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CELEBRATING GOD'S GRACE:
AN ADULT INFORMATION COURSE
WHICH TEACHES THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
AS IT IS EXPRESSED IN THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

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MARCH 1993

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ALBERT LEA, MINNESOTA

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ABSTRACT

The writer did a thorough study of the ongoing relationship of worship and doctrine as an influence in the formation of Lutheran worship practices.

He developed a class entitled "Celebrating God's Grace," which summarized the basic teachings of the church as they are expressed in the worship of the church. This was part of a revamped adult education program in his congregation.

In addition to the obvious benefits for those attending the class, the writer came to better understand the centrality of grace in the Christian faith and is now better able to plan and lead worship.

To my wife, Jolene,
and my children, Nathan, Sarah, and Emily,
who had to share their husband and father with this project;

to the faithful members of Zion Lutheran Church in Albert Lea, Minnesota,
who allowed their pastor the time to work on this project,
and also served as willing "guinea pigs" for his efforts;

to good friends, Pam and Vern Doss,
who served as dedicated proofreaders.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE INTEGRAL RELATIONSHIP

BETWEEN WORSHIP AND DOCTRINE

What is the proper relationship between worship and theology? In the ancient church, it was assumed that they complemented and supported each other. The Latin saying was *lex orandi--lex credendi* (literally: law of praying--law of believing). Realistically, at various times and places within the history of the Christian church, one or the other has tended to be given the place of prominence.

This chapter will look at the relationship between worship and theology through the years. It will be seen that worship has often served as a source for doctrine. Since worship patterns were influenced by a wide variety of non-theological forces, this sometimes led to strange worship customs, and therefore strange theology.

Martin Luther is the prime example of one who firmly believed that theology must have priority. Any worship that conflicted with the Word of God had to go. But there have been other movements and denominations which have similarly modified their worship practices according to their theological beliefs.

Finally, it will be seen that worship practices, which have been based upon good theology, can and have helped to reinforce that same doctrine in the hearts and minds of the people.

What Is Worship?

In Romans 9:4 Paul uses the word, "*latreia*," which is often translated with the word "worship" in English, to refer to the rites instituted by God and regulated by the laws of the Old Covenant. It was one of the marks which identified Israel as the true people of God. In Hebrews 9:1,6 the same term is used to refer to the official acts of the priest in the tabernacle or temple. Such service had been commanded by God and was pleasing to him.

Those sacrifices were designed to point ahead to the one who would himself be sacrificed, for all people in all times. With the coming of Christ, that old order has now been superseded by a new kind of sacrifice. We read in Romans 12:1-2:

Therefore, I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies (as a) living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, (this is) your authentic worship. And do not be conformed outwardly to this age, but be transformed inwardly by the renewing of your mind, so that you might discern the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.¹

We no longer kill animals to show our devotion, but we do offer our very bodies as living sacrifices to our God. In this, our bodies represent our entire beings, which we dedicate to the service of our God.

The idea of sacrifice marks the continuity of the new worship with the old, but the adjective "living" reminds of the discontinuity, the newness of the worship that has come about because of the sacrifice of Christ. We give ourselves to God: all of our time, all of our activity, all of our thoughts. The life which is received from God is offered back to God. This is a living sacrifice, for we are not called upon to die for our Lord but to live for him--which is far better.

Needless to say, this will extend beyond the day for community worship and the sanctuary. It is no longer valid to ask, "Is it better to be in church on Sunday morning thinking

¹Writer's translation.

about fishing or out on the lake thinking about church?" As Christians we will want to praise God and serve him in both places--and every other place as well.

All of this leaves a very big question: what is to be the role of cultic worship today? It would seem that two extremes must be avoided.

The first error would be to simply replace old cultic forms with new, which become just as narrow and legalistic. With Irenaeus came a relapse into pre-New Testament ideas of material sacrifices and true cultic offering, and therein developed the sacrifice of the mass.² Protestants will want to be careful when they consider such questions as "What is basic in worship?" While such a discussion can be considered in the proper sense (such as what is helpful or true to tradition), whenever worship is thought of in terms of things that we must do (as opposed to what God has done for us), we risk losing sight of the Gospel itself.

Ernst Käsemann seems to be reacting against such a tendency as he writes:

This shows conclusively that the total Christian community with all of its members is the bearer of this worship and that not only sacred functions but also cultically privileged persons lose their right to exist.³

But has he gone to the other extreme, implying that all cultic worship forms need to be discarded?

