

# The Liturgy and Its Use in Our Church

## Introduction

The Wisconsin Synod never wanted to be a liturgical church. The three pastors who met in Milwaukee in December of 1849 to form a new church body were not inclined, either by their personal experience or theological training, to encourage the classic liturgical forms of the Lutheran church orders. By the time John Muehlhaeuser, William Wrede, and William Weinmann completed their studies at the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft in Barmen, much of Lutheran Germany had abandoned both the confessional and liturgical heritage of the Reformation. It wasn't only a lack of experience and training, therefore, that prompted the early liturgical disinterest in the new synod. Had they identified liturgical worship as a priority, they might have sought instruction from nearby pastors who were experts in the field. In 1850 Friedrich Lochner began a 26-year tenure as pastor of Trinity Church, just across the Milwaukee River from Muehlhaeuser's Grace Church, and Lochner, a protégé of the liturgical giant William Loehe, was the liturgical expert in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.<sup>1</sup> By 1851 Wrede's closest neighbor was Ottomar Fuerbringer, pastor at Trinity, a few miles north on the Granville Road (Freistadt). As one of the preeminent theologians of the Missouri Synod, Fuerbringer was a critical supporter of C. F. W. Walther's 1856 *Kirchen-Agende*, which laid the foundation for Missouri's determined liturgical practice. The Wisconsin men were not looking for liturgical training, however. They would have viewed the Reformation worship models espoused by Loehe, Walther, Lochner, and Fuerbringer as part of a confessional standard they did not espouse. Until late in life Muehlhaeuser considered the Lutheran Confessions to be "paper fences"<sup>2</sup> and pointedly added this paragraph to the Grace Church constitution:

Be it resolved that our congregation, founded on the ground of the apostles and prophets, whereon Jesus is the cornerstone, makes confession of the Augsburg confession and Luther's Small Catechism. However, never may or shall a preacher of the said congregation use the Rite of the Old Lutheran Church, whether in Baptism or the Lord's Supper.<sup>3</sup>

By the second decade of Wisconsin's endeavor, however, Muehlhaeuser could see that his little synod was moving to the right of his personal confessional sensitivities. Led by John Bading, the Wisconsin Synod began to adopt a more confessional position and eventually moved toward fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Worship habits and attitudes born in Pietism died hard, however. An 1874 synodical convention resolution calling for the adoption of Walther's *Kirchen-Agende* was vigorously debated and died on the convention floor.<sup>4</sup> An order of service patterned after Walther's order, prepared by Walther's student Prof. August Graebner, was accepted and readied for publication in 1887, but remained unpublished for lack of funds.<sup>5</sup> As the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the synod approached in 1925, worship in most synodical congregations continued to follow the patterns of Pietistic models brought over from the old country.

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Hildebrand, "Friedrich Lochner and Der Hauptgottesdienst," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, Winter 2011–2012, Vol. 84, No. 4, page 10ff.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, page 45.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold O. Lehmann, "Wisconsin Synod Hymnals and Agendas, 1850-1950," *Wisconsin Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 16 (1998), No. 2, page 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, page 20.

As the Roaring 20s dawned in America, synodical leaders began to see the need for an English hymnal, and Otto Hagedorn, pastor at Salem Church in Milwaukee, took on the assignment to prepare the service orders and select the hymns for what became the *Book of Hymns* (1917). Hagedorn made it very clear, however, that he was no more interested in the Reformation rites than his predecessors. Although the English Common Service had been completed in 1888 and was the main order in Missouri's 1911 *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal*, Hagedorn went his own way. He moved around or flat out omitted many of the most long-standing elements of the historic liturgy and even boasted about it. It grinds on our modern ear to read his rationale, e.g., "We believe the average church-goer will thank us for not putting in more than one Scripture lesson."<sup>6</sup> Hagedorn had friends in high places. Mark Braun summarized a 1917 *Northwestern Lutheran* article written by John W. Brenner, not yet synodical president but already an influential leader in the synod:

When Wisconsin's *Book of Hymns* was completed in 1917, [Brenner] announced that it contained "everything that is necessary and no more," considering it an advantage that the book included no psalms, collects, or other elements "rarely, if ever, used in our services." Wisconsin Synod church members "often do not take part in the liturgical service, as they know neither the words nor the melody of the responses." They preferred a simple style of worship.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the opinion of some, many pastors in the synod groaned over the liturgical paucity of Hagedorn's hymnal.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps hoping to benefit from the liturgical leadership of the Missouri Synod, two pastoral conferences memorialized the 1925 synodical convention urging that a hymnal be prepared by the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference.<sup>9</sup> The effort to produce *The Lutheran Hymnal* began officially in 1930, and Wisconsin men served faithfully as members of the Intersynodical Committee on Hymnology and Liturgics. But the old ghosts didn't disappear. In a letter reacting to information from committee member Gervasius Fischer, John Brenner (by now president) wrote, "I laid the matter before our city conference, and the remarks of the speakers showed plainly that we are very conservative and do not want to see any great deviation from the simple liturgical forms now in use among us."<sup>10</sup> Although *The Lutheran Hymnal* gained immediate acceptance in the synod, many older pastors found it difficult to rid themselves of their liturgical biases. More than one pastor introduced TLH without introducing its orders of service,<sup>11</sup> and the hymnal's liturgical section was still being denounced by a few of the old guard over a decade after the book's publication.<sup>12</sup>

For the first 90 years of its history the great majority of pastors in the Wisconsin Synod felt little allegiance for and showed little interest in what we call today the western rite or the liturgy. During that span of time, the synod participated steadfastly in the Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, without doubt the most confessional Lutheran alliance in the history of the United States. The synod founded and fostered hundreds of elementary schools and supported six ministerial education

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<sup>6</sup> Otto Hagedorn, "Concerning Our Order of Service," *The Northwestern Lutheran*, May 5, 1918, page 71.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Braun, "He Was a Man and a Christian – The Life and Work of John W. O. Brenner," *WELS Historical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 2, page 10. The article which Braun quotes is entitled "Our New Hymnal" and appears in the September 21, 1917 issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* on pages 162-163.

<sup>8</sup> Lehmann, page 25.

<sup>9</sup> Lehmann, page 25.

<sup>10</sup> John Brenner to Gervasius W. Fischer, March 28, 1936, WELS Archives, Brenner papers, file 29.

<sup>11</sup> Grace Congregation in Yakima, WA, never did use the TLH orders of service but moved directly from its pre-1941 rite to the orders in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*.

<sup>12</sup> A copy of a 1954 essay by District President E. Arnold Sitz which excoriated the liturgical rites in TLH has been lost.

institutions. Thousands of children were baptized and confirmed. Our congregations continued to proclaim law and gospel through economic panics and a great depression as well as during two world wars. Our forebears transitioned from German to English without the loss of doctrinal integrity and armed themselves for the theological debate that would define the WELS and dominate our church's life in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. **Given that history and considering how the Lord of the Church blessed our little synod over that span of time, it sounds strange to hear some say that the loss of liturgical worship harms the unity of the church and attacks the gospel.**

Two events that took place within about ten years of the WELS centennial celebration in 1950 changed the character of the Wisconsin Synod. The first event was the Second World War. The war ended the Great Depression and put money into people's wallets again. The war's industrial technology encouraged vast improvements in communication and transportation. The war's agonies promoted an interest in faith and family. More than at any other time in our nation's history people had money to move, and they an incentive to move to new places. What's more, they wanted to attend churches and educate their children in these new places. The second synod-changing event took place 11 years after the centennial; it was the break with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1961. Although WELS was involved in outreach before 1961, many of our efforts were carried out in partnerships with the Missouri Synod. Missouri carried the global mission ball for the Synodical Conference, and its several thousand congregations, spread throughout the nation, were ready to receive WELS members who moved out of the Midwest.

