

Doctrinal Unity Conference – Worship

Prologue

What will be said today is not new. Worship is old. Worship is forever. What will be said today is not 'original' in any way with me. I have borrowed unapologetically from plenty of people wiser than I. If you learn anything today, or are further convinced in the faith we confess together, it is them you should thank. However, I won't be naming them all, so you can skip ahead to thanking God – Who gave them anything good to say that might be said today.

Worship is key to our **unity** as the church of Jesus Christ. In worship we confess the name of the true triune God. In worship we confess our true state as sinners before the righteous, yet all-forgiving God. In worship we confess and pray our whole faith. Most importantly, in worship our Lord Jesus Christ grants us the forgiveness of sins. Most certainly, the way we pray, the way we worship, is the way we believe. (lex orandi, lex credendi)

Thus unity in worship is a sine qua non of our walk together in Christ.

Introduction

Some of you may have already heard this tale, so bear with me.

I heard it various times from the now sainted Doctor Kurt Marquart.

It is told that when the Czar of Russia wanted to bring a new and unifying religion into his lands, he sent out a scouting party of sorts, to investigate the possibilities that might be available to him.

The search team went to Mecca to study Islam, to Rome to discover the Roman Catholic Church, and to Constantinople to observe the Orthodox.

On their return, they lauded the Muslims for their discipline and fervour. They were impressed by the organization they found in Rome.

But when they went to worship at the Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople, the church of the Holy Wisdom, and observed their liturgy, they said it was *as though they were in heaven itself!*

The orthodox took the prize and became the religion of the Russians.

That is what worship is: Heaven coming down to earth – heaven touching earth. When we are at worship, it is as if we were in heaven itself.

If we should be united on anything today, it must be that worship is God coming to us, bringing heaven down to earth, that at the last we children of earth may be raised by Him to heaven.

Perhaps an overarching rubric for our discussion of worship today should come from St. Paul's words to the Corinthians: ***God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.*** This is what our faith is all about. God doing the reconciling – us receiving His reconciliation in Christ. This is what our worship does, and is, and forever will embrace.

Biblical History of Worship

It's been happening for a long time. It begins with Adam, as do a lot of things.

In the state of perfection, Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony and communion with God, receiving from God all good things, and giving God perfect thanks and daily praise.

Following the Fall, that communion with God is broken, and ONLY God can restore fellowship with His created ones, ONLY God can bring about reconciliation.

So Adam is brought into the worship of God the hard way in Genesis three. God comes down to earth, walking in the cool of the evening. It takes a bit for Adam to join in. First he hides, with God calling, '***Where are you?***' Against his own desire, Adam is brought to a confession of His sin – after he first blames the woman God gave him for all his present trouble.

After this contrition, worked by God Himself, God brings Adam to Himself and Himself to Adam. He does it with WORD – that wondrous word of promise in Genesis 3:15, which we know as the 'protoevangelium' – a promise of redemptive grace and victory over the serpent, through the Seed of the woman, Who was to come.

And He does it through action – through sacrifice, as animals are killed, presumably by God, to create a covering for the naked Adam and Eve.

God comes – heaven comes to earth – as God speaks and God does – as God speaks forgiveness and does forgiveness to cover our nakedness and let us stand in His presence

It is the word and action of God that defines our worship of God.

So Adam worshipped God by receiving and believing the promise of God.

False Worship

Cain and Abel both brought sacrifices in worship to God. Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God in true faith. Cain's was not. Cain approached God in pride while Abel approached God as a beggar in faith. Luther comments *'If you look at the work itself, you cannot prefer Abel to Cain. The Jews, in their folly, have a silly idea when they dream that Cain did not offer selected grain but chaff, and that for this reason he was rejected by God....But the verdict of the Epistle to the Hebrews is different; it declares that because of his faith Abel brought the more excellent offering (Heb. 11:4)' (1:250)*

Abel comes as one who has nothing to offer God, and so is received by God. Worship begins for us when we realize that **we** have nothing to offer to God, but everything to receive from Him.

Cain's worship, however, reveals false faith. All those who come to worship thinking that they are doing a good work for God are false worshippers, after the order of Cain. We are to worship God by bowing down in humility, with nothing in our hearts or hands but sin to be confessed, to receive His mercy.

In the days of Seth, Adam and Eve's third son, we are told *'At that time men began to call upon the name of the Lord'* (Genesis 4:26). Seth's son was named Enosh, which means 'the Frail One'. This name expresses the truth of the human condition; Seth and his family knew their frailty and so they turned to their God in true faith.

Luther writes: *'Here a most excellent definition is given of what it means to worship God, namely, to call upon the name of the Lord, a work or act of worship*

in the First Table, which contains the commandments about the true worship of God. But calling upon the name of the Lord include the preaching of the word, faith or trust in God, confession, etc.'

The worship of Genesis included sacrifices and offerings to God. However, these sacrifices were not made in the same spirit as those of the unbelieving nations among whom the Patriarchs sojourned. All other religions, invented by men, made sacrifices of some kind to appease the anger of a wrathful god, or to win the favour of a god whom they believed could supply them with earthly good.

The sacrifices of the patriarchs, on the other hand, do not appease, or attempt to win favours. Rather they are both expressions of faith in the merciful, all-giving God, and the means through which God showed His acceptance of those who trusted Him.

Hebrews says, '***By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts...***

The sacrifices of the Patriarchs, like those of the Temple worship to come, both point forward to the final sacrifice of God, Jesus Christ, and receive their efficacy from that one and only final sacrifice. The patriarchs built altars, brought sacrifices and offerings to God in response to the Lord's Word and promises. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bowed down before God because He had first called them in mercy and given His promise of forgiveness and life to them. God gave first, and they responded with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

This will always be the true pattern of true worship. God gives. We receive. And God works in us to praise Him for His goodness.

Moses and the Law

Israel became a great nation in Egypt by the favour and gracious choosing of God. God rescued His people from humble slavery and brought them out en route to the Promised Land. In every way God was their Leader, their Defender,

their Provider. We see this throughout the wilderness wanderings of Israel. God did not just bring His people out of bondage and leave them to their own devices.