Peter Brunner has a helpful discussion in this regard. While all of life is worship, ever since the New Testament era, Christians have found it helpful to come together in a common assembly (*ekklesia*), finding there a "concrete focal point, a power station, so to say, which controls and directs their whole existence." When he speaks of worship, he refers simply to what Christians do when they come together "in the name of Jesus."⁴

²Johannes Behm, "ἑὶς, θυσία, θυσιαστήριον," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:190.

³Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 191.

⁴Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 17-18.

Neither *latreia* nor any other Old or New Testament term can adequately express what happens when Christians gather together for worship, for it is something radically different from the worship of Israel or any pagan cult. Luther and the Lutheran confessional writings use the term "*Gottesdienst*" (divine service), in which God is the one who comes to us with his blessings. For Luther, the Sabbath rest of the Third Commandment meant more than a pause from work; it was an opportunity for God to do his work on man. We never quit needing the strengthening that comes to us from Word and Sacrament. The sacrifice of worship cannot be anything more than receiving God's gifts and thanking him for them.

Since the gathering of believers is only a part of the total worship life of Christians, we dare not prescribe certain mandatory forms. The Lutheran Confessions speak only of the Biblical necessity of the Gospel being preached in its purity and the Sacraments being administered according to the Gospel. "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places."⁵

The "Northfield Statement on Worship" (1983) put it this way:

The core and center of corporate worship, then, is this: a gathering around Jesus Christ, who is present in the community through his Spirit-empowered means of grace, a gathering in Jesus Christ to give praise and thanks to God.⁶

Lex Orandi--Lex Credendi

The Latin phrase *lex orandi--lex credendi* may be taken in two ways. Most often it refers to the rule of prayer as providing a norm for belief. But it is also possible to reverse the subject and the predicate. The understood *est* is equivalent to an "=" sign. It can be that the half that is emphasized comes last. In that case, the rule of faith becomes the standard for what should be

⁵AC, VII.

⁶Eugene Brand, ed., *Worship Among Lutherans* (Geneva: Department of Studies, The Lutheran World Federation, 1983), 5.

prayed. The linguistic ambiguity of the Latin reminds of the interplay of worship and theology in the life of the church. Most often, it has been those in the Roman Catholic Church who have emphasized the normative power of worship, as they have looked to past liturgical practices to justify present doctrinal positions. The Protestant church was born out of a desire to re-establish Biblical doctrine as the norm for the life of the entire church, including worship practices. However, the relationship of worship and doctrine works both ways in both traditions. In the end, both traditions would say that there is a proper and complementary relationship between the two, but, if there is a conflict, the Roman Catholics would most often choose the supremacy of liturgical tradition, whereas the Protestants would most often opt for the doctrinal standard.⁷

Hermann Sasse asserts that "confession and liturgy belong inseparably together if the church is to be healthy. Liturgy is prayed dogma; dogma is the doctrinal content of the liturgy."⁸ He is concerned that some members of the liturgical movement are appealing to *lex orandi--lex credendi* as justification for placing liturgy above doctrine. He maintains that that, indeed, was the position of Pius XI in "*Divini Cultus*." However, that position has since been opposed by the then present Pope (Pius XII) in his encyclical "*Mediator Dei*." There the Roman pontiff pointed out that the saying could be turned around, and in all circumstances dogma should be the norm for liturgy. Sasse argues that if the church of Rome has figured that out, it should certainly also be true for followers of Luther who would like to think that the Gospel is the criterion for everything they do.⁹

⁷Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 252.

⁸Hermann Sasse, *We Confess: The Sacraments* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 117.

⁹*Ibid.*

While Luther certainly emphasized the priority of the Gospel, he too agreed that properly there should not be any conflict. The words *fides* (faith), *religio* (religion), and *cultus* (worship) are used synonymously in his writings.¹⁰ Faith is not something to be kept inside but is realized in worship.

From the Methodist perspective, William Willimon writes:

Here, in that hour or so on Sunday morning, as well as at funerals, weddings, and prayer meetings, our faith is expressed and formed, our innermost beliefs are transformed into outward acts and words.¹¹

According to Alexander Schmemmann, it is faith that gives birth to and shapes the liturgy, but it is the liturgy which bears testimony to faith and therefore becomes its true and adequate expression and norm.¹²

Ideally, there should never be any conflict between worship and doctrine. Was that the case in the early church? Schmemmann writes that for the fathers, the liturgy was "the living source and ultimate criteria of all Christian thought." He quotes Irenaeus as saying "Our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion."¹³

Schmemmann believes that there was a beautiful unity of the worship of the church in those early years. There was a self-evident connection and interdependence of the Lord's Day, the Eucharist, and the *Ecclesia* (church). However, this liturgical unity of the patristic age did not last, for it was soon replaced by a scholastic type of thinking, in which all organic connection within worship was severed. Theology was given a new independent, rational status. Worship

¹⁰Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 12.

