites as best fits their needs and circumstances for the furtherance of the Gospel in their midst as their response of faith takes different forms. The question is always “How can the Gospel be set forth more clearly to the people of God in this place and in this age?” It is not a matter of what is permitted or not permitted, for then we are outside the area of adiaphora. Nothing impermissible will conform to God’s commands—it must have no place in the setting for the Gospel. The very idea of permission being given detracts from the freedom the people of God have to establish, change and abandon these customs and rites.

The Evangelical Church showed the beneficial function of customs and rites as they sometimes changed the language of the service so the rural and unlearned could understand the Word of God read to them, while maintaining the Latin where the city people could understand it. Abolishing prayers to the saints and abandoning useless bells, candles and vestments did not lie in the area of adiaphora, for they were either harmful to the Gospel or useless in presenting it to the congregation.

Again, in some circles much is made of the German, *Gemeinde*, which our translation renders “congregation,” very much in the sense of “local congregation.” Far from being a Missourian bias,¹⁴ *Gemeinde* (or the archaic *Gemeine* in the original 1580 Dresden edition of the Book of Concord), did mean “congregation” in the middle German, with a long and extensive heritage, judging by the *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob*

¹² Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 544.

¹³ James Brauer, *Worship, Gottesdienst, Cultus Dei*, p. 292.

¹⁴ Matthew Harrison, “Lutheran Liturgical Uniformity in Relation to Church Polity in the Augustana and the Formula,” p. 13.

Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, the equivalent of our OED, not “community” in the illocal, conceptual sense as in the modern German. Yet, the general use of the word as given in the dictionary may not be the sense of the word used in the church. Context determines the meaning.

This section of the Epitome grants the local congregation (*Gemeinde*) of God of every place and of every time the power to change its customs which are adiaphora for the benefit of the same congregation (*Gemeinde*) of God. There is a distributive sense in *jedes Orts* (every place) and *jeder Zeit* (every time). The Solid Declaration summarizes citations from Luther’s Smalcald Articles (“Just as little as we can worship the devil himself as Lord and God, we can endure his apostle, the Pope, or Antichrist, in his rule as head or lord (SD X:20),” in this way, “Everyone can understand what every Christian congregation (*Gemeinde*) and every Christian man, especially in time of confession, and most of all, preachers, are to do or to leave undone, without injury to conscience, with respect to adiaphora (SD X:25).” Lest we belabor the point, but one more example. The Epitome (X:12) rejected as contrary to God’s Word when it is taught when adiaphora are abrogated in such a manner as though it were not free to the congregation (*Gemeinde*) of God to employ one or more in Christian liberty, according to its circumstances, as may be most useful at any time to the Church (*Kirche*). The actions of a local congregation (*Gemeinde*) has ramifications for the larger body of Christ (*Kirche*). Christian congregations have always had this power by virtue of the Gospel. They use it for their own benefit. In a conversation with a Sem prof whose German is better than mine by a magnitude of ten, I made the statement, “I am trying to find how best to get the Gospel to these people.” “That’s *Gemeinde!*” “These people” before me, “these people” in the pews, the *Gemeinde Gottes*. Where a larger, more illocal sense of Church is needed, the confessions use *Kirche*, as in the final statement of affirmation in the Epitome. “No Church (*Kirche*) should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other (Ep X.7).” The translator reflected this illocal concept by his capitalization of Church. The Roman Catholic Church should not condemn the Evangelical Church for its relative paucity of external ceremonies not commanded by God. The modern sniffing by superior Roman Catholics over lowly Lutherans adding the Doxology to the Lord’s Prayer comes to mind as an example of what the Epitome condemns.

Yet the local congregation cannot change its customs at a whim and without forethought and consideration for the wider fellowship. The weak may not understand that a change in customs which are truly adiaphora does not mean a change in doctrine. The weak may not even understand that the adiaphora are not even part of the spiritual worship of God. In this the Evangelical Churches showed tremendous restraint, even a generation after Luther. Change had to follow careful instruction and consultation. There was also an earthly factor in that the state church had to present a relative conformity in customs within its territory to avoid running afoul of the 1555 Peace of Augsburg as defined by the Emperor and Pope.