It must be said that the Lord used these two events to prompt the great mission interest and expansion that began in the second century of WELS history. WELS pastors were no longer willing to transfer members to LCMS congregations in Virginia and California, and a genuine sense of urgency accompanied efforts to establish congregations in areas the synod had not served in the past. Our members gained a growing awareness that their new non-WELS neighbors might also be interested in the pure gospel and an unchanging message from God, and we began to understand what evangelism and outreach were all about. The interest to protect the faith of the found and to witness the faith to the lost morphed into a growing desire to carry the gospel to the world. The largest graduating classes in the history of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary enabled the synod to attain its goal of establishing churches "in every state by '78" in 1983.<sup>13</sup> In the 61 years that have passed since the WELS centennial, WELS missionaries have proclaimed the gospel in 23 countries around the world.<sup>14</sup>

And wherever WELS missionaries went, the historic liturgy followed. The Common Service (The Order of the Holy Communion in *The Lutheran Hymnal*) became the standard as pastors established the patterns for public worship both in the United States and around the globe. The 1970 seminary graduate who placed his earthly goods into a U-haul trailer headed for Connecticut or Alabama invariably packed along several boxes of new (or used) copies of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. These were the books he placed on folding chairs in his living room when he conducted his first service. From anecdotal evidence it seems that the Common Service was rarely replaced or edited even after congregations grew, built chapels, established schools, and encountered new Bible translations. The truth is that *The Lutheran Hymnal* provided the primary worship rite as WELS added four new districts between 1954 and 1983.

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<sup>13</sup> Edward E. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), page 217.

<sup>14</sup> Information supplied by the WELS Board for World Missions, April 10, 2012.

Retired missionary Richard Mueller recently shared with me the story of the use of the Common Service in Zambia and Malawi. Following are highlights from his March 24, 2012, email:

The Common Service in *The Lutheran Hymnal* was used "as is" when we translated the English into Chinyanja. I write "we" because I used a Chinyanja-speaking African during the translation process to make sure the English was being translated correctly.

When we first conducted worship service in Northern Rhodesia, we did not have a liturgy of any kind. Our worship services consisted of hymns, ex-corde prayers, Scripture lessons, sermon texts, and sermons. Our worship services took on the nature of Bible Studies and Sunday School lessons.

But when we did realize the need for a liturgy in which we would add the confession and absolution of sins, we turned to *The Lutheran Hymnal* and the liturgies in it. These orders were translated word for word.

You ask why we decided to go with *The Lutheran Hymnal* liturgy rather than search for something "creative."

I did not feel that I knew enough about the African culture at that time to be able to create a liturgy that would match their life style. I also felt that *The Lutheran Hymnal* liturgy had all that we look for in a worship service. It had places for hymns, confession and absolution of sins, prayers, Scripture lessons, sermons and a benediction.

I should add that the Africans with whom I had contact, appreciated the formal method of worship. They took to it without objection--at least with no objection that I could sense.

From Connecticut and Alabama to Zambia and India, the Common Service from *The Lutheran Hymnal* provided the paradigm that guided the formation of services and rites in dozens of neighborhoods and countries and in many cultures and languages. While the liturgical confusion that plagues congregations in North America has also provided challenges in our global mission endeavors, the fact remains that many of our early mission endeavors were and remain spectacularly successful and were not hindered by the use of the historic liturgical rite. Efforts to make these national churches indigenous and independent are on course. Included among the fastest growing congregations on the home front in our synod are churches with a determined liturgical perspective that in some cases includes processions, chanting, and Easter Vigils. **Given that history and considering how the Lord of the Church has blessed our outreach efforts over the past 60 years, it sounds strange to hear some say that liturgical churches can't grow and that the use of the church's ancient forms and practices can no longer speak to the men, women, and children of our world.**

I have set before you in the introduction to this essay two realities that I find very strange. The first reality is that in a church which for more than half of its history distrusted and eschewed the church's ancient liturgy one hears some rather strident voices accusing those who abandon the liturgy of harming the unity of the Church and overturning the gospel of Christ. The second reality is that in a church which for more than a third of its history nurtured and witnessed to countless souls by means of the ancient liturgy one hears some rather insistent voices accusing those who use the liturgy of lacking concern and love for the lost. I'm not quite sure if WELS is involved in discussions or embroiled in debates over the role of the liturgy in public worship, but it seems that the rhetoric might wisely be cooled.

## The Present Battle

The battle to create and retain forms for public worship that proclaim the gospel and confess the teaching of the Scriptures is almost as old as the church itself. Perhaps the first example of “worship wars” occurred when Paul opposed Peter “face to face” in Antioch over issues that affected the worship life of the early church (Galatians 2). Paul aimed harsh criticism at the Galatians (Galatians 3) and the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11 and 14) because of abuses taking place in public worship. Some of the troubles the Spirit addressed in his letters to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 2 and 3) seem to have been connected to worship practices. One might say, “As it was in the beginning, in now, and ever shall be, world without end.” It is not surprising that Satan attacks the church at worship; having failed to defeat Christ as he went about to redeem the world, Satan assails the proclamation and reception of the gospel of redemption.

We live in the midst of that on-going worship battle today. Twenty years ago LCMS seminary professor Dr. Arthur Just contended:

A battle is being waged between those who want to move toward an American version of Protestantism with Calvinistic roots and those who want to regain historical Lutheranism. At stake in liturgical renewal is nothing more and nothing less than the very ethos of our church. One of the goals of Lutheran liturgical renewal is the development of a distinctly *Lutheran* ethos.<sup>15</sup>

The battle Dr. Just described in 1992 is more accurately a battle between those who hold to the truths of God’s Word and those who have been influenced by American Revivalism. This essay will present the larger story of Revivalism on subsequent pages, but no one can debate that the teachings and practices that grew out of John Wesley’s English Methodism have shaped and energized American Protestantism for more than two centuries. Some might contend that Revivalism has exerted more influence on the visible Christian Church than the Reformation.<sup>16</sup> With its roots in Pietism and Arminianism, Revivalism may have done its worst damage in public worship. Surely in the early church and then in the Lutheran Church--and even in Roman Catholicism--worship was a theocentric activity that focused on the actions of the Divine. Revivalism and its 20<sup>th</sup> century manifestation, Evangelicalism, turned public worship into an anthropocentric activity focused at the reactions of the creature. Revivalism’s protégé, the Church Growth movement, provides incontestable evidence that in Revivalism, psychology seeks to replace the gospel as the power that changes hearts.

There has never been a heresy that someone didn’t latch onto, of course, but Revivalism is easily the most popular heresy in American history. Wikipedia estimates that 25-30% of the U.S. population, or about 70 million, people consider themselves Evangelicals.<sup>17</sup> What makes Revivalism so popular? The desire to contribute something to one’s salvation (*opinio legis*) exists in every sinful heart, and the inherent self-determinism of Revivalism makes it enormously appealing to Americans. The American life-style tends toward narcissism generally, and the subjectivism of Revivalism fits perfectly into that frame of mind. Like the creators of *Musak* (“Stir the senses, stimulate the sales”), Revivalistic think

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<sup>15</sup> Arthur Just, “Liturgical Renewal in the Parish,” *Lutheran Worship History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), page 23.

<sup>16</sup> The author is among them.

<sup>17</sup> *Evangelicalism*, Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelicalism>.

tanks create pragmatic approaches based on well-worn psychological observations. The great Revivalist Charles Finney expressed the essence of this perspective when he wrote:

A revival is not a miracle according to another definition of the term miracle -- *something above the powers of nature*. There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. [A revival] consists entirely in the *right exercise* of the powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else.<sup>18</sup>

The Revivalists understand what works; they use what works; they are not surprised when it works. And Americans love what works. At the bottom line, Revivalism seeks to achieve spirituality on the back of pragmatism.

The battle is serious, and there can be no doubt about the motives of those who are engaged in it. This fight is for the preservation of the gospel itself which was “written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). It is the means of grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament, which is at stake here. Those involved in this battle take seriously the Savior’s words, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31).

The challenge we face today is to choose the best strategy to engage this battle. Neither the rightness of our cause nor our right motivation assures that we will inevitably employ the right strategy, however. From his perspective Robert E. Lee’s cause was right and his motives were pure when he sent his infantry divisions headlong into the center of the Union Army at the Battle of Gettysburg, but the South never recovered from Pickett’s disastrous charge.