¹¹William Willimon, *Worship As Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 28.

¹²Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform," in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed., Thomas Fisch (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 39.

¹³Schmemmann, "Theology and Liturgical Tradition," in Fisch, 12.

would no longer be the source, but the object of theology. Theology, in its various categories, then came to evaluate worship. The reformers argued against the medieval theology of worship, but, in spite of their stated desire to return to the primitive tradition, they looked instead to their own doctrine to establish a new theology of worship. In subsequent developments (liberalism, pietism, intellectualism, and the like), theology continued to dominate and form worship according to the *lex credendi*.¹⁴

At this point it seems obvious that Schmemmann is arguing for the priority of the *orandi* over the *credendi*, as his detractors are quick to point out. But he strongly maintains that for the Fathers there was no problem of priority or authority. From an Eastern mind-set, he is arguing that worship and doctrine must be a unity. He makes a distinction between "theology of liturgy" and "liturgical theology." In the first, one looks for the essence of the liturgy, with the goal of deriving theology from it. The goal then becomes a desire to have pure, right liturgy (but which period was perfect?). In liturgical theology, which he favors, the goal is to grasp that theology which is revealed in and through the liturgy.¹⁵

Schmemmann deplors "the divorce between liturgy, theology, and piety" which he believes has characterized the post-patristic period of the church. This lack of understanding of the liturgy of the church has altered the theology and piety of the church. He is not against liturgical reform, but he is worried that there is not the slightest interest in the organic relation of the *lex orandi* to the *lex credendi*. As a result, potential reformers tend to fall into two categories: (1) those who have a fixation with rubrics and rules but who have little interest in the relation they may or may not have to the faith of the church, and (2) those who are concerned only with making the liturgy

¹⁴Schmemmann, "Liturgical Tradition," 13-14, and "Liturgical Theology," 41.

¹⁵Schmemmann, "Liturgical Tradition," 18, and "Liturgical Theology," 39-40.

relevant and understandable. With both groups, liturgy is seen as an end in itself.¹⁶ It will only be through the recovery of the formula *lex orandi--lex credendi* that legitimate theology and worship will be possible within the church.

Worship As the Norm for Doctrine

In Orthodox terms, worship is first and foremost the "presence and act of the trinitarian God." "Worship is not primarily man's initiative but God's redeeming act in Christ through His Spirit."¹⁷ Since it is in worship that God comes to man in his saving encounter, worship is seen as a legitimate source of doctrine.

But which liturgies have the right to be used as a source of doctrine? Wainwright recalls three tests that have been applied. The first concerns origin. Worship traditions which can be traced back to Jesus or the apostolic church will carry the most weight. Indeed, some liturgical materials predate the New Testament gospels and epistles. The second criterion to be applied concerns the spread of a practice in time and space. If we believe that God is guiding his people, we would assume that God would not let an error continue for years and years. Therefore, the closer a practice is to universality, the greater would be its claim as a source for doctrine. An example would be looking to the historical witness of the church as an argument for infant baptism. The third test has to do with the results of the practice of that custom. Augustine and Prosper believed that the holiness of the church, as led by the Holy Spirit, could give legitimacy to the use of its liturgy as a source of doctrine. For instance, the ethical reputation of the Quakers leads some people to take seriously their liturgical practice of avoiding particular sacraments in favor of what they consider to be a "wider sacramentality," as they wait in communal silence for

¹⁶Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology," 40-45.

¹⁷Wainwright, 242.

divine guidance, and take action only in accordance with what they would call the "sense of the meeting."¹⁸

While all of these categories may seem to be somewhat subjective in nature (and they are), the next section will attempt to show that the *orandi* has had a significant influence upon the *credendi* in the history of the Christian Church.

Historical Examples

It is very likely that some New Testament materials existed first as liturgical writings. Philippians 2:6-11 was probably a hymn in the early church before Paul included it in his epistle. Some see in I Peter an early address delivered to Christians who had just been baptized. There are no fewer than four hymns preserved in the first two chapters of Luke's gospel. Some, taking a critical stance, will claim that the early church molded the New Testament writings to fit the faith which was developing in their Christian worship communities. It would be better to say that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, liturgical materials were used as a valid source for the New Testament writings.