In Exodus 20:4 God promised '***In every place where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you***'

We do not have time to go into the entire Law of Exodus and Leviticus, but suffice it to say that God established the priesthood of Aaron and his sons to be the means through which He would continue to give His blessing to His people Israel. God revealed detailed instructions concerning the tabernacle, the priestly vestments and activities, the sacrifices and ceremonies, in order that Israel could be certain that in receiving the priestly gifts, they were receiving the mercies of God.

In Exodus 24 we see the outline of the divinely given Divine Service of word and sacrament. Moses comes down from the mountain, having received the word of God, and preaches it to the people – the service of the Word, we may call it. After this, Moses sprinkles the blood of the Covenant on the people, and then the elders of Israel eat the covenant meal in communion with God – the service of the sacrament we could call it.

Critical in the instructions given through Moses is the prohibition against imitating pagan ways of worship. In Deuteronomy twelve, not only the actual worship of false gods, the idols of the nations, is rejected. Also the manner in which the nations do their so-called worship must not be copied by the people of Israel. In verses 30-32 the command is given: ***Take heed that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? – that I might do likewise". You shall not do so to the Lord your God; for every abominable thing which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. Everything that I command you shall be careful to do; you shall not add or take from it'***

The ancient world was not unlike our world. The temptations were the same for the people who belonged to God, who did not belong IN the world. The

chief temptation was to 'fit in', to assimilate to the world around them, to be found acceptable by their world neighbours. And it was a sneaking temptation. The people of Israel would never admit to giving up on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in order to worship false gods. They would only say they were incorporating the relevant cultural features of the land to better communicate their god to the people around them.

This they could NOT do, and remain faithful to the God who had called them.

The worship of God does not leave room for human innovation. In the tenth chapter of Leviticus we have a stunning example of God's displeasure with worship corrupted this way. Nadab and Abihu were the sons of Aaron the high priest, consecrated to the priesthood of Israel. But Leviticus tells us ***Each took his censer, and put fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And the fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.*** Self-chosen forms of are not acceptable to God, to put it mildly. Moses spoke the Lord's explanation to Aaron: ***Among those who are near Me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.***

('In the narrow sense, true worship of God is simply faith, believing that God forgives me for Jesus' sake. And false worship, in the narrow sense, is unbelief. But unbelief presents itself in any attitude that finds security in a place other than Jesus Christ. Whenever we think that being right with God depends on our doing something, the performance of some ritual or some act of sacrifice, we have fallen away from true worship, just as surely as did the Israelites in the days of the Judges. God does not need our works. We need His. These He freely give to us. The deepest offense we can cause God is to think and act as though what He did for us through His Son, Jesus Christ, was not enough to secure our salvation. In contrast, the greatest honour we can give God is simply to receive his gift of salvation by believing it.)

(Brent McGuire)

The Temple Era

In the era of the Temple and the kings, the worship of Israel reached both its high point and its low point.

The high point was the fullness of Temple worship, where the priests faithfully served, the Word of God was taught to the people, and the royal choirs sang wondrous praise to the God Who was graciously present in that place for the sake of His people.

The low point was also connected to the Temple worship. The priests were unfaithful. The people were led into unfaithfulness. The prophets spoke against the false worship, the blatant idolatry of Israel. They also spoke against the abuse of temple sacrifice, like Malachi castigating Israel for the second-rate sacrifices they brought. They made the appearance of 'doing the right thing', but their hearts were faithless.

Israelite substance in Canaanite style was always a problem for Israel – up to the exile. Afterward, it was the lack of love to the neighbour that evidenced their faithlessness toward God.

Development of the Divine Service

The Divine Service of the Lutheran Church in its formation is deeply rooted in the worship life of God's people in the Old and New Testaments. The temple worship was essentially the service of sacrifice and intercession. In the temple the priests carried out sacrifices of various sorts (e.g. thank offerings, incense offerings, guilt offerings, atonement offerings), and made intercessions for the people of Israel. The atonement and guilt offerings were a prophecy of

the absolute offering for guilt and atonement, which the promised Messiah would later accomplish once and for all for the salvation of the world.

The worship of the temple flowed into the worship of the synagogue, the worship in which our Lord Jesus took part on a weekly basis, as was His custom (Luke tells us)

The worship structure of the synagogue at the dawn of the New Testament was something as follows

1. The Divine Service began with the *confession of faith (creed)* in the one and only true God (Shema: Deuteronomy 6:4-6 **Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all you might.**)
2. This creed was followed by a prayer of **intercession** (One had to be 13 years of age to be permitted to speak this prayer – cf. bar/bas mitzpah)
3. Then the reading of the **Torah** (five books of Moses) occurred. This reading was carried out standing. The Torah was divided into 154 paragraphs or sections, so that one could read it through completely in 3 years. (3 year lectionary?) It was strictly forbidden to utter these verses from memory. A doxology began and ended the reading of the Torah.
4. Then came the reading of the prophets, interspersed with the singing of the psalms. This reading, unlike the reading of the Torah, was more freely structured. There were no prescribed pericopes, and the lector could comment on what was read. Think, for example, of Jesus reading from Isaiah and commenting on the text in the Nazareth synagogue.
5. Then followed the sermon, an interpretation of the texts read, amplified through catechesis.
6. The synagogue service concluded with the blessing – the Aaronic benediction we still use. (Numbers 6:24-26)

In the case of synagogue worship, there was normally added the fellowship Sabbath meal. This did not include the sacrifice of the Temple, yet Word and meal always went together.

We see the background to the Christian divine service in the service of the synagogue. The description of the early church in Acts Two includes the synagogue components: ***They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers.***

The apostolic teaching was the firm foundation on which the church stood. The epistles were added to the service of the Word, culminating in the Gospel, which took the place of Torah as the climax of Christ's speaking to His people. At the conclusion of the apostolic teaching, the kiss of peace led into the liturgy of the Supper.

The breaking of bread, the sacrament of the altar in the context of worship, was the high point of the Divine Service of the early church. Where the King of kings and Lord of lords makes His entrance, there the reverence and devotion owed to Him by His church will also be in evidence. The celebration of the Lord's Supper was utterly crucial in the emergence of the New Testament liturgy, for the liturgy developed out of the Lord's Supper.

The apostolic church was also a singing church. The Psalmist declares (106:12) ***Then they believed His promises and sang His praise.*** Where the right faith is, there the praise of God will not be absent. The apostolic church sang gladly, and therefore sang much. That sang psalms, hymns (songs of praise), and other spiritual songs. St. Paul places the congregational song under the rubric of ***speaking to each other.*** The song of the Divine Service teaches, confesses, preaches the faith into the ears of others. Thus the song of the church must be given the same care as the preaching of the church.