We don’t have to look long across the breadth of Bible-believing Lutheran churches in our land to discover a number of strategies. One strategy is based on the observation that the worship practices of Revivalism/Evangelicalism are all-pervasive and holds to the maxim that the church and its message need to meet people where they’re at. This strategy also judges that where the people are at, at least in significant numbers, is not at the traditional rites of Lutheran worship. While some might judge that this strategy leans toward Revivalistic pragmatism, the strategists in this camp find their paradigm in Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 9:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

A second strategy accepts the reality that the American religious mood is changing, but isn’t ready or willing to imitate the patterns of Revivalism/Evangelicalism. Rather, this strategy follows the example set by the Second Vatican Council, 1963-1965, and seeks to make historic liturgical rites practical and

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<sup>18</sup> Charles G. Finney, *What a Revival of Religion Is*, Charles Grandison Finney and the Revival, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/religion/finney1.html>.

interesting to more of today's worshipers who live in a variety of cultures and settings. The critical characteristic of this strategy is *liturgical adaptability*: the historic structures remain in place but allow and encourage a wide variety of styles in preaching, language, music, and mood. This strategy lays a strong emphasis on worship education that enables worshipers to participate with intention and knowledge and on worship excellence, assuming that God and his people are worth the best efforts of ministers, musicians, artists, architects—and worshipers.

A third strategy finds something deeper in the ancient liturgical rites than forms to love or leave. The emphasis in this strategy is not so much the historical nature of the form, although the catholicity of the form is critical. The real emphasis is the form's gospel content. Since the liturgical rite proclaims the gospel, so this strategy contends, the form is tantamount to the gospel. To abandon the liturgy, therefore, is to abandon the gospel. In this strategy it is almost impossible to speak about the liturgy as *adiaphora* since the proclamation of the gospel is hardly an indifferent matter, i.e., something God has neither commanded nor forbidden. Although this strategy has been adopted by many within the wider Lutheran Church, it is articulated well enough by the editors of *Gottesdienst* as they explain their slogan, "*Leitourgia Divina adiaphora non est.*"

The principle expressed here is that the historic Divine Service of the Western Christian Church is more than Christian antiquity. It is a theological treasure which can and should be used in today's Christian Church. It has well served our Mother Church and our fathers in the faith for the past centuries and there is no reason to believe that it will not continue to do so in the future. Moreover, to say that liturgy is something not commanded by God is to reject the clear words of our Lord, who indeed has given specific commands which are quite liturgical in nature; for example, This do, pertaining to the Sacrament, and When ye pray, say, pertaining to the Our Father.<sup>19</sup>

If the liturgy is the gospel, then it is true enough that the liturgy should indeed be used in today's Christian Church. It is also true, if the liturgy is the gospel, that the loss of the liturgy harms the unity of the Church and overturns its gospel proclamation.

### ***Leitourgia Divina?***

If the liturgy is the gospel, the question has to be asked: What is the liturgy? How does one identify this Divine Liturgy, this so-called liturgy of the Church catholic? Is it the western rite but not the eastern rite? Is it Luther's *Formula Missae* or his *Deutsche Messe*? Is it the Common Service from *The Lutheran Hymnal* or the Service of Word and Sacrament in *Christian Worship*? Must the liturgy include Holy Communion or may it be only the service of the Word? If we intend to adopt a strategy to do battle with the influences of Revivalism/Evangelicalism that identifies the liturgy as the gospel and insists upon its use in our church, then we must define what the liturgy is.

We know what the first Christians found to be the priorities of their gatherings: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). We gain the impression that their first gatherings were modeled after the rites of the synagogue which they knew well. We know that Jesus gave his followers a prayer to use, although in two slightly different forms (Cf. Matthew 6 and Luke 11) and that Paul urged that "requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone" (1 Timothy 2:1). Paul established orderly procedures for the

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<sup>19</sup> *Gottesdienst, The Journal of Lutheran Liturgy*, [www.gottesdienst.org](http://www.gottesdienst.org).

congregation in Corinth so that the Word of God could be heard and understood by all: “If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God” (1 Corinthians 14:27-28). He also insisted that women cover their heads at worship as a witness to God’s order of creation (1 Corinthians 11:3-10). We know that Jesus broke the bread and gave thanks on the night he instituted his holy meal and that the apostles encouraged the use of the “holy kiss” (1 Thessalonians 5:26).

But the story of the formation of the “liturgy of the Church catholic” becomes murky as Christianity spread across Asia, Europe, and North Africa. It takes Luther Reed 26 pages to describe the evolution of the Christian rite during the first 800 years of the church’s life;<sup>20</sup> Frank Senn needs 157 pages to tell the same story.<sup>21</sup> As he begins to review the story after 800 AD, Reed warns his readers: “It is not easy to unravel the tangled skeins of medieval history in the West.”<sup>22</sup> As Luther edited the medieval rites for use in the Lutheran Church, he observed, “As for the example of the fathers, [their liturgical orders] are partly unknown, partly so much at variance with each other that nothing definite can be established about them.”<sup>23</sup> We know the two versions of the liturgy that Luther proposed for the Lutheran Church, one in Latin and the other in German; we see them form by form in his works. We also observe that they are different from each other. If we had the time, the skill, and the patience we could work our way through the German Lutheran *Kirchenordnungen* (in German) and gain insights into how the various provincial churches worshiped in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, although we cannot know how carefully or for how long congregations followed the prescribed orders. The antecedents of the Common Service (1888) freely admit that they were not looking to work with one specific order of service, but would be guided by “the common consent of the pure Lutheran liturgies of the sixteenth century, and when there is not an entire agreement among them, the consent of the largest number of the greatest weight.”<sup>24</sup>

If one looks at the liturgy as a form of worship handed down from one Christian era to another Christian era across the span of 2000 years, it is not difficult to define the liturgy. We can determine the liturgy’s consistent emphases and patterns—its shape, if you will—and at the same time recognize that the liturgical form has evolved and changed over the centuries and will continue to do so in the future as people and circumstances change. But if we want to fix or establish the Divine Service (*Gottesdienst*) or the liturgy of the Church catholic and then insist that it should be used in our church, if we would maintain that abandoning this liturgy harms the unity of the Church and perverts the gospel, then it becomes impossible to define the liturgy because, unlike the Scriptures, the liturgy has no static form.

To many of us a strategy that insists upon the use of the liturgy or removes the liturgy from the realm of adiaphora seems almost surreal. There has been very little in our theological training that makes any of the historic worship rites anything more than *Mitteldinge*. August Pieper was not only echoing personal taste but also his understanding of the Scriptures and the Confessions when he wrote:

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<sup>20</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947) pages 24-50.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy-Catholic and Evangelical* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), pages 53-210)

<sup>22</sup> Reed, page 51

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), page 37.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Luther Reed, page 183

There is nothing pertaining to the church and its activity which has been prescribed as to outward form, no form for the worship service, the sermon, the prayers, the liturgy, the singing; also no time, no frequency, no duration, no prescribed order of worship.<sup>25</sup>

So where does this thinking come from? In any conservative church body there are always going to be a few Miniver Cheevys<sup>26</sup> who mourn the loss of ancient forms. But there is more here. It behooves us to investigate a theological concept called “liturgical theology.” The ideas that form this way of looking at the liturgy have been spooking around the Lutheran Church for 75 years, primarily in the writings of men connected to the Lutheran Liturgical Movement. Perhaps the most thorough treatment of this viewpoint in our circles is by James A. Waddell in *The Struggle to Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church*.<sup>27</sup> Although Waddell’s work is extraordinarily detailed, he may be overly passionate at times and see things that aren’t there. On the other hand, he does identify the main problem with liturgical theology: it places the texts of the liturgy above the Scriptures: “This echoes the assumption of the broader context of Liturgical Theology that liturgy is primary theology and that theological reflection is secondary. It even goes so far as to subordinate scripture to liturgy.”<sup>28</sup> Waddell takes issue with the writings of a number of our contemporaries, but saves his most critical assessments for David Scaer and Arthur Just from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, and Norman Nagel, retired from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

In his recently completed senior thesis, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary senior Philip Moldenhauer assesses this concept and provides some of its background—and he may be the first in WELS to do this.

Alexander Schmermann, an Orthodox priest, is the father of liturgical theology....Liturgical theology, according to Schmermann, is “the study of the theological meaning of Divine Worship.” While on the surface this may sound fairly benign, liturgical theology is not merely concerned with how liturgy expresses theological truths. Rather, liturgy is itself the source of theology. As such, worship transcends all else.