It is here, rather than in the vocable, “*Gemeinde*,” that the local congregation must look beyond itself and weigh the wisdom of contemplated changes and measure the impact they would have on the wider fellowship, however wide that fellowship is construed.

What is to prevent headstrong actions on the part of the local congregation? Humanly speaking, very little. Not guidelines imposed by men outside the congregation who claim authority over the use of adiaphora in that congregation. Not even the common wisdom, however winsome it may sound. Only the Gospel working in the hearts of the people of God gathered around the Word will move them to love their fellow brothers and sisters as they love themselves. Anything else can only introduce a legalism which will slowly, but certainly, kill the Christian’s freedom and obscure the Gospel. In Sunday worship, I am concerned about “these people” in front of me, but I am also concerned for “those people” in front of you who are “these people” to you.

How difficult it is for those interested in maintaining order and propriety to completely trust the Gospel. Francis Pieper bases his argument on common wisdom. “Self-evidently a local congregation will, as far as feasible, conform to the customs in surrounding congregations of the true faith in order thus to confess outwardly the agreement in doctrine and to avoid confusing members who transfer from one congregation to

another.”¹⁵ Brauer can beautifully confess, “When believers assemble and among them the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to Christ’s command, there we find the Holy Christian Church.”¹⁶ Yet he is not writing in a way in which he cannot be misunderstood when he writes, “The fellowship of faith is recognized by its outward objects and rites around the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ’s command.”¹⁷ Others resort to the testimony of history to reveal the intent of the confessors, most notably Chemnitz who, as superintendent of the Brunswick churches laid out for them a lengthy and mandatory order of service to be followed.¹⁸ He probably had his reasons, and the daily realities of supervising a state church must befuddle Lutherans in 21st century America long disentangled from the control of the state, but such a tactic today would seem legalistic.

But we do not read the confessions through the filter of subsequent history. Later events do not change the sense of the Confessions, else Melancthon’s *Variata* would have confessional status among us. Though the church’s history can illustrate how doctrine was perceived and taught, though history can be instrumental in tracing the development of confessing the pure doctrine, the descriptions of the church in action by itself holds no confessional status before us. We also have determined not to depart even a finger’s breadth from the subjects or the phrases which the Book of Concord contains.

Adiaphora cease to be matters of indifference in times of persecution. Then a plain and steadfast confession is required of every congregation, every Christian, every theologian and pastor. Then the Gospel is at stake and nothing may be yielded to the enemies of the Gospel who are persecuting us.

With this paragraph the Formula of Concord settled the Adiaphoristic Controversy. Those who had succumbed to the pressures of the Interims had sinned. Their rebuke decades earlier was justified. They needed to repent. Melancthon’s attitude towards the Leipzig Interim, “steadfast in doctrine—submission in all else for the sake of peace” was not only an impossibility, but also false teaching which had caused hardship and grief upon the Evangelical Church for thirty years and had provided a nursery for pride and vain-glory from which a weed patch of false teachings had grown. Folly is proved wrong by her children. The opposition of the people, the choice of pastors to be dismissed and exiled rather than submit to the Interims, were approved. Though he erred elsewhere and his spirit was not as charitable as it could be, Flacius was vindicated on this point.

Applications to the WELS Today

Proud and satirical wit can be blinding, especially when it is turned towards worship. “After looking at the Supplement, we won’t be dismissing contemporary music solely on the grounds of inferior quality any more.” “Just give the new hymnal (of 1993) a red cover and start a service on page 15 and nobody will recognize the difference.” “If the old hymnal (of 1941) was good enough for Luther, it’s good enough for us.” Dull and plodding love mixed with humility lights the way. Why is it so difficult for us to recognize the curse of sin God uttered in the Garden also applies to our efforts at worship? It will never be the best in a world of thistles and thorns. We will always be striving to make the sacrificial portion of worship better.