We have here testimony that antiphonal singing was integral to the Psalms. The fledgling church was already used to liturgical singing in alternation. Thanks to the Roman Secundus Plinius, who as governor of the province of Bithynia in Asia Minor had the forbidden services of the persecuted church of Jesus spied upon in order that he might give a report concerning these service to the Emperor Trajan (c. 112 AD), the antiphonal singing of the early church has been confirmed for us. He tells the Emperor '*that they (the Christians) gather together before sunup on a particular day and by antiphonal singing praise Christ*

as a god'. The New Testament Divine Service was already always a ceremonious, liturgical service, involving antiphonal singing between the congregation and congregation, or between the pastor and congregation.

The Lutheran Divine Service is not the product of imaginative thinking or feeling, or the individual ideas of Martin Luther and his fellow reformers. In things having to do with worship, Luther was still a reformer and not a revolutionary. Revolutionaries throw everything overboard and start over again from square one. For example, the iconoclasts and radical reformers saw the reformation era as zero hour in the post-apostolic church. The ancient divine service with its deep roots in Holy Scriptures and in the life of the early church was often simply set aside.

In contradistinction to this, the Lutheran confessors could respond boldly to their critics in Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession: *We are unjustly accused of abolishing the Mass. Actually, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns are interspersed here and there among the parts sung in Latin. These are added for the instruction of the people, for ceremonies are needed especially in order that the unlearned may be taught. Paul prescribed that in church a language should be used which is understood by the people (1 Cor. 14:2, 9). The people are accustomed to receive the sacrament together, in so far as they are fit to do so. This likewise increases the reverence and devotion of public worship, for none are admitted unless they are first heard and examined. The people are also admonished concerning the value and use of the sacrament and the great consolation it offers to anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe in God and as for and expect what is good from God. Such worship pleases God, and such use of the sacrament nourishes devotion to God. Accordingly it does not appear that the Mass is observed with more devotion among our adversaries than among us.'*

The Lutheran reformers were conservative in their approach to reforming the mass/ divine service for a reason. At the heart of the Divine Service is the Gospel rightly preached and the Lord's Supper administered according to it.

Heaven comes to earth through these means specified by the Lord Himself. Therefore the whole understanding of worship is to serve this reality of the sacramental presence of the Lord – for the sake of His people.

The Lutheran theologian Valentin Ernst Loscher wrote in a hymn:

“How holy is this place, O Lord, Where I stand in devotion!

It is for me heaven’s door, which I now see as open.

*O Gate of Life, Lord’s Table thou, I am no longer far from heaven,
and feel my Father’s closeness.”*

The place of the Divine Service is a holy place, a place where God Himself is present. Christ teaches us there through the office of the sermon. What the pastor preaches is God’s own, eternal Word. God is present in the office, which preaches reconciliation with God through Christ. The Augsburg Confession states the purpose of the office of pastor in the Divine Service: *‘That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, Who works faith where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel.*

In His Church Christ is present not only through the sermon of the Gospel, but also and foremost in the all-holy Sacrament of the Altar. In, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine the Body and Blood of Christ are present. In the holy Sacrament of the Altar Christ is as exactly and really present, as He was that Palm Sunday when He made His entrance into Jerusalem on the back of a donkeys’ colt.

For that reason the Church of the New Testament also sings the Palm Sunday Hosanna (which is traceable back to the year 96 AD) as its greeting of homage to Him, Who makes His solemn entrance into the congregation in the holy supper. For that reason as well the congregation then bows with the prophet Isaiah before the Majesty of the coming Lord (also traceable back to 96 AD) and sings with the angels and archangels the ‘holy, holy, holy’....

Hermann Sasse said in a speech in 1939:

In the Lord's Supper the rooms of the Church broaden themselves and heaven and earth become one, as our fathers prayed before the Lord's Supper: 'In the Lord's Supper the rooms of the Church broaden themselves and heaven and earth become one, as our fathers prayed before the Lord's Supper: 'Your supper be my heaven on earth, until I enter into Your heaven'. As the Supper of our Lord bridges the immense time-span between this earthly age and the kingdom of God, so this Sacrament bridges the chasm between heaven and earth... If heaven is here, 'where Christ is, seated at God's right hand', then the Lord's supper is really our heaven on earth, until we enter heaven.

What is said of the Supper of the Lord is said by extension to the worship that is the place of the Supper of the Lord. Heaven and earth come together here, as Christ comes among His people to forgive them and make them His saints. Worship is thus a unique place, where the culture of heaven touches down to lift us up. Thus our worship will never truly fit into any human, earthly culture – be it German, or North American, Hispanic, or Tanzanian – for worship carries with it the eternal culture of heaven.

Therefore the place of worship, the service where Christ comes to serve us, is totally unsuited for irreverent and impious behaviour or emotions. Where God is present, the sinner can do nothing else than to appear first with His head bowed. Conscious of our own unworthy, sinful standing, and mindful of the most holy presence of the Holy Trinity, we conduct ourselves in the Divine Service not as the people of Israel before the golden calf, but rather more like reverent Jacob, as he found Himself in God's holy presence. ***He was afraid and said: 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!'***

A repentant sinner comes before His Lord Jesus Christ on his knees. But he is blessed there. For the Gospel word of Christ 'I forgive you; do not be afraid' is the last word, the only word that counts for the sinner who confesses and seeks help from the God Who saves.

That is, finally, what occurs Sunday to Sunday in the Divine Service. We Christians come into the house of God with humility of heart, conscious of our guilt under God's law. There we confess to our Lord our sin, for which He makes us truly sorry. He then addresses us with the forgiveness of sins – through His absolution, His song, His Word, His sermon, His supper, His benediction. We depart without fear and free.

(Excursus: I dislike liturgies that have words following the Benediction that have the pattern of 'Go in peace; serve the Lord'. It seems that the unequivocal word of peace, which is God's unconditional Gospel blessing, is then followed by a word of Law. The last Word, then, is about what WE must do, that is, in serving the Lord. For that matter, I am cautious about what sort of announcements are made following the Divine Service, for even these might leave the congregation with the sound of law in their ears, diminishing to an extent the word of grace they have received from their Heavenly Father through His Christ.)