It was not uncommon for the church fathers to point to the liturgy to prove a doctrinal point. In the fifth century, Prosper, in arguing against semi-Pelagianism, states that "the apostolic injunction to pray for the entire human race--which the church obeys in its intercessions--proves the obligation to believe . . . that all faith . . . is from start to finish a work of grace."¹⁹

Augustine pointed to pre-baptismal exorcism and exsufflation as implying that children are born in sin and under the power of the devil. He would also use liturgical examples or illustrations in his sermons and encouraged others to do the same. Recognizing the teaching

¹⁸Ibid., 242-245.

¹⁹Ibid., 225.

power of the liturgy in faith and morals, Augustine advised his bishop to correct any errors that may be found in the worship of the church and to introduce new features that might be profitable.

He wrote:

A thing which is held by the universal Church and was not instituted by a council but has always been kept is rightly believed not to have been transmitted without apostolic authority.²⁰

Ambrose looked to the baptismal service as teaching the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Since it was the practice to express belief equally in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as part of one's baptism, it indicated that one should believe in all three persons in the same way.

Those of the Arian party apparently did not question the reasonableness of taking doctrinal arguments from liturgical sources, but sought to use it to their own advantage. An anonymous Arian treatise suggests that the "catholic" church is not really learning from the "catholic" liturgy, for in their imposition of hands, in their creed, and their blessings they consistently put the Father before the Son. They sought to make their doctrine of radical subordinationism a stronger influence in the doxology with the words "*to the Father through Christ the Son in the Holy Spirit.*"²¹

Tertullian appealed to the sacraments against Gnostic and other dualisms. In arguing for the resurrection of the body, he pointed out that in the sacraments the body is already the means by which the soul receives grace.

Since earliest times, the mass has been a cherished source of doctrine for many. Joseph Jungmann writes:

But the very fact that Christ's power is continually hedged in by men and surrounded by surging life made it imperative from the very beginning that there be some protecting form, some firm dwelling in which the Holies would be

²⁰Ibid., 231.

²¹Ibid., 229.

guarded against rough hands and the dust of the streets, safe from desecration and dishonor. It would have to be a form in which what is going on beneath is enveloped without being hidden from men's senses, so that its inmost riches and its uplifting power might be made manifest. This form is the *liturgy of the Holy Mass*.²²

It became of great importance in the Middle Ages for the canon of the mass to be read with the greatest solemnity and importance without the variation of a single syllable. However, "doing it right" seemed to place the emphasis upon what man was doing in the eucharist. That in turn led to fear of possibly doing it wrong. The spotlight was upon man's actions, and that gave the theological impression that our salvation was a matter of doing the right things.

From about the sixth century onward, the altar was placed against the wall of the church. Priests gradually began to celebrate the mass with their backs to the people. After a time, they even began to speak parts of the mass in inaudible words. The priest did his priestly activity as the congregation watched (what they could). Beliefs about the mass were bound to be reinterpreted.²³

During this time, seeing the host became as (or more) important than actually receiving it. The first opportunity came when the priest took the host in his hands "as our Lord" had done. The priests, urged on by the desires of the people, began to highlight the action. Initially, the bishops were concerned lest the people begin to adore the host. In 1210 the Bishop of Paris ruled that the host should not be elevated until after the consecration, and then it should be high enough for all to see. Jungmann writes that this only served to give the mass a new focal point. In some cities people, expecting great rewards, would run from church to church to see the elevated host as often as possible. People even started lawsuits so that they might have a more favorable view

²²Joseph Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1951), 1:1.

²³William H. Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine and Bread: How Worship Has Changed Over the Years* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1980), 52.

of the altar. In some congregations the majority would wait for the sound of the sance-bell, signaling the approach of the consecration. They would rush into the church to get "their view" and then leave just as rapidly. While such abuses were officially discouraged, the practice gradually gained ecclesiastical approval. Some priests knew how to "play to the audience." Berthold of Regensburg in one of his sermons cried out: "At the elevation of the Sacrament the priest seems to be saying three things to you: See the Son of God who, for your sakes, was thus lifted on the Cross; see the Son of God who will come to judge the living and the dead."²⁴

More and longer "showings" of the host were the result. Some priests even took a stipend for longer showings! The next step was to take this adoration out of the cathedral. From the beginning of the fourteenth century it became customary to carry the "Blessed Sacrament," uncovered, through the streets on the festival of Corpus Christi, a festival which had come to the fore as a result of the new movement.