In tracing Andreae’s role in the Formula of Concord, it is striking that he avoided the egos, vitriol and career aspirations of a theological spitting match. He approached it as a common pastor concerned that his common people not be scandalized, so he resorted to the simple faith of the Catechism. As the WELS approaches worship in the 21st century, we need to keep that pastoral heart. There are no names to be made in picking a fight over this. No careers will be furthered, no petty jealousies quenched, no positions kept or eliminated. It is not a question of how high or how low can we go. Nor is it a question of what is permitted and what is off-limits. The question is and always must be, “How can I best get the Gospel across to these people?” To approach the issue of worship in the WELS as though it were a controversy to be battled over by the schoolmen is like using a baseball bat to swat mosquitoes. People will be unnecessarily hurt and some one will

¹⁵ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. III, p. 283.

¹⁶ Brauer, p. 290.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹⁸ James Wadell, *The Struggle to Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church*, p. 97.

finally have the guts to take the bat out of your lunatic hands and send you to your room.

In a related vein, scholastic dissection and reassembly to the point of novelty should raise the suspicion of all. The assertion of some that worship is only sacramental is novel and should be recognized as such.¹⁹ The discovery among some in our own circles that praise is proclamation.²⁰ should not undermine or confuse the (correct) view of the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of worship. Any teacher worth his salt knows he has taught the lesson when his students echo back his teachings to him. “Now they have it,” he thinks. That the people of God show they have it by praising God with Gospel proclamation should not be that earth-shaking. Nor should it move us away from our traditional way of looking at worship in terms of sacramental and sacrificial.

From Article X’s definition of adiaphora, we can stop our indifferent excuse of bad lyrics as poetic license and treat them as we would any false doctrine—expunge them without prejudice, be it in verses from Count Zinsendorf or the refrain of the latest and greatest contemporary Christian band to hit the Top Ten.

The discussion on *Gemeinde* (though it should be handled by someone who knows his German) does reveal the tension Christians will always feel between the exercise of their Christian liberty and their concern for the weak. No one can lay down rules for it. It does seem a little far-fetched to talk about the WELS, an entity that spans the continent, in the same terms as, say, Chemnitz establishing the liturgical order for Brunswick. Looking at the distances (and time it took to travel between these centers of Lutheranism), our presently constituted conferences or (even better) circuits seem to offer a more fitting parallel. One can certainly fault the innovator who utters not a peep about his intentions to his circle of brothers for their perusal, evaluation and suggestions. One can also fault the naysayer who never voices concerns save for the largest, most public forum.

And finally, a plea. Let us not belittle the sufferings of the Evangelical Church leading up to the Formula of Concord by claiming the *status confessionis* they truly faced—maintaining doctrine within their own fellowship at the risk of liberty, employment and homeland—is similar to our situation today. The church will always struggle with the world and the *opinio legis*. That is not *status confessionis*. *Status confessionis* is when those within our fellowship claim a truth that is not the truth, when those outside our fellowship seek by force to impose teachings, whether by word or by practice, impose teachings foreign to the Gospel upon us. We are strangers to such circumstances today, unless we choose to create them among ourselves. If we do not live in an imagined, golden age of heroic, confessional conflict as a former generation did, contesting for the truth in the Synodical Council, at least rejoice and gladly lay humble hands to the plow Jesus has set before us.

¹⁹ James Tiefel, “The Lutheran Liturgy: An Adiaphoron?”, p. 308.

²⁰ Bryan Gerlach. In an electronic note he comments on the conclusion of a School of Worship, Lecture 1: “The definition of worship most familiar in WELS describes the sacramental and sacrificial dimensions of worship – God coming to us, and our coming to God; God speaks, we respond. While this remains a valuable definition and distinction, the definition that follows is broader and more valuable. What may be a surprise to many trained in WELS before 2000 is how frequently this broader definition occurs both in historic Lutheran sources and recent articulations... praise is proclamation and proclamation is praise.”

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