Jesus makes a promise to be with us through the worship of His church. Worship is THE centre of the life of the one holy church. Worship is the way that Christ makes and sustains disciples, followers of Him.

Our Lord promised in Matthew 28 (what we often call the 'Great Commission'):
Therefore, going, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to heed to everything I have commanded you.

The dominically mandated means – the way Jesus wants it done – of making disciples – followers of Him – are the baptizing and the teaching. Jesus goes on: ***and thus (in this way – outwards) I am with you always, to the very end of the age.***

The same way that Jesus makes disciples is the way that HE is with us now in worship.

Confessions References

(Pless)

Article VII of the Augsburg Confession defines the church liturgically.... Article VII confesses that *'it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word'* (AC VII:2)

Notice that the Augustana does not define the church on the basis of the mere presence of Word and Sacrament, but by the fact that the Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are rightly administered in accordance with the divine Word. Preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments require liturgy. Word and Sacrament are not static commodities but means through which the Lord Himself is working to constitute and sustain His church. To be sure, Augustana VII holds that the true unity of the church is not grounded in the uniformity of ceremonies instituted by men. But these humanly devised ceremonies are not the liturgy.

The liturgy is Gottesdienst, divine service, the Lord's service to us through the proclamation of His Word and the giving out of His body and blood. In the theology of the Lutheran Confessions, God is the subject not the object of liturgical action. The trajectory is from the Lord to His Church and then from the Church to her Lord. (*arrows might be helpful here*) In Luke 22, just after He had established the Supper of His body and blood, the Lord says, "I am among you as One Who serves" (v. 22). This verse embodies the Lutheran understanding of the liturgy; it is the service that Jesus renders to His church, given by grace and received by faith. Rome had reversed the flow with the insistence that the Mass is essentially a sacrifice that the church offers to God. Reformed Protestants likewise define worship as human activity, that is, the church's obedient ascription of praise to the majesty of a sovereign God.

Luther, in his treatise “Against the Heavenly Prophets” writes: *‘If I now seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ as Dr. Karlstadt trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacrament or the gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross.’*

In the liturgy, God Himself is **present** to forgive sins.

C. F. W. Walther: Thesis IX of Law and Gospel, ‘the Word of God is not rightly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and the Sacraments, but to their own prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace; in other words, when they are told to keep on praying and struggling until they feel that God has received them into grace’

in statu confessionis

(pless)

In a culture that has been so deeply influenced by Evangelicalism it is imperative that we emphasize our Lutheran distinctives. Article X of the Formula of Concord-Solid Declaration confesses: *“We believe, teach, and confess that in a time of confession, as when the enemies of the Word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel, the entire community of God, yes, every individual Christian, and especially the ministers of the Word as leaders of the community of God, are obligated to confess openly, not only by words but also through deeds and actions, the true doctrine and all that pertains to it, according to the Word of God. In such a case we should not yield to adversaries even in matters of indifference, nor should we tolerate the imposition of such ceremonies*

on us by adversaries in order to undermine the genuine worship of God and to introduce and confirm their idolatry by force of chicanery” (FC-SD X:10)

At the time of the Formula, the challenge was an attempt to impose Roman ceremonies on Lutherans in order to give the impression of unity. Today the challenge is from the other side of the fence as some Lutherans give the impression that there are no substantial differences between them and the ‘Evangelicals’.

Some of the strongest, clearest, and most unifying words in regard to the maintaining of our liturgical worship in the Lutheran church, especially in the midst of our North American culture, come from C. F. W. Walther:

‘We refuse to be guided by those who are offended by our church customs. We adhere to them all the more firmly when someone wants to cause us to have a guilty conscience on account of them...It is truly distressing that many of our fellow Christians find the difference between Lutheranism and Papism in outward things.

(It is not in the outward things of the Divine Service that you will find the great difference between us and Rome – but rather in the true Gospel that is proclaimed among us as opposed to the pelagian error still maintained by Rome) It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when one sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the deluded American sects, lest they accuse us of being papistic! Indeed! Am I to be afraid of a Methodist, who perverts the saving Word, or be ashamed in the matter of my good cause, and not rather rejoice that the sects can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them?... We are not insisting that there be uniformity of perception or feeling or of taste among all believing Christians – neither dare anyone that all be minded as he. Nevertheless it remains true that the Lutheran liturgy distinguishes Lutheran worship from the worship of other churches to such an extent that the houses of worship of the latter look like lecture halls (or movie theatres today) in which hearers are merely addressed or instructed, while our churches are in truth houses of prayer in which Christians serve the great God publicly before the world’

(This is the reason all our congregations' constitutions include the in the Doctrinal Articles the promise of 'Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school')

Pastor John Pless comments further:

There are several implications for congregational life and pastoral practice. Rejection of the 'alternative worship movement' is not an affirmation that all is well in congregations that stick to the hymnal. (Kenneth Korby commented) that there are three kinds of churches: (1) churches with the liturgy; (2) churches without the liturgy; and (3) liturgical churches.

There are congregations that never depart from (the liturgy) (TLH or LW services – now LSB 1- 5); they have the liturgy, although they really don't know WHY.

There are churches that have abandoned the liturgy altogether.

Genuinely liturgical churches are at home in the liturgy; it is the source and center of their life. I have no doubt that one of the reasons 'alternative worship forms' have been so eagerly embraced by many in the Missouri Synod is that that liturgy was never taught and the richness of our hymnbooks was left largely untapped. It is not the liturgy that is the problem but the way it has been misused....

Martin Luther writes(LC II:55):

*'We believe that in this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins, which is granted through the holy sacraments and, in short, the entire Gospel and all the duties of Christianity ... Therefore **everything** in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live'*

Everything in worship is to be ordered in this direction – that the forgiveness of sins is the main thing. The desires - for participation or relevancy

or comfort or ease of use – all must fall below the need that EVERYTHING be ordered toward the obtaining of forgiveness of sins.

Proper understanding of ‘Tradition’

Some speak of a ‘traditional service’ as if it were akin to ‘old fashioned’ or ‘out of date’ or just something of the past (maybe like old time Christmas traditions from the farm that are no longer do-able in the urban context)

But ‘tradition’ comes from the Latin: tradito – that which is passed on, or handed down. St. Paul writes that ***I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you...***

He speaks this way of the dying and rising of Christ, and of our Lord’s institution of His supper.