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

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

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<sup>25</sup> August Pieper, “Are There Legal Requirements in the New Testament,” translated by Carl Lawrenz in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 1, page 37.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Arlington Robinson, “Miniver Cheevy.” <http://www.poemtree.com/poems/MiniverCheevy.htm>.

Miniver loved the days of old  
When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;  
The vision of a warrior bold  
Would set him dancing.

<sup>27</sup> James A. Waddell, *The Struggle to Reclaim the Liturgy in the Lutheran Church: Adiaphora in Historical, Theological, and Practical Perspective* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press).

<sup>28</sup> Waddell, page 184.

Oswald Bayer, in his book *Theology the Lutheran Way*, argues for a radical liturgical theology. Because “theology begins and ends with the divine service,” Bayer concludes that systematic theology must be dramatically revamped. It is not sufficient for it to “follow the outline of the creed, as most textbooks do, beginning with creation and ending with eschatology.” Mark Mattes, commenting on Bayer, states: “Theology is...accountable to the divine service.” In Bayer’s mind, the divine service has much more authority than the Holy Scriptures.<sup>29</sup>

We dare not assume that everyone who contends for the use of the ancient liturgy in our church has bought into liturgical theology. We do need to be aware, however, where our liturgical opinions may come from and where they may lead us. Kurt Marquardt takes us to Mt. Carmel and places before us two opinions:

Here at last we are face to face with the crux of the Reformation: what is the gospel? Is it the glorious Trinitarian truth of full and free salvation in the incarnate Son of God—*sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura*—to which everything else must yield, even an angel from heaven (Galatians 1:8), how much more than the various details of liturgy or ritual, no matter how “traditional”? Or is the gospel a complex amalgam to be pieced together from or read out of the bric-a-brac of traditional ecclesiastical ritual? The contradiction between the two views could not be more glaring—there can be no compromise between them.<sup>30</sup>

Hermann Sasse warned his contemporaries:

In Lutheran Germany, however, one can today hear theologians—even some who come from unliturgical Wuerttemberg—say that there is a form of the divine service that belongs to the essence of the church, even that Gregorian chant belongs essentially to the Christian liturgy. It is high time that the liturgical movement in the Lutheran church wakes up from its romantic dreams and subordinates itself to the norms to which the whole life of the church must be subject: the *norma normans* of Holy Scripture and the *norma normata* of the church’s confession. And this applies to all the Lutheran churches in the world, for the Scandinavian, in which the Anglican influence is so great, and for the American, in which the ideas of the European liturgical movement have now gained a footing. If this serious reflection does not take place, then the liturgical movement will become what it has become already for many of its adherents: the end of Lutheranism and the road to Rome.<sup>31</sup>

For all its value to the church, the historic rite we call the liturgy must take its place under the Scriptures. While many of our liturgical forms contain the gospel, they are not, in and of themselves, the gospel. The Word of God stands forever; the liturgy stands for as long as we choose to use it. Moldenhauer writes: “The liturgy is not indispensable in the same way that the Word and Sacraments are indispensable. To put it another way: Jesus is present in the liturgy only insofar as the means of grace

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<sup>29</sup> Philip Moldenhauer, *Theological and Pastoral Criteria for Worship Forms in the Lutheran Confessions*, 2012. The entire thesis is available on the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library website.

<sup>30</sup> Kurt Marquardt, “Liturgy and Dogmatics,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 67:2 (April 2003), pages 182-183.

<sup>31</sup> Hermann Sasse, “The Lutheran Understanding of the Consecration” in *We Confess the Sacraments* translated by Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), p.120.

are in the liturgy.”<sup>32</sup> As such the liturgy remains within the category of churchly acts and practices we call adiaphora. This means that we apply to the liturgy and to all our rites and rituals everything the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the Lutheran fathers say about adiaphora. Naming the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacrament according to Christ’s institution as the only positively prescribed elements of form in the church’s worship, Peter Brunner asserts:

...these elements themselves admit, individually, of manifold possibilities of form. Whether we use leavened or unleavened bread, white wine, red wine, or wine diluted with water, how we use Christ’s words of institution, whether as special words of proclamation of or consecration, whether in the context of a prayer, whether in the literal form of one of the Biblical reports on institution, or in a harmonized form in accord with Luther’s Catechism, whether the Word of God is proclaimed in the form of exposition of a Scripture passage, or in other forms—all that comes within the range of the believer’s liberty. Not even the use of the Lord’s Prayer may be demanded as an absolute legal-ritual necessity.<sup>33</sup>

Not many in our confessional circles are willing to equate the liturgy with the gospel absolutely, as the proponents of liturgical theology do. More, however, turn instead to the Lutheran Confessions as they seek to find support for the necessity of the liturgical rite in the church. The Confessions often refer to worship practices that existed in the Lutheran churches of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many citations are similar to what is perhaps the most well known of these statements:

Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. In fact, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the usual ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns, added for the instruction of the people, are interspersed here and there among the Latin ones.<sup>34</sup>

The contention is that the liturgical practices of the confessions which are described in the Confessions become normative for anyone who desires to be a confessional Lutheran. While some may agree that the liturgy cannot be defined as the gospel and that the use of the liturgy is not commanded by Scripture, they propose that the liturgical practices noted in the Confessions enjoin these practices to churches that subscribe to the Confessions.

This leads to the question: Do the liturgical practices of the confessions have the same status as the doctrinal sections of the Confessions? Do these practices fall under our *quia* subscription to the Confessions? The question is answered by understanding the relationship that exists between the Scriptures and the Confessions. Only the Scriptures establish divine truth; the Confessions themselves make this clear: “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone.”<sup>35</sup> We subscribe to the Confessions because they teach what the Scripture teaches. The Scriptures and the Confessions do not stand side by side as equal sources of truth. The Scriptures are the source of truth, the *norma normans*; the Confessions witness to the Scriptural truth; they are *norma normata*. Where the Confessions do not witness to the Scriptures, the

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<sup>32</sup> Moldenhauer, page 25.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, M.H. Bertram, translator (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), pages 221-223.

<sup>34</sup> AC XXIV, 1-2

<sup>35</sup> FC Epitome, 1

opinions or practices therein are not binding on the church. The Confessions make no claim to be witnesses to the Scriptures when they describe liturgical practices unnamed or unknown in the Scriptures, and their liturgical practices cannot and ought not be considered prescriptive.

Luther's pastoral, conservative, and traditional sensibilities led the Lutheran Church to become a liturgical church, but he always remained wary of liturgical edicts. In the introduction to the *Formula Missae* he wrote, "We heartily beg in the name of Christ that if in time something better should be revealed to them, they would tell us to be silent, so that by a common effort we may aid the common cause."<sup>36</sup> Luther insisted:

...liberty must prevail in these matters and Christian consciences must not be bound by laws and ordinances. That is why the Scriptures prescribe nothing in these matters, but allow freedom for the Spirit to act according to his own understanding as the respective place, time, and persons may require it.<sup>37</sup>

The Confessions echo this perspective. We find no hesitation on the part of the confessors to report the general liturgical practices in the Lutheran congregations; they forthrightly describe their preferences. But across 47 years, from the *Augsburg Confession* to the *Formula of Concord*, the Confessions imitate Luther:

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere.<sup>38</sup>

We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the authority to alter such ceremonies according to its own situation, as may be most useful and edifying for the community of God.<sup>39</sup>

We also believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because the one has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other has, when otherwise there is unity with the other in teaching and all the articles of faith and in the proper use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known saying, "Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei," "Dissimilarity in fasting is not to disrupt unity of faith".<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps because we in WELS have had such a clear understanding of these issues over more than 160 years of history (and certainly because of the grace of God), there are not many in our circles who have become confused on the issue of the liturgy and adiaphora. There are not many "liturgical theologians" or "hyper-confessionals" among us. Whether there are few or many, however, it is necessary that we articulate carefully and consistently what the Scriptures and the Confessions say about ceremonies and adiaphora. If there is benefit to the 21<sup>st</sup> century church in repeating the value of the liturgical rite—and

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), page 20

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, page 37.