Also during the Middle Ages came a tendency to allegorize, to give every part of the mass a meaning. An anonymous interpreter in the fifteenth century wrote that the vestments signified Christ's passion: the priest's going to the altar called to mind the capture of our Lord; at the *Confiteor* he stands before the high priest; the elevation pointed to Christ's being raised on the cross; and the like. While these things may not have been official teaching, they were certainly believed by many of the people. And not without reason, for certain priests saw opportunity to make the "drama more potent" by adding elements such as hiding of the paten under the corporal at the offertory (as a reminder of Christ hiding his divinity) and making five crosses (the five wounds of Christ) at the doxology concluding the canon.²⁵

²⁴Jungmann, 1:120-121.

²⁵Ibid., 1:114-118.

To most Protestants, the Marian doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church are the most obvious manifestation of the Roman emphasis upon the *lex orandi*. While the official proclamations of Mary's immaculate conception (1854) and her bodily assumption (1950) were rather recent, the authenticity of these doctrines had been accepted for many centuries due to the worship practice of the Church. Both Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas of Aquinas looked to the Church's celebration of Mary's Nativity as a holy day to be proof of her sanctification before birth. After all, "why would the church celebrate something that was not holy?" It is interesting to note that in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* of 1854 Pope Pius claims that these feasts had been authorized by his papal predecessors many centuries before in order to encourage a good belief.²⁶

Martin Luther grew up as a faithful adherent to the Roman Catholic faith. But when he rediscovered the Biblical concept of justification by grace alone, he could no longer reconcile the teaching of the Scripture and the message of the mass. He stated that so many things had been added to the canon of the mass over the years that it had become an "abominable concoction drawn from everyone's sewer and cesspool."²⁷ In the Smalcald Articles he mentions a number of things which had been corrupted because of the influence of the sacrificial character of the mass, including: private Masses, vigils, pilgrimages and other alms, brotherhoods, the adoration of relics, indulgences, the invocation of saints, the baptism of bells and altar stones, and the like.²⁸ He believed that all of these things had resulted from the corrupt worship called the mass.

The Council of Trent, called in response to the Reformation, appealed to the prayer for the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost as support for the Roman Catholic position of a growth in

²⁶Wainwright, 237-40.

²⁷Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Fortress Press and Concordia Publishing House, 1960-), 53:21. References to this edition are hereafter cited as "LW".

²⁸SC, II.

justifying grace after the initial act of justification. The prayer read: "Holy Church prays for this increase of justice when it asks: Give us, Lord an increase of faith, hope and love."²⁹ Later Roman Catholic writers would cite this incident as an example of the appropriateness of establishing dogma by the dual authority of liturgy and magisterium.

In dealing with doctrinal questions, the Council of Trent quite naturally looked to the *lex orandi*. Rather than specifically address doctrinal problems in the liturgy, the emphasis was on the worship itself. The ideal would be to return to the worship of the city of Rome as it had been in former times. While that was not possible, the new ("refined and purified"³⁰) mass book, which came about in 1570 as a result of their efforts, was declared binding everywhere. Only churches which could demonstrate a two-hundred-year history of a different form were allowed to deviate. In 1588 Pope Sixtus V founded the "Congregation of Rites" to enforce the edict. The Roman Catholic way of preventing new and deviant beliefs was to make sure that the liturgy would not change. They knew the power of the *lex orandi*!

The *lex orandi* is still a powerful force in modern Roman Catholicism. When the Nazi forces invaded Austria (and it seemed they might be taking over the entire world), Joseph Jungmann's thoughts turned to using his remaining time to write an exposition of the mass-liturgy.³¹ That treasure must be preserved! As part of reforming the church, Vatican II took a careful look at liturgical practices. Sermons were to become an important part of the

²⁹Wainwright, 236.

³⁰Jungmann, 1:141.

³¹Ibid., 1:v.

worship services, and that sermon "should draw its content from scriptural and liturgical sources."³²

Roman Catholics have by no means been the only ones to recognize or appeal to the power of the *lex orandi*. The Anglican Church, since its very beginnings, has been united more by a common worship book than by a common confession. Thomas Cranmer produced the first *Book of Common Prayer* with the goal of uniting the church and the nation (not through doctrine but through worship). The book included specific rubrics which were enforced by governmental authority.