Yet our ENTIRE FAITH is traditional – that is, it has been handed down to us.

Colossians 2:6-7 ***Therefore ,as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving,***

Again, St. Paul writes to the Corinthians ***Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone things that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. IF anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.***

IF you change the faith you have received, then it is NO LONGER the faith you received, and you cannot then hand it down to the next people that God places before you to hear it from you

Pastor John Pless writes,

'Our concern for the liturgy is not fueled by a traditionalism that is intent on merely preserving the past. It is a concern that the forgiveness won by our Lord in His suffering and death be proclaimed and distributed in their truth and purity for the salvation of sinners. Liturgical texts and practices are to be evaluated in this perspective'

'The teaching of the liturgy is a key component in the catechesis of new members....The liturgy is not readily understandable or accessible to the unbeliever. Through catechesis the unbeliever is being transported from the culture of this world to the culture of God's colony on earth, the holy church. The culture of God's colony has its own language, the language of faith. The language of faith is the language of the liturgy. Catechesis teaches the convert this language.

In His preface to the Small Catechism Luther strongly urged the teachers of the catechism to 'adopt one form, adhere to it, and use it repeatedly year after year', and not to 'alter a single syllable or recite the catechism differently from year to year'

What holds for catechetics holds even more for liturgics, for worship.

NOTE importance of 'homologeo' (to confess) - that we say the same thing to God (and to others) that He first says to us.

This holds for the confession (saying the same thing) of our sin and the confession (saying the same thing) of the name and Persons of God in the Creed.

Yet this holds also for the entire worship of the church. God speaks, we listen; we speak back. The readings are His speaking. The collect is our speaking back what He has spoken. The hymns are our singing what He has first spoken to us in His Word, from which the hymns have their content and meaning.

This 'homologeo' may seem to be our work, and certainly our mouths and bodies are used in the confessing. Yet in reality, it is the work of the Holy Spirit Who creates faith and the expression of faith, Who grants forgiveness and opens the ears and heart to receive that forgiveness.

'O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise'

Importance also of the Salutation (which at first may seem to be a minor detail in our worship). The salutation (The Lord be with you. R: and with your spirit) is called the 'little ordination' or the 'minor ordination' – as again the congregation confesses that through the spirit of this servant of God she will receive the gifts of God. God works through means – real, flesh and blood human means. He has a Pastor, not a robot, not a TV screen. The pastor has warts and wrinkles that must be borne with by the congregation – but all the more to show us that it is the LORD Who is really doing the work, the One speaking here.

Dr. Norman Nagel explains that the historic liturgy is like a living tree. 'Some of the branches have been blown away or pruned off. A little bit more has grown here or there. But what we know of the liturgy, from as long as we know of the liturgy, is what's gone on in the liturgy' (Whose Liturgy is it? Logia 1993)

The first president of the Missouri Synod worked long and hard to restore a common historic liturgy to the church when so many churches were following their own devices. C. F. W. Walther's efforts received some negative feedback. He responded in a publication that he edited for many years: *Der Lutheraner*, as in this example, translated from the July 19, 1853, issue, volume 9, number 24, page 163.

Whenever the divine service once again follows the old Evangelical-Lutheran agendas (or church books), it seems that many raise a great cry that it is "Roman Catholic": "Roman Catholic" when the pastor chants "The Lord be with you" and the congregation responds by chanting "and with thy spirit"; "Roman Catholic" when the pastor chants the collect and the blessing and the people respond with a chanted "Amen." Even the simplest Christian can respond to this outcry: "Prove to me that this chanting is contrary to the Word of God, then I too will call it

'Roman Catholic' and have nothing more to do with it. However, you cannot prove this to me." If you insist upon calling every element in the divine service "Romish" that has been used by the Roman Catholic Church, it must follow that the reading of the Epistle and Gospel is also "Romish." Indeed, it is mischief to sing or preach in church, for the Roman Church has done this also . . . Those who cry out should remember that the Roman Catholic Church possesses every beautiful song of the old orthodox church. The chants and antiphons and responses were brought into the church long before the false teachings of Rome crept in. This Christian Church since the beginning, even in the Old Testament, has derived great joy from chanting... For more than 1700 years orthodox Christians have participated joyfully in the divine service. Should we, today, carry on by saying that such joyful participation is "Roman Catholic"? God forbid! Therefore, as we continue to hold and to restore our wonderful divine services in places where they have been forgotten, let us boldly confess that our worship forms do not tie us with the modern sects or with the church of Rome; rather, they join us to the one, holy Christian Church that is as old as the world and is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

More thoughts from C.F.W. Walther:

"We know and firmly hold that the character, the soul of Lutheranism, is not found in outward observances but in the [pure doctrine](#). If a congregation had the most beautiful ceremonies in the very best order, but did not have the [pure doctrine](#), it would be anything but Lutheran. We have from the beginning spoken earnestly of good ceremonies, not as though the important thing were outward forms, but rather to make use of our liberty in these things. For true Lutherans know that although one does not have to have these things (because there is no divine command to have them), one may nevertheless have them because good ceremonies are lovely and beautiful and are not forbidden in the Word of God. Therefore the Lutheran church has not abolished "outward ornaments, candles, altar cloths, statues and similar ornaments," [AP XXIV] but has left them free. The sects proceeded differently because they did not know how to distinguish between what is commanded, forbidden, and left free in the Word of God. We remind only of the mad actions of Carlstadt and of his adherents and followers in Germany and in Switzerland. We on our part have retained the ceremonies and church ornaments in order to prove by our actions that we have a correct understanding of Christian liberty, and know how to conduct ourselves in things which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God.

We refuse to be guided by those who are offended by our church customs. We adhere to them all the more firmly when someone wants to cause us to have a guilty conscience on account of them. The Roman antichristendom enslaves

poor consciences by imposing human ordinances on them with the command: "You must keep such and such a thing!"; the sects enslave consciences by forbidding and branding as sin what God has left free. Unfortunately, also many of our Lutheran Christians are still without a true understanding of their liberty. This is demonstrated by their aversion to ceremonies.

It is truly distressing that many of our fellow Christians find the difference between Lutheranism and [Roman Catholicism](#) in outward things. It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when a person sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the deluded American denominations just so they won't accuse us of being Roman Catholic! Indeed! Am I to be afraid of a Methodist, who perverts the saving Word, or be ashamed in the matter of my good cause, and not rather rejoice that they can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them?