<sup>38</sup> AC VII, 2-3

<sup>39</sup> FC Epitome X, 5

<sup>40</sup> FC Epitome X, 7

there is benefit in this—it is also beneficial to repeat that rites and ceremonies are no more than human vehicles which carry an eternal message.

There are several other confessional issues that might be addressed before we move on. Both concern the practical implications and applications of Article X of the *Formula of Concord*.

We all remember the controversy that arose in the Lutheran churches after the Leipzig Interim of 1548 when Melancthon and the Wittenberg faculty along with Bugenhagen and others “held that even in a time of persecution that demands confession of the faith—when the enemies of the holy gospel have not come to agreement with us in public teaching—it is permissible with a clear conscience, under the pressure and demands of the opponents, to restore certain ceremonies that had been earlier abrogated.”<sup>41</sup> Another group led by Matthias Flacius argued:

that in a time of persecution that demands confession of the faith—particularly when the opponents are striving either through violence and coercion or through craft and deceit to suppress pure teaching and subtly to slip their false teaching back into our churches—such things, even indifferent things, may in no way be permitted with a clear conscience and without damaging divine truth.<sup>42</sup>

The confessors addressed this argument with truth based on Scripture: “We believe, teach, and confess that in a time of persecution, when an unequivocal confession of the faith is demanded of us, we dare not yield to the opponents in such indifferent matters.”<sup>43</sup>

Some among us contend that we live in similar circumstances today, and that the present assault against the gospel by Revivalism/Evangelicalism demands that we refuse to abandon the liturgical rite specifically as a matter of confession.

It is obvious that the Lutheran confessors struggled with this issue as we do. For this reason the Solid Declaration expands on the Epitome’s rather brief statement, “All frivolity and offense must be avoided, and special consideration must be given particularly to those who are weak in faith.”<sup>44</sup> The Solid Declaration presents the kinds of circumstances that “we should not regard as free and indifferent, but rather as things forbidden by God that are to be avoided:

...the kind of things presented under the name and appearance of external, indifferent things that are nevertheless fundamentally opposed to God’s Word (even if they are painted another color).

...ceremonies that give the appearance or (in order to avoid persecution) are designed to give the impression that our religion does not differ greatly from the papist religion...

...ceremonies...when they are intended to create the illusion (or are demanded or accepted with that intention), as if such action brought two contradictory religions into agreement...”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> FC Solid Declaration X, 2

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 3

<sup>43</sup> FC Epitome X, 6

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>45</sup> FC Solid Declaration X, 5

Some contend that a so-called contemporary, non-liturgical worship form patterned after Revivalism/Evangelicalism falls under the prohibitions noted in the Solid Declaration and thus ceases to be adiaphora.

There are two questions here. First: Is the situation that existed in Lutheran Germany after Luther's death analogous to our present situation? I believe the two situations are not similar for the simple reason that the Revivalists/Evangelicals are not demanding under threat of violence and persecution or even by craft and deceit that we adopt their worship styles. It is doubtful they care what we Lutherans do! We are certainly surrounded by mega-churches, and we may feel pressure from time to time to adopt their styles (and the pressure sometimes comes from those within our congregations), but no one is forcing this on us or tricking us into it. The confessors were surrounded by Roman Catholics and their abuse of the liturgical rite, but they were not hesitant to retain the rite and almost all its usual ceremonies until the Romans forced the issue. It seems extraordinarily problematic if not impossible to apply the "Nihil est adiaphoron in casu confessionis" principle on our present situation.

Second: Does the adaptation of the worship forms of Revivalism/Evangelicalism in Lutheran worship create the impression either among our own members or among some Evangelicals that we Lutherans agree with and have bought into Pietistic/Arminian theology? I believe we can give that impression. The KW edition of the *Book of Concord* adds a footnote: Flacius observed, "The poor people look mostly to the ceremonies, for they fill the eyes; doctrine cannot be seen." (*Vom wahren und falschen Mitteldinge*, O4a). Flacius makes a good point. It needs to be remembered, however, that our liturgical ceremonies have given more than a few "poor people" the impression that we Lutherans have joined forces with Roman Catholicism. Since the introduction of *Christian Worship* twenty years ago, all of us have heard WELS members pose the question, "Isn't that Catholic?" If we want to remove contemporary worship forms from the list of adiaphora because their use might lead people to wrong ideas about our teaching, we had better be ready to remove a few liturgical customs from that list as well. Whether in the promotion of more ceremonies or fewer ceremonies, pastoral care and worship education is essential.

A similar point needs to be made concerning this statement in the Solid Declaration: "In the same way, useless, foolish spectacles, which are not beneficial for good order, Christian discipline, or evangelical decorum in the church, are not true adiaphora or indifferent things."<sup>46</sup> This confessional statement has also been cited against contemporary forms of worship. But I ask: who is the arbiter of what is useless and foolish? Some might consider the back beat and the drum set to fall into that category; others might include chanting or a Roman collar. We had better be cautious about what we call foolish lest others turn the charge against us. *De gustibus non disputandum est*.

When it comes to the liturgy and all that the liturgy implies, we can commend, but we cannot command. I have spent the greater part of 26 years teaching and modeling liturgical worship in a variety of styles, and I don't see that effort changing in the years to come. As I have worked in a classroom, a chapel, and a vibrant and growing urban parish, I am convinced that the Christian rite, i.e., the Lutheran liturgy, retaining its core gospel proclamation in Ordinary, Proper, and Meal, but always adapting to the culture around it, is best suited for nurture and outreach. Many of you agree. But we cannot make laws about this, nor can we remain silent if others make laws. We cannot go beyond what the Scripture says or force the Confessions to say what they do not say. We are in a battle for sure, but it is a battle against false teaching, not against unfamiliar or non-traditional worship styles. Any stand we take for the means

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<sup>46</sup> FC, Solid Declaration X, 7

of grace, no matter how valiant and courageous it may be, is compromised when we try to turn man-made forms into divine commands. That's legalism, and legalism, even in defense of the gospel, is still legalism.

## Frontier Worship

Listen to James F. White (1932-2004), long-time professor of liturgical studies at Notre Dame University and Drew University:

The most prevalent worship tradition in American Protestantism (and maybe in American Christianity) lacks any recognized name. I shall call it the Frontier tradition...(Frontier-revival tradition might be more accurate)...The importance of the Frontier tradition consists not only in its own vigor in shaping the worship of churches originating on the frontier but also in its history of reshaping many other traditions in its own image. Yet the Frontier tradition has been almost totally ignored in liturgical scholarship, as if such an omnipresent American phenomenon did not deserve description, still less interpretation.<sup>47</sup>

So what is the story of Frontier worship? It isn't too far-flung to suggest that the story begins with Lutheran Pietism. As you know, Pietism was reaction to a problem, and like so many reactions, it began well and ended badly. The problems identified by the Pietists were real enough. In too many places preaching failed to connect doctrine to life and faith to love. The traditional liturgical forms remained in place in Germany, but often without the catechization and discipline the reformers had viewed as essential. Too often under-trained and over-worked pastors carried out ministry armed with doctrinal proof passages instead of a clear grasp of the whole of Scripture. At first the Pietists rightly sensed the problems were primarily related to ministry, but as the idea spread and became a populist movement, the focus shifted. Pietists began to see the assurance of salvation not in objective truths proclaimed in the Word and the sacraments, but in a personal demonstration of the Christian life and good deeds. From their perspective, historic liturgical forms and orthodox hymnody which rested on the Word and the Sacraments became superfluous because they lacked the appeal of worship and music that touched their hearts. Disdain for the Lutheran Confessions was bound to follow. Without the Confessions, the barriers to ecumenicity crumbled. The movement that had begun in the years following the Thirty Years War became 250 later an all-pervasive influence in Lutheran Germany. This was the Lutheranism that found its way to Milwaukee in 1848 in the person of John Muehlhaeuser.