Cranmer included services of Morning and Evening Prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer* to restore the daily worship of the people. His thought was that the normal Sunday worship would be the eucharist. But the people were not used to that (it was not part of their *orandi*), and so there were often no people desiring communion. Morning Prayer came to be used on the Sabbath since it was better than a "private mass." Hence, it is the usage of the book, as opposed to the intent, which ultimately establishes the *lex orandi*. It would take three hundred years to restore the weekly eucharist to the people.

Recognizing the power of *lex orandi*, John Knox and Bishop Hooper, after convincing King Edward of their point of view, nearly succeeded in forcing Cranmer to omit kneeling from the 1552 prayer book. Cranmer was allowed to keep kneeling as an option only when he agreed to include the "Black Rubric" at the end of the service. The rubric carefully denied that kneeling implied a belief in transubstantiation.

Lutherans, born out of the insistence upon the priority of the *lex credendi*, have not been immune to the influence of the *lex orandi*. As with the Anglicans, the new Lutherans were not

³²Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Dublin, Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1975), 12.

in the habit of frequent communion. Since there was to be no communion unless there were communicants, the truncated service became the norm--not just for practice but for belief.

While the reformers believed the church should control its own worship rites, the same German princes who had been so helpful in making the Reformation possible sometimes also wanted to dictate the style of the service. The time came when the nobility no longer wanted to commune with the commoners. This led to private baptisms, marriages, and funerals, with a corresponding shift in belief as to the nature of these corporate events.³³

Paul Lang, concerned with the right ceremony in worship, is legitimately concerned about what Lutherans continue to teach through careless worship practices. He asks if too many directional remarks do not give the impression that the service is nothing more than an ordinary meeting?³⁴ What do some of our practices teach? Holy communion only on special Sundays? Individual cups vs. the common cup? Plain crosses vs. crucifixes? Plain and drab church buildings? Subjective hymns? Sentimental music? Extempore, subjective, worldly prayers? The disuse of private confession and absolution?³⁵ Whether one agrees with all of his suggestions or not, it cannot be denied that our worship practices can and do teach in the popular mind.

Luther Reed argues that Luther made a mistake in paring the canon of the mass to the bare use of the verba, divorced from all prayers of remembrance and thanksgiving. He believes that such a usage, combined with the sign of the cross, "encourages in the popular mind a mechanistic and Roman conception of consecration."³⁶

³³Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 335.

³⁴Paul H. D. Lang, *Ceremony and Celebration* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 63-64.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 13-14.

³⁶Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 349-50.

Robin Leaver writes:

In principle we accept the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers but in practice we deny it. A phenomenological study of patterns of Protestant worship would undoubtedly have to conclude that we believe in the priesthood of the ministry, the levitical orders of choirs and musicians, and the largely passive role of the people who are nevertheless permitted from time to time to sing a few hymns and make a few responses.³⁷

Then we ask "What have we taught with our confirmation practices?" Do we know ourselves what we believe? We are certainly teaching through the *lex orandi*, whether we recognize it or not.

Robert Wilken writes a most interesting editorial from a Lutheran standpoint. On the eve of the introduction of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* in 1978, he cautioned pastors not to worry too much about introducing a new liturgy, for a book cannot do that. Liturgical changes are constantly being brought about "by the people" and a book is not likely to change that. He writes:

Lutherans have, of course, always had things backward here. Formulate the right theology and everything will fall in place. We debate the reform of the liturgy as though it were primarily a theological question. But it doesn't work that way.³⁸

The next section will look at *why* it doesn't always "work that way."

Outside Influences Upon the Worship of the Church

Ideally, those worship practices which serve as a norm for the doctrine of the church will have originated in the faith of the church. In such a perfect world both faith and doctrine would complement each other. Realistically, the worship of the church has been influenced by many things other than theology. Some of the areas to be examined will include cultural, political, and

³⁷Robin Leaver, *The Theological Character of Music in Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 16.

³⁸Robert L. Wilken, "The Liturgy and the Lutheran Book of Worship," *Dialog*, 17 (1978), 4-5.

social movements. Worship which has been influenced by these elements may promote a faith which is vastly different from that of the Scriptures.