It is too bad that such entirely different ceremonies prevail in our Synod, and that no liturgy at all has yet been introduced in many congregations. The prejudice especially against the responsive chanting of pastor and congregations is of course still very great with many people -- this does not, however, alter the fact that it is very foolish. The pious [church father](#) Augustine said, "Qui cantat, bis orat--he who sings prays twice."

This finds its application also in the matter of the liturgy. Why should congregations or individuals in the congregation want to retain their prejudices? How foolish that would be! For first of all it is clear from the words of St. Paul (1 Cor. 14:16) that the congregations of his time had a similar custom. It has been the custom in the Lutheran Church for 250 years. It creates a solemn impression on the Christian mind when one is reminded by the solemnity of the divine service that one is in the house of God, in childlike love to their heavenly Father, also give expression to their joy in such a lovely manner.

We are not insisting that there be uniformity in perception or feeling or taste among all believing Christians--neither dare anyone demand that all be minded as he. Nevertheless, it remains true that the Lutheran liturgy distinguishes Lutheran worship from the worship of other churches to such an extent that the houses of worship of the latter look like lecture halls in which the hearers are merely addressed or instructed, while our churches are in truth houses of prayer in which Christians serve the great God publicly before the world.

Uniformity of ceremonies (perhaps according to the Saxon Church order published by the Synod, which is the simplest among the many Lutheran church orders) would be highly desirable because of its usefulness. A poor slave of the pope finds one and same form of service, no matter where he goes, by which he at once recognizes his church.

With us it is different. Whoever comes from Germany without a true understanding of the doctrine often has to look for his church for a long time, and

many have already been lost to our church because of this search. How different it would be if the entire Lutheran church had a uniform form of worship! This would, of course, first of all yield only an external advantage, however, one which is by no means unimportant. Has not many a Lutheran already kept his distance from the sects because he saw at the Lord's Supper they broke the bread instead of distributing wafers?

The objection: "What would be the use of uniformity of ceremonies?" was answered with the counter question, "What is the use of a flag on the battlefield? Even though a soldier cannot defeat the enemy with it, he nevertheless sees by the flag where he belongs. We ought not to refuse to walk in the footsteps of our fathers. They were so far removed from being ashamed of the good ceremonies that they publicly confess in the passage quoted: "It is not true that we do away with all such external ornaments"

(C.F.W. Walther, Explanation of Thesis XVIII, D, Adiaphora, of the book The True Visible Church, delivered at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, Beginning August 9, 1871, at the 16th Central District Convention, translated by Fred Kramer, printed in Essays for the Church [CPH: 1992], I:193-194).

Proper Understanding of 'Contemporary'

The dictionary definition is that which happens at the same time as something else. This paper being read to you is a contemporary experience. It's happening now.

However, there is a deeper definition of 'contemporary'. Literally it means 'with the time' (con + temporis). In popular speech, we might say 'Get with the times'. This is more than simply using the current language of the day, or even the music of an era, for in *some* cases these can be neutral matters. To be 'with the times' may mean more deeply to be attached to the culture, the spirit, the ethos, of the era, to absorb the culture and make it your own.

Two things about this:

1. Culture always changes; Christ and His church are eternal
'The church that marries the culture will soon be a widow'

2. Every culture in the sinful fallen world is counter-church; and the church is always counter-cultural in a sinful fallen world

Pastor John Pless writes,

*'Remember the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32. The children of Israel, fresh out of Egypt, are encamped in the Sinai wilderness. They do not know what has become of Moses. The people go to Aaron with the request for new gods. Aaron is responsive to their 'felt needs' and fashions for them a golden calf, a 'worship form' that was culturally relevant to their Canaanite context. This was entertainment evangelism at its best as we read that **the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play**. Even though Aaron called it **a feast to the Lord**, God called it idolatry....*

(discuss ex tempore 'Israelite substance and Canaanite style' –what does this mean for us today?)

The opposite of idolatry is faith in Jesus Christ. Indeed Faith is the highest worship of God as the Confessions so often remind us.

CS Lewis: 'As long as you notice, and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing, but only learning to dance. The ideal service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping. Concluding with an entreaty for permanence and uniformity, he said he could make do with almost any kind of service whatever if only it would stay put. But if each form is snatched away just when I am beginning to feel at home in it, then I can never make any progress in the art of worship.

Fred Precht, in *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, writes:

'Part of the problem of contemporary, do-it-yourself liturgies promoted by the Church Growth Movement in the hope of increasing church membership is the emphasis on technique and methodology and its program/entertainment aspect rather than relying on the power of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. When such homemade efforts grab attention, the ministry team is invariably challenged to outdo the worship effects of the week before. Moreover, because such service often lack sustenance and continuity, they have little sustaining for worshippers

Our unifying, confessional position is that expressed in AC XXIV:30 : 'no novelty has been introduced which did not exist in the church from ancient times.'

Adiaphora

The concept of 'adiaphora' is often raised in regard to worship forms and practices. Sometimes the improper use of the concept leads to a disunity in our worship practices, rather than the Unity that the Formula of Concord seeks to reach through the right understanding of adiaphora.

We need to look at Article X of the Formula of Concord to understand its real context and meaning, especially as it applies to the liturgical orders of worship in the Lutheran Church.

The article states: *There has also been a division among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession concerning those ceremonies or church usages which are neither command nor forbidden in the Word of God but have been introduced into the church in the interest of good order and the general welfare.*

The chief question has been, In times of persecution, when a confession is called for, and when the enemies of the Gospel have not come to an agreement with us in doctrine, may we with an inviolate conscience yield to their pressure and demands, reintroduce some ceremonies that have fallen into disuse and that in themselves are indifferent things and neither commanded nor forbidden by God, and thus come to an understanding with them in such

ceremonies and indifferent things? One party said Yes to this, the other party said No.

1. To settle this controversy we believe, teach, and confess unanimously that the ceremonies or church usages which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God, but which have been introduced for the sake of good order and the general welfare, are in and for themselves no divine worship or even apart of it. "In vain do they worship Me, teach as doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:9).

Note that the Formula teaches that such ceremonies are not 'in and for themselves' divine worship. The ceremonies – the forms – serve what happens in true liturgy – the true preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments.