The story of Revivalism actually begins in Holland with a Calvinistic professor of theology at the University of Leiden. Through his personal study of the Scriptures James Arminius (1560-1609) determined he could not agree with the core of John Calvin's theological system, the doctrines of a limited atonement and unconditional predestination. Arminius' answer to the question, "Why some and not others" was no better than Calvin's, of course. While Calvin saw God's sovereignty as the cause of both salvation and damnation, Arminius viewed the cause of the creature's eternal destiny to be his own free will. In their rejection of the biblical answer to the issues of faith and unbelief, both Calvin and Arminius denied the power of the gospel: in their theological system no gospel power was necessary for a person whose eternal status had already been determined nor was the gospel's power necessary for the person who made his own decision to believe.

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<sup>47</sup> James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 171.

Although his adherents advanced his teachings in Holland after his death, Arminianism never caught on in Europe. It did catch on in England, however, and that's where it caught up with John Wesley (1703-1791). The founder of Methodism, Wesley eagerly grasped decision theology and viewed it as the key to establishing a personal relation with Christ. But there was more to Wesley than Arminianism. A dreary moment in his life led him to seek comfort from the Moravians in their Herrnhut complex, and there he gained the Pietists' perspective on Luther and salvation by faith alone. Wesley's theological perspective joined Pietism and Arminianism and offered a theological system that requires faith, a personal decision for faith, and empiric evidence of faith. This is the seedbed of American Revivalism. With its emphasis on simplicity and self-determination, Revivalism was the perfect religion for America. It was the right medicine for pioneers following the call, "Go west, young man, go west."

Charles Finney (1792-1875) was born the year after John Wesley died. Whether he was Wesley's theological heir is debatable, for his personal confession never became particularly clear. He did make Wesley's theology practical in wild and wooly America. Following Wesley's lead, Finney changed the objective of public worship. From the time of the apostles, public worship was identified as the work of believers, the place where Christians came together to proclaim the gospel, employ the sacraments, pray and praise the God in whom they trusted. In Finney's mind, worship was a work for unbelievers, an opportunity to touch people and convince them to choose Christ over unbelief. James White calls Finney "the most influential liturgical reformer in American history."<sup>48</sup> White summarizes Finney's work:

Finney discarded traditions when they did not prove as effective as newer methods. The essential test, then, is a pragmatic one: Does it work? If so, keep it; if not, discard it. Finney and his associates represent a liturgical revolution based on pure pragmatism. It is a new and distinctive American voice.<sup>49</sup>

So popular were Finney's new methods that he was called to New York to begin reviving congregations on the east coast.

The outgrowth of Finney's efforts was a three-part Sunday service modeled on revival techniques originally developed in camp meetings. James White describes the service:

The first part is a service of prayer and praise which includes considerable musical elements. Congregational singing developed and choirs were introduced. Extempore prayer was offered. And a lesson was read, usually a single lesson, as the basis for the sermon. The second part was fervent preaching which was the major event of the service (and for which all else sometimes seemed preparatory). The sermon called the unconverted to conversion, sinners to repentance, and the godly to rejoice in their salvation. The third part was a harvest of those converted or those recommitting their lives to Jesus Christ.<sup>50</sup>

For the first century of its existence Revivalism was most popular in the Bible Belt and among the northern poor. But by 1950 the movement was poised for expansion. Radio and television were the agents for expansion, and young Americans, searching for spiritual support after World War II and turned off by the liberal theology of mainline Protestant churches, were ready for change. Sensing its new direction, Revivalism shed its blue collar image and morphed itself into Evangelicalism.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., page 176.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., page 177.

<sup>50</sup> James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), page 161.

Evangelicalism had something to say to America's Lutherans. Its commitment to evangelism often shamed us. Biblical scholarship, preaching, and moral commentary were among its strengths. Many Lutherans watched Billy Graham's crusades, and most Lutheran pastors read *Christianity Today*. For all of Evangelicalism's positive influence, however, Lutherans weren't listing toward Evangelical worship styles.

Then dawned the Age of Aquarius. Today libraries set aside miles of shelf space for books that describe and assess the influence of the decade of the 1960s. It was an era in which an entire generation of young Americans rejected the life style and traditions of their parents. Music was the unifying force for America's youth, and it wasn't long before music took on religion, sometimes to attack it, but just as often to embrace it. There was a market for Christian music in popular styles, just as there had been a market for Christian jazz, country, and rhythm and blues in the 1940s and 50s, and the recording industry cashed in. Christian radio was born. The Jesus Movement, a 1970s effort to support impoverished and addicted youth, carried its message and music to college campuses where it found more hurting people. The Navigators and Campus Crusade for Christ came to exert their influence on a national, even global, level. What these young people did wasn't worship, at least not to them; it was nothing like going to church in the congregations their parents attended. This was more like a rally: a message calling for change in their lives amplified by music that was the center of their lives. None of this was quite as crass as Charles Finney's "new methods" a century before, but the campus rally was essentially a revival for a new generation.

The college crowds graduated, married, and moved to the suburbs, but their theological perspective didn't change. Male pattern baldness made them conspicuous on campus, so they needed a church of their own. They had moved beyond the traditional denominations of their youth; they weren't nearly as interested in dogma as they were in self-determination. Eager Bible college graduates, armed with guitars, trap sets, and toothy smiles, were at the ready, and became the pastors of thousands of non- or inter-denominational congregations. Many of these "pastors" flamed out as quickly as they had fired up, but the best and the brightest attracted phenomenal crowds. These mega-churches featured captivating speakers and high-quality music and drama and were willing to share the keys to their success with others. Through countless books and in high-powered seminars mega-church ministries influenced congregations all across America. James White comments: "The [revival] pattern has proved remarkably durable. It still forms the outline of most Protestant worship in North America and has spread rapidly in mission areas overseas...There is obviously a conjunction of this form of worship and profound human needs."<sup>51</sup>

Lutherans couldn't help but be intrigued, some looking for ways to reclaim drifting teens and young adults and others holding to a sincere desire to bring the gospel to the lost. Christian Contemporary Music became a mainstay at Lutheran teen rallies and in college chapels. Christian radio found its way into Lutheran family rooms and mini-vans. The most daring Lutherans (daring in the 1980s anyway) offered contemporary worship alternatives usually patterned in some way after the worship of the mega-churches. Lutherans also proved they could write books and hold seminars with the best of them; volumes about growing churches and institutes for growing churches popped up all over the Lutheran world.

An early proponent of using Evangelical patterns in Lutheran worship was David S. Luecke, an LCMS pastor who eventually became a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and authored more than a half

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., page 161.

dozen books encouraging Lutherans to reassess ministry methods and worship forms. Luecke's first effort, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*,<sup>52</sup> was reviewed by Prof. David Valleskey in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* and generally panned. Valleskey demonstrated that Luecke had not been able to do what he proposed, i.e., retain the substance of Lutheran teaching in Evangelical worship styles: "What [Luecke] comes up with all too often is...an intermingling of Evangelical style and substance and Lutheran style and substance, with Lutheran substance coming out the loser in the process."<sup>53</sup>

But Valleskey didn't find everything in Luecke's book unhelpful. Among seven elements in the book that "one might selectively borrow without sacrificing Lutheran substance" are these:

4) Addressing felt needs as a *pre*-evangelism tool;  
Luecke observes:

I think Lutherans shape and package their Gospel offering according to the felt needs of only a small segment of American society. That "market" is now getting smaller...Can Lutherans learn how to package their offering better? (p 72)

We may not be comfortable with such terminology, but we do need to work at ways to approach people so we can bring them law and gospel.

5) A recognition that worship style affects outreach;  
While we do not agree with some of Luecke's suggestions, including the one that churches should be constructing their worship *especially* with newcomers in mind, we do feel with him that newcomers should be carefully considered in one's worship planning.

The trend in the past generation has been toward greater reliance on formalities and ritual. But that liturgical renewal has not been associated with a burst of church growth. In practice the style is often more responsive to well-reasoned needs of past believers, carried forward as tradition, than to the felt needs of current participants (p 109).