A desire to conform to popular tastes has always been a factor in the church's worship practices. When American Methodists appealed to John Wesley for directions in worship, he commended to them the *Book of Common Prayer*. But the Americans didn't like it, believing Free Church worship patterns to be more suited to their needs. Many American church bodies believed that an emphasis upon individualism in worship would complement the rise of the capitalist spirit and the new democratic and egalitarian ideals. Revivalism seemed to be a style particularly suited to the American frontier. Many wondered about and yearned for the emotional religious experiences their neighbors were having.

During the nineteenth century, Lutherans were also influenced by their "more American" neighbors. Men like Samuel Schmucker, Benjamin Kurtz, and Samuel Sprecher argued that Lutherans could survive on the American soil only by adopting some of the revivalistic and puritanical spirit of their Protestant neighbors. Liturgical worship was denounced as formalism, revival methods were advocated, and personal piety was exalted above all else. Those who opposed the new measures were called "head Christians" and "catechism Christians."³⁹ A consequence of this kind of practice was an increasing vagueness concerning traditional Lutheran doctrine. Samuel Schmucker wrote that one's understanding of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper should be a matter of individual decision.

Society's changing music styles have also influenced the church's music. People want the church's music to be in conformity with what they listen to during the week. But musical tastes are often quick to change. Certain experimental liturgies which were popularly received

³⁹Abdul Ross Wentz, *Lutheranism in America*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 133-134.

when the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship began its work, were not included in *Lutheran Book of Worship* because people had already tired of that style.⁴⁰

Olof Herrlin has some interesting things to say about *lex orandi--lex credendi*. He simply assumes that the *orandi* will influence the *credendi* in calling certain worship practices tools of modernism. The practice of piety becomes primary and the dogmatic becomes secondary. As an example, he states that prayer and worship are often spoken of as having value as psychological means for promoting human welfare and good conduct. The question as to the existence of God becomes only an academic exercise. That is no longer the important thing.⁴¹

Harold Senkbeil writes that we live in a consumer society in which Christians shop for a church which will suit their tastes. Often the style of the message is more important than the content.⁴² It is difficult for other churches not to seek to emulate certain styles which seem to be "successful" in our society.

Equal rights for women has been a strong focus in our society in recent years; hence, the drive for "inclusive language" in worship. It remains to be seen what speaking of God as "mother" will do to "Lutheran" theology.

While we are sometimes quick to try worship customs from other sources, those customs can easily become part of our "tradition", which we are then reluctant to give up. To make a change might imply that the ways of our fathers that we learned in our youth "may not have been

⁴⁰Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship: Liturgy in Its Ecumenical Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 10.

⁴¹Olof Herrlin, *Divine Service--Liturgy in Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 58-59.

⁴²Harold Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 175.

right." Bryan Spinks cautions that Lutherans have a tendency to submit to a "Reformation fundamentalism" which would give divine status to the practices of Martin Luther.⁴³

Roman Catholics also seem to have been struggling with the force of tradition in their recent liturgical reforms. Vatican II emphasized the importance of sound tradition in making liturgical decisions. Was tradition the reason that the council only went so far as to say that the Words of Institution "may" be read aloud and that the eucharist "may" be distributed according to both kinds on special occasions?⁴⁴ It is hard to say that your official practices have been wrong for hundreds of years.

Politics were the incentive for change in early nineteenth century Prussia. King Frederick William III sought to unite the Lutheran and Reformed elements through a common agenda introduced in 1822.⁴⁵ Many, including some of this writer's ancestors, emigrated to America rather than be forced to worship in a way which was not in keeping with their beliefs. Despite opposition from those who stayed, the agenda was widely used due to political decree and enforcement.

Ecumenical goals were also the catalyst for liturgical reform in America during the same period, although without the Prussian coercion. The German *Liturgie oder Kirchen Agende* published in 1818 had virtually no responses. This was accompanied by a hymnal prepared for joint use by Lutheran and Reformed congregations with the goal of "breaking down the partition wall between the Lutherans and the Reformed which is only based on prejudice."⁴⁶

⁴³Bryan Spinks, *Luther's Liturgical Criteria and His Reform of the Canon of the Mass*, Grove Liturgical Study, no. 30 (Nottingham, England: Grove Books, 1982), 40.

⁴⁴Flannery, 18, 115.

⁴⁵Reed, 152-153.

⁴⁶Ibid., 170-171.