2. We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every locality and every age has the authority to change such ceremonies according to circumstance, as it may be most profitable and edifying to the community of God.

Note that changes to ceremonies are those which are profitable (unto salvation) and edifying. Please understand, as well, that when the Formula uses the words 'every locality and every age', we are not talking about individual congregations, but rather about the church as a whole. The church walks together in her common ceremony.

3. But in this matter all frivolity and offenses are to be avoided, and particularly the weak in faith are to be spared (I Cor. 8:9-13; Rom. 14:13ff).

Just because a ceremony is considered adiaphora, something neither commanded nor forbidden, does not mean it can be changed on a dime!

We should not consider as matters of indifference, and we should avoid as forbidden by God, ceremonies which are basically contrary to the Word of God even though they go under the name and guise of external adiaphora and are given a different colour from the true one.

Hymnody

St. Paul directed the believers to '***speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs***'. This was not any old singing. Spiritual songs are songs given to be sung by the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore the church has always developed hymnody that is focused on where the Spirit has promised to be found, namely, in the Word of God.

The Word has utter precedence in the song of the church. Melody, tune, rhyme, rhythm all serve the Word of God which brings Christ to us. We do not have time to go into the development of Christian hymnody, nor does your speaker have expertise to do so. However, it must be said that here the church has always taken the best, the richest, the most faithful, to be retained in the song of the church.

A quick glance through our hymnal will demonstrate that the hymns we use in worship come from centuries of time and from all corners of the holy Christian church.

An easy test of the validity of song for use in the liturgy of the church was once suggested by Pastor Jim Keller, now of our St. Catharines seminary. Rather than dispute the musical form, he encouraged speaking the words of the songs to indicate whether they were truly edifying.

1. the controversy in worship is:

a) will we maintain that worship is God serving us
or will we change/adapt worship to be something we do – either for God (ie praise and thanksgiving primary) or for others (as a means by which WE entertain/ bring people into the church)

b) will we maintain the historic liturgy of the church, which the Holy Spirit has given to the church in order that Christ's gifts be given to us in worship or will we develop forms of worship which focus in a different direction,

2. The confessional position has always been that worship is God's action – God serving us – Christ coming to us with the forgiveness of sins

the confessional position has been that we maintain the 'ceremonies of the mass', the historic liturgy handed down to us by the Spirit's direction in the church

Conclusion (intro to Lutheran Worship)

Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. Music is drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious Giver God. Saying back to Him what He has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure...Each generation receives from those who went before and, in making the tradition of the Divine Service its own, adds what best may serve in its own day – the living heritage and something new.

ADDENDA -----

Illustration – ceremony

As an Army soldier I cannot and will not speak for Marines, but formality and practiced precision go deeper than our close association with death. As one who performs funeral honors frequently, I can tell you that the military bearing is a sign of my honor to the departed and their family. That is the motivation and focus as we practice and prepare.

As a superior once told me, "That man up front spent his entire life serving others. The least you can do is serve his widow for an hour on Saturday." That has stuck with me. No better place is this sentiment shown than at Arlington, where men march the exact same 21 steps and pause at 21 second intervals in all weather 24 hours a day 365 days a year for long dead heroes we can't even name and most Americans never visit.

My hat off to you for correctly identifying this as an object lesson for the spirit of the liturgy: humility and deference when confronted with someone else's sacrifice - not our own.

The focus on the ritual directs our focus to the things that truly matter.. it points us to the things that we would overlook if we did not observe the ceremony. It is never about the ceremony itself. The ceremony is a tool that pulls our attention away from ourselves and forces us to face objective reality apart from our personal situation.

No honor guard ever serves at a funeral out of personal pride in the merit of his bearing and training. The service, the ritual, the "liturgy" that we follow is done to communicate our heartfelt gratitude and respect. To take away proper ceremony is to divorce an act of proper respect. In the minds of most (including my Drill Sergeants back at Basic), you cannot separate ceremony and respect because ceremony IS respect. The two are linked so closely that where ceremony is lacking, respect will be also.

One always effects the other. For the military, ceremony and respect are linked. For the church, we prefer to see it in terms of practice and doctrine.

The amazing parallels between being a Soldier and being a Christian are too many to identify in this post so I will just touch on a few of them. Certainly St. Paul identified it: we are both at war against a deadly enemy and alone we cannot hope to win. Preparation, unity, ceremony, and repetition are tools to accomplish the task of victory. The necessary death of the old life so that a new life can be made. The consequences for a lack of vigilance is certain death. As

a Soldier, I desperately cling to my training. As a Christian, I desperately cling to the cross.

Maybe this is why the US Army saw the importance of formulating a common creed and requiring that it be memorized by all recruits.

True and False Church. True and False Liturgy.

“There is true and false church. There is correct and false liturgy. The great Gnostic sects of the second century—to which a great portion of Christianity of the day, perhaps the greater part, fell sacrifice—won men by means of their liturgies, so far as the sources allow us to determine. The great mystery religions of the ancient world did the same before the Gnostics. The ancient Christian liturgies arose out of the language of prophecy. Here lies the beauty and force of the language of the liturgy. But there is true and false prophecy. Wherever true prophecy appears, there also false prophecy arises. This is so in the time of the OT and the NT, and in the history of the church. It belongs to the greatness of Luther that he had the gift of discernment. He was brought up in the liturgy and lived in it. He desired to maintain whatever of it could be retained. And he never gave up any of it frivolously, and he often hesitated long before he finally made a decision. Luther had the gift of discernment. He had this great gift of the Holy Spirit, without which the church cannot exist, because he had the Word and Sacrament, to which the Spirit of God has bound himself in the church. He could judge liturgy because he possessed the measure on which it along can be judged: the [holy Gospel](#), the saving message of the justification of the sinner by faith alone, the article from which nothing can be granted even if heaven and earth should fall and nothing remain. On this article depends not only our salvation, but also the church and the liturgy of the [true church](#). “Where this article remains pure, so too Christianity remains pure and in beautiful harmony and without any divisions. [...] But where it does not remain pure, there it is not possible to repel any errors or heretical spirit.” [cited in FC SD III.6]. In this sense we ought all begin and end our work in the realm of liturgy with this prayer: “Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word.”

Source: Hermann Sasse, “A Brotherly Warning Against the ‘[High Church](#)’ Danger,” translated by M.C. Harrison in *The Lonely Way: Selected Letters and Essays* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), pgs. 314-315.