He argues for a regular staff evaluation of a congregation's worship and for more opportunities for "spontaneous, informal, and personalized contact" in worship. When done within certain bounds, we agree with Luecke.<sup>54</sup>

Prof. Valleskey has never been a proponent of adapting Evangelical styles in Lutheran worship even for the sake of outreach. In his evangelism textbook he twice includes this perspective:

We are convinced that Lutheran liturgical worship,

- when its strengths are emphasized and its balance maintained,
- when it is carefully planned and artfully executed by the congregation's leaders and enthusiastically entered by the congregation's members,
- when it is accompanied by a congregational mindset that opens wide its arms to the visitor to its services,

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<sup>52</sup> David S. Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> David J. Valleskey, "Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance, A Review Article," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 87 (1990), page 138

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 142-143.

has served and can continue to serve as a good tool for congregational outreach with the gospel.<sup>55</sup>

Valleskey's perspective about worship and outreach has been a guiding force in our church body for almost a generation. To this day it influences the seminary he served as professor and president and, through the seminary, has come to mold the attitudes and practices of the great majority of pastors and congregations in WELS. Our own Institute on Worship and Outreach is firmly planted in this soil:

The Spirit grows the Church through the means of grace, but every pastor searches for ways and means to invite and attract people to his church so the gospel might be heard and the sacraments administered. He also works to equip the members of congregation to share in carrying out the Savior's commission in their neighborhoods and communities. Based on their personal study and in their own experience, the members of the Institute on Worship and Outreach believe that efforts at worship and outreach need not be mutually exclusive, pitted against each other, or outside the parameters of Lutheran history and practice and are willing to share what they have learned with brothers in the ministry.<sup>56</sup>

This perspective has not guided everyone, however. There are some among us who have insisted that Lutheran substance can remain the center of public worship even when carried in the vehicle of Evangelical style. They have adopted the basic three-part rite of Revivalism/Evangelicalism and adapted it to include historic forms such as Confession/Absolution and the Apostles' Creed. Like the traditional frontier services, preaching is the centerpiece of their services. They have replaced or supplemented traditional hymnody with music borrowed from Christian radio and assembled praise bands and worship leaders to perform it. While they have calmed some of their early rhetoric which insisted that only churches with so-called contemporary worship can grow, they continue to maintain that there is a significant segment of our American society, influenced in many cases by culture and Evangelicalism, that will never be inclined to approach the gospel in a liturgical setting, even when that liturgical setting is vibrant and welcoming. I described their strategy earlier in this essay when I wrote that it is

based on the observation that the worship practices of Revivalism/Evangelicalism are all-pervasive and holds to the maxim that the church and its message need to meet people where they're at. This strategy also judges that where the people are at, at least in significant numbers, is not at the traditional rites of Lutheran worship.<sup>57</sup>

Along with us, they are looking for ways to encounter the lost in a worship setting. As Prof. Valleskey encouraged, they are assessing worship forms and looking for ways to approach people with law and gospel. Unlike most of us—and unlike the great middle of WELS—they are willing to go looking where we and others are unwilling or unable to go.

Anyone and everyone who participates in planning and presiding at public worship takes on both an extraordinary privilege and a serious responsibility, and the highest privilege and most serious responsibility falls on the man who has been called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. As pastors, our task at public worship is to proclaim law and gospel, indeed, the whole counsel of God, and to

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<sup>55</sup> David J. Valleskey, *We Believe-Therefore We Speak, The Theology and Practice of Evangelism* (Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), pages 197 and 204.

<sup>56</sup> Objectives of the Institute on Worship and Outreach, <http://worshipandoutreach.org/about>

<sup>57</sup> Page 6.

administer the sacraments according to the Savior's institution. We do this not as individuals, however, but in the company of saints who have gathered for public worship; we apply the means of grace **to** people and **with** people. Part of our task as worship planners, therefore, is to enable people both to hear and understand the gospel and to use the gospel in their own proclamation and praise. Whatever forms we use in public worship are simply tools that enable us to carry out that task, i.e., to proclaim the gospel to people and with people. We might say that the order of service is the vessel that holds those various tools.

The responsibilities that come with carrying out this task are not minimized by a regular use of the Christian liturgy. We add preaching and hymnody to the vessel we call the liturgy and we approach the liturgy with a certain attitude. Using the liturgy, therefore, doesn't guarantee that its evangelical and orthodox proclamation will never be compromised; worship in heterodox liturgical churches demonstrates this. Nor does liturgical worship assume that the gospel will be believed and lived by every worshiper every Sunday. The liturgical vessel that Luther encountered in 1523 was filled not only with good but also with forms so horrible that he called them "wretched accretions which corrupt it [i.e., the liturgy]." <sup>58</sup> In both his services, he retained some forms in the vessel, removed others, and refilled the vessel with new forms. We bear the responsibility to insert into the liturgical vessel forms (including sermons) that not only enhance the liturgy's orthodox proclamation but also apply it to the lives of people, both for the sake of nurture and outreach.

Those who choose to set aside the Christian liturgy and implement the worship patterns of Revivalism/ Evangelicalism also carry a heavy responsibility; in fact, their responsibility may be greater. The vessel that is the three-part service of Revivalism is also filled with "wretched accretions", and those accretions must be removed if the rite can be used to proclaim the gospel to people. It wasn't easy for Luther to remove customs and practices to which people in his day had become accustomed, and it won't be easy to remove the poison of Arminian theology which people today have come to embrace. But the vessel must be emptied and then refilled with the Scriptures. Prof. Deutschlander is no proponent of non-liturgical worship, but he reminds us: "Is it a foregone conclusion that anyone who tampers with the Western Rite is a heretic or at least the way preparer for a heretic? No, that is not inevitable." <sup>59</sup> But it will take some work and some wisdom from the Spirit. David Luecke tried and failed.

WELS has a habit of copy-cattng ecclesiastical innovations long after the ecclesiastics have abandoned the innovations. There is evidence that suggests that the great majority of people seeking Jesus are not overly concerned with worship style. <sup>60</sup> There is also evidence that the members of Generation X, Y, and Z are not nearly as interested in contemporary styles as the Baby Boomers. It would be naïve to suppose there are no people in our towns and cities who are attracted to more casual and less liturgical worship styles. It is just as naïve to suppose that these people live in our specific neighborhoods or will be attracted to Lutheran substance even if dressed in Evangelical style. Corporate outreach ventures that are spontaneous and emotional seldom bear fruit. Careful and calculated studies are essential. The goal remains reaching people with the gospel, not beginning contemporary worship. The latter must serve the former.

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<sup>58</sup> Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion", op. cit., page 20.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel Deutschlander, "The Western Rite: Its Development and Rich History and Its Relevance for Our Worship Life Today" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File), page 13.

<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Schroeder, "Worship and Outreach, A Lutheran Paradigm" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File), page 15.

Our brothers and sisters who see the outreach potential of the “three-part service” need to confront honestly the false theology in classic Revival worship. James White’s description of the first part of the Revivalism rite—a service of prayer and praise which includes considerable musical elements—doesn’t include the typical objective of this part of the service: “Such music tended to be a powerful emotional stimulant. At its worst it was sentimental and trivial, but this could make it all the more effective. When exploited, such music could be used as a softening-up technique for what was to come.”<sup>61</sup> In fact, the music in this part of the service is almost always exploited because most Evangelicals don’t understand the doctrine of the means of grace. To Rick Warren, music is a vital element in leading people to sense the presence of God in worship. “More people are won for Christ by feeling God’s presence than by all our apologetic arguments combined.”<sup>62</sup> There is no defense here of dull music, but the reminder that the message, not the music, is what converts and strengthens. Obviously, the third part of the Revival service—“a harvest of those converted or those recommitting their lives to Jesus Christ”<sup>63</sup>—also has to be reconstructed for Lutheran worship.

If liturgical worship does indeed set up barriers to some seekers in some neighborhoods, advocates of this outreach tool are wise to consider how the strengths of the liturgy, if not its forms, can be maintained in worship. Across the span of almost 2,000 years the liturgy has been:

- Doxological – the liturgy enables the corporate praise and prayer of the body of Christ.
- Kerygmatic – the liturgy is essentially a heralding of the gospel of Christ.
- Christological – the liturgy has at its center the proclamation of the words and works of Jesus.
- Sacramental – the liturgy assumes the use of the Sacraments.
- Pedagogical – the liturgy teaches the faith.
- Doctrinal – the liturgy reviews the most important teachings of the Scriptures.

The structure of the liturgy has nothing to apologize for, but the liturgy’s objectives are more important than its structure, and are wisely a part of every Lutheran worship gathering.