Dr. Holger Sonntag offers these poignant comments on the issue of liturgy, worship, orders and freedom. The post of last week or so on adiaphora elicited quite an active discussion, and a number of comments, of varying quality. Pastor

Sonntag offered this as a comment to that thread, but it was so good that I felt it deserved to be featured as a separate blog post.

First, I want to respond to a comment on this blog site about my connecting liturgiology and ecclesiology. I don't quite see how this would make liturgy part of the areas in which we need to agree before we can have church fellowship. All I meant to say here is: Lutheran churches with Lutheran theology should also worship in a recognizably Lutheran way.

AC VII, esp. when we take it together with Ap. VII-VIII, shows very clearly that Lutherans navigated the double dangers of a liturgical uniformity that was of a meritorious nature and a confusion of freedom of faith with liturgical license. What they opted for, for the sake of public harmony and tranquility, was liturgical uniformity that is of a non-meritorious nature.

They applied it in such a way that sovereign cities and principalities would have uniform orders which needed not to be identical all across Germany and Scandinavia.

There is a difference between necessity and usefulness. Just because something is not necessary (and liturgical uniformity is not necessary for church fellowship) doesn't mean it's bad. Good works are not necessary for salvation, but they're not bad...

Now, not to start a chicken-egg hunt here, but as to a person's more recent quoting from Luther's German Mass on Luther's respect for those who already have "good orders" (LW 53:62), it might be good to determine how this applies to us today.

Wasn't it this way that some among us felt the need, beginning perhaps sometimes in the 60s or 70s, to take it upon themselves to alter the "good orders" already in existence in congregations (TLH) and to replace them with their own creations and alterations. That's now history, I know, but we also shouldn't pretend that the "new orders" we're talking about in our context somehow emerged in anything remotely similar to the liturgical vacuum created by Luther's reformation which necessitated decisive *theological* (not: stylistic) changes in the traditional liturgy to reflect the rediscovered gospel.

Here pastors felt the theological need to act, and probably rightly so; and Luther respected their sincere work. -- Yet is that what happened in the last 30 years, was TLH (or LW) in such a dire need of *theological* reform that everybody was called to try their hand in this "state of emergency" to create the "diversity" that exists today?

In the same context (about LW 53:62), Luther nonetheless talks about that it would be nice to have uniform ceremonies in the principalities (he just can't help

it, it seems!). These territories were, in my recollection of German history, the basic sovereign units of the German empire: they could wage wars, enter into confederations, etc. And they also had the right to reform (and defend) the church (*ius reformandi*) and to establish ceremonies (*ius liturgicum*) -- a mayor in, say, Saxony, didn't have these rights independently because they were held by his sovereign. In other words, these little states were different from the individual states in America.

Practically speaking, they were also the basic point of reference for most people. Yes, they were all Germans (esp. against Rome), but they were, perhaps first of all, Saxons, Prussians, Bavarians, etc. Only a few merchants, or mercenaries or theologians, would ever travel outside of their tiny nations. Most were farmers and craftsmen.

And, if I'm not wrong, you also couldn't simply leave your home country and move to a different place. You belonged to the prince; he was your "father" (see the LC on that one), he owned you as his subject (this is why suicide was a crime against the prince: you were defrauding him of his possession).

This ties in to the point Luther makes elsewhere: let's avoid confusion and offense. Well, if all are uniform in one territory; if all are basically never leaving that territory, you clearly don't need a "German" solution to a problem that can be solved on the Saxon or Prussian level.

Again, is that our situation today? It is not. People travel, snowbirds come to mind when you live in MN. Folks spend several months away from home; they visit their children in other parts of the country. -- Any congregations out there where that's caused discussions and perhaps even ugly divisions??

We can't pretend that we're still shepherding a flock of stationary farmers and little merchants who don't have the money to go to town more often than once a week, much less the means to leave the state.

And, these pragmatic considerations aside, the early Missourians whose members also didn't travel a lot, still strove to be uniform liturgically in CA, MN, MO, AL, NY, and MI -- nationally, in other words! They took pleasure in looking the same as fellow Missourians everywhere (that's love too) -- and they wanted to look different than those not in fellowship with us based on agreement in the areas mentioned in AC VII. This is different from sectarianism.

Why do we worship the way we do? Because it's theologically sound and, after careful and respectful consideration of our (Lutheran) heritage (4th Commandment!), we've freely and lovingly agreed to do it this way. Isn't it possible to be a Lutheran and worship based on a slimmed-down version of the divine service without all these cumbersome canticles? Probably, but that's just not what we've agreed upon. Otherwise, we'd only abide, e.g., by the agreed-

upon bylaws and constitution of synod, not by its agreed-upon hymnal and liturgy. That'd be pretty sad.

Finally, as in the case of Luther (and the Early Church, I read somewhere), the point of reference for our liturgical practice (and reform) ought to be those of the household of the faith, not potential members or heterodox communions.

Evangelism, at least in the previous millennia, I venture to say, didn't exactly happen in the worship service. It happened in the home, at work, and wherever else Christians and unbelievers rubbed shoulders in the context of their vocations. As the opening invocation indicates, the worship service is chiefly for those who already rightly know and believe in the triune God; only they can call upon him in a God-pleasing manner. Others may visit (and we welcome them, except at the communion table -- oops...), but they can't be made the defining yardstick for Christian worship. To understand and appreciate the divine service, you need to know the catechism, LW 53:64.

By the way, the catechism is perhaps a good example for our discussion here. Is there anything in God's word that tells us we have to use catechisms to instruct unbelievers? No. Is there anything in God's word that tells us that we must use Luther's catechism? No. Can Christian doctrine be taught *correctly* in any other way than Luther's? I guess so! So, why are we then urging congregations to use the SC (or maybe we aren't urging them -- so why should we urge them ...), by means of the hymnal? Because we're Lutherans, and Luther has put it together so well, and we have / should agree upon it to do it this way.

The catechism, as well as the liturgy catechetically understood (another thought in Ap. VII-VIII), provide us with the Christian language; they help us to understand the bible's language correctly which is the Spirit's speaking; they help us to speak this language faithfully and accurately to our neighbor, so that he and we would praise God with one voice and in one common understanding, Rom. 15.

Everybody using their own version of a little catechism? Possible. Good? No.