Perhaps the greatest responsibility for this style of worship is gathering musical resources that enable a genuine Lutheran witness. Not every worship song needs to have the textual quality of a Lutheran chorale or the sedentary pace of an English cathedral hymn, but it will take an extraordinary effort to find better texts than those that usually grace Christian radio and worship in the mega-churches. When Luther brought new music into worship, he realized the need to commission Lutheran poets. “Remember your leaders.”

In a 2005 editorial, Paul Kelm suggested, “Perhaps music should reinforce basic Christian truth and express praise and prayer, leaving teaching to the sermon.”<sup>64</sup> If this is to be a characteristic of contemporary worship, then preaching becomes even more important than it is in liturgical worship. It is one thing to imitate Revivalistic worship patterns and quite another to copy the moralizing and pop psychology evident in so much Evangelical preaching. The liturgical preacher can return to the sacristy after what he may admit was a sub-standard sermon and sigh, “Thank God for good hymns.” The

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<sup>61</sup> White, *Protestant Worship*, page 184.

<sup>62</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), page 241.

<sup>63</sup> White, *Protestant Worship*, page 184.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Kelm, “Christian Freedom in Worship: More Than Just a Throw-away Line.” The editorial was delivered at 2005 worship conference at St. Mark, Green Bay, WI. The author has a copy of this editorial, but is not aware where copies may be gained.

preacher in contemporary worship may not be able to say that. But then, preachers in both liturgical and non-liturgical worship would be wise to review Walther's *Law and Gospel* regularly.

It is vitally important to recognize that Revivalism's three-part service was created for evangelism and became the regular worship pattern for converts only later. Long-time advocates of contemporary worship styles have always seen a need for opportunities that enable Christians to grow and mature in faith, e.g., midweek believers' services and/or small group Bible studies. Especially since contemporary worship in WELS often attracts as many WELS members as seekers, outreach strategies need to include efforts at assimilation and on-going Bible study. The warnings that come from Willow Creek Community Church are striking. After a multi-year qualitative study of its ministry, church leadership published its findings in *Reveal: Where Are You*.<sup>65</sup> In the book minister Bill Hybels confesses:

We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become "self feeders." We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their Bible between service, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.

In other words, spiritual growth doesn't happen best by becoming dependent on elaborate church programs but through the age old spiritual practices of prayer, Bible reading, and relationships.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, we must constantly help people understand the essential status of the means of grace in faith and life. Whether dressed in liturgical or non-liturgical form or in traditional or non-traditional styles, the gospel is the critical issue for worship and outreach. Without the everlasting gospel, joy is never lasting.

## Conclusion

Some may contend that the points raised in this essay deal primarily with extreme positions at the fringes of our synod and not with the concerns of the vast middle of the WELS, and thus that the essay is not a fitting expression of the Institute on Worship and Outreach. The members of the institute will have to decide that.

I wish I were as convinced that the essay deals only with the fringes. For almost a generation your teachers have proposed the value of liturgical worship for both nurture and outreach. You found soundness in their teaching, implemented and expanded their concepts in your parishes, and experienced blessing after blessing by the power of the Spirit working through the means of grace. Now you are willing to share your experience with others. But in the last several years a new perspective has entered our synod that does not exist only at the fringes of WELS. This perspective is contentious and critical, and sometimes even condemning. It contends and even contrives to bring worship and outreach onto a common plain with a single pattern and it does so in the name of and for the sake of orthodoxy and confessionalism. This kind of talk appeals to people in our churches whose love for Scripture leads them to be wary of innovations and slippery slopes. When there is fear in the air, men grab for weapons, and sometimes even good men grab for the sword of the law rather than the sword

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<sup>65</sup> Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: Where Are You* (Willow Creek Association, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> [http://www.outofur.com/archives/2007/10/willow\\_creek\\_re.html](http://www.outofur.com/archives/2007/10/willow_creek_re.html).

of the Spirit. This is legalism. Legalism is the tool Satan uses to bring down the gospel among men who love the gospel. That is why gospel-loving Lutherans have always struggled with legalism and do so to this day.

Nor am I convinced that those who favor a non-liturgical worship style lie only on the fringes of the synod. While the number of congregations that actually have implemented this style may be small, there are many more who are intrigued by the style. Given the paucity of liturgical loyalty in WELS, more will likely become at least defenders of the style, especially when the style is attacked and criticized.

The Institute on Worship and Outreach has identified its position between the two perspectives reviewed in this essay. We have subscribed to what Jon Schroeder wrote in his 2010 essay: “You may be free in making changes to worship practices; we will fight for your freedom to do just that. Do not, however, demand that we always call it wise.”<sup>67</sup> I restate my subscription to Jon’s words today. But as we continue to help congregations in the great middle of WELS to study and strategize their efforts at worship and outreach, we may also need to call out and expose legalism in our circles. We may have to clearly identify not only where we stand but also where we do not stand. And if we are not willing to follow in the footsteps of those implementing and adapting the worship forms of Revivalism/Evangelicalism, might we at least be able to walk in their shoes and experience their zeal for the lost? Might we recognize their efforts in a brotherly spirit and thus find an avenue for sharing and encouragement? We are right to voice our concern that those who adopt these worship patterns risk a compromise of the gospel. The greater risk to compromising the gospel may come with legalism, however, and may be a risk that more in our synod are willing to take, wittingly or unwittingly.

I am not laying any challenges before you today, but I was intrigued (and emboldened) when I read the following paragraphs from an essay delivered by Prof. Valleskey several weeks ago.

Also here in the USA one size doesn't necessarily fit all. Our doctrine, drawn solely from the Scriptures, cannot change. And our subscription to the Scriptures and Confessions must be more than mere words. What we believe must be put into practice. But different times and different circumstances, as well as differences in cultures, dictate that the way a particular doctrine is applied may not and at times should not be identical in every situation. Applications aren't always “cookie cutter.” There is no rule book, except for the law of love—love for God and his Word and love for God's people.

We look to another of our WELS church fathers, August Pieper, as a good example of a willingness even to sacrifice a personal preference for the sake of the gospel. Pieper was brought up with the German language. He taught in the German language. He loved the German language. He considered the German language to be superior to English.

Nevertheless, for the sake of proclaiming the gospel beyond the borders of German-speaking Lutherans, he urges a transition to English:

The current situation in America has laid a greater assignment upon the orthodox Lutheran church as it becomes English-speaking, one which cannot be deferred or delayed. That assignment is: *by means of the English language to carry the Lutheran gospel to the English-*

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<sup>67</sup> Schroeder, page 12.

*speaking American people who are still outside of our church* [italics in original].... By packaging our message in the German language we have neglected to share our gospel with the Americans at our doorstep, the very people among whom we live. Our concept of ministry is deficient. The awareness that every pastor, in addition to his parish work, has been called by God to be a missionary to his neighborhood, to use every opportunity to preach the gospel publicly and privately to "every creature" in the world immediately surrounding him - this awareness needs to be aroused in our pastors.... The way we conduct our public ministry almost makes it seem as though God has forbidden us to preach beyond the borders of our church body and parish.... Two-thirds of America's 110 millions do not hold membership in any church. Even if only half of America's population were unchurched, the work of evangelizing them is so great that we could "not finish...before the Son of Man comes." As congregations and as a synod we have failed to proclaim the gospel to these unchurched millions - almost as though, because they live next door to us, they are not included in "all nations."

Confessional Lutherans are evangelical Lutherans, neither lax nor legalistic, but gospel-centered. In the interest of the gospel, they will say with the Apostle Paul, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22 NIV11).<sup>68</sup>

To this I say, "Me, too."

Almighty God, grant to your Church the Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above. Let nothing hinder your Word from being freely proclaimed to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, so that we may serve you in steadfast faith and confess your name as long as we live, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

J. Tiefel  
May 11, 2012

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<sup>68</sup> David Valleskey, "What Does It Mean to Be a Confessional Lutheran," delivered at the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Conference held in Atlanta, GA, April 30-May 2, 2012. The quotation is from essay by August Pieper, "Our Transition into English," which appeared originally in 1918-19 in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. It was translated by John Jeske and is available from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary essay file.