Ecumenical goals are also important to many in the liturgical renewal movement. William Willimon writes:

In stripping away accumulated liturgical bric-a-brac, we now see more clearly the most basic, shared elements of Christian worship. As a result, churches which have been unable to achieve doctrinal or political unity now find they are able to join hands over the word, water, wine and bread.⁴⁷

Whereas in the past, Lutherans have generally been content to produce "Lutheran" hymnals, the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship began with a commitment to the mainstream Christian liturgical tradition. The hope was that "one" hymnal would unite North American Lutherans and that the content of that hymnal would draw them closer to other Christian traditions as well. A document of the Lutheran World Federation expresses this same commitment when it states that Lutherans should refrain from making unilateral changes in the liturgy and also that Lutherans should change forms in concert with other Christians--unless there are "compelling reasons" to do otherwise.⁴⁸ The International Consultation on English Texts has sought to produce common renderings of the various historic elements of the liturgy.

Hermann Sasse offers some strong words of concern about the goals and work of the liturgical movement. He calls for those involved to wake up from their "romantic dreams" of finding that form of the divine service which belongs to the essence of the church and to submit themselves to the true norms, Scripture and the Confessions.⁴⁹

Problems are already arising in some areas such as baptism. Willimon states that the emerging consensus among liturgical scholars is that an adult initiate is the norm for baptism. He also states that churches which have in the past practiced infant baptism will probably continue

⁴⁷Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine and Bread*, 118.

⁴⁸Brand, 12.

⁴⁹Sasse, 118.

to do so.⁵⁰ He doesn't come out and say it, but the impression given is that infant baptism has only the authority of a nice tradition.

Willimon also notes that existentialism has had a (negative) influence upon the worship life of the church. Men like Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann have manifested subjectivistic, individualistic tendencies which have worked against the renewal of corporate worship and a sacramental emphasis. Bultmann is said to have insisted that "Christ meets us in the word of preaching and nowhere else."⁵¹

Social reform is another force that has had an influence upon the worship of the church. Social gospel worship aids such as Rauschenbusch's *Prayers of the Social Awakening* (1910) and the hymns of Washington Gladden and Frank Mason North have influenced Protestants, especially Methodists, to turn from subjective individualism to more corporate, worldly action. The Federal Council of Churches proposed a new season of the church year, "Kingdomtide," in which the social gospel themes of kingdom building and service to humanity were highlighted. The Methodists were the only ones to actually follow the recommendations.⁵²

The *orandi* of the church has been influenced by many forces throughout history. Therefore those doctrines which are only drawn from the worship and tradition of the church do not necessarily have scriptural foundation.

Doctrine As the Norm for Worship

To this point we have examined a number of possible influences upon the development of worship customs, but not the factor which most in the Protestant world would say needs to be

⁵⁰Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine and Bread*, 121.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 115.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 114.

supreme, the *lex credendi*. Michael Aune states that, in the Lutheran tradition, liturgy has not been regarded as a source of theology. Doctrine is to be the norm for what is to happen in liturgy.⁵³

Peter Brunner writes that a church's doctrine of worship "must be based on past revelation of God."⁵⁴ It can neither be descriptive of present day services nor the experiences of her members. It is neither the sum total of Christian teachings on worship through the ages nor the teaching of the fathers. It must be based on the Word. With that foundation, "the church's doctrine on worship will determine which liturgical orders it employs, which it leaves to freedom of choice, and which it rejects."⁵⁵

This concept is hardly new with Lutherans or Protestants. It is certainly on doctrinal grounds that Paul calls into question the eucharistic practices in I Corinthians 11 and the worship habits of I Corinthians 14.

In response to the Arian controversy, the church at Laodicea forbade the singing of hymns written by Arius and other anti-Trinitarians. The worship of the church began to reflect the more fully developed Trinitarian doctrinal formulations.⁵⁶

⁵³Michael Bjerknes Aune, "Doctrine and Doxology: Toward a Creative Balance in American Lutheran Liturgical Theology and Practice, 1946-1976" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1981), 19-23.

⁵⁴Brunner, 26.

⁵⁵Ibid., 24.

⁵⁶Wainwright, 255-57.

Martin Luther

The consensus of Protestant liturgical writers, including many Lutheran, seems to be that Luther was ultra-conservative, if not downright clumsy and destructive when it came to liturgical matters. This seems to be primarily because, on the one hand, he kept most of the Roman mass and, on the other hand where he did cut (especially with the canon), he did it so drastically.

Bryan Spinks, an Anglican, has shown through his small volume *Luther's Liturgical Criteria and His Reform of the Canon of the Mass* that Luther's liturgical work was a sound and logical expression of his theology.

Spinks begins by describing for his readers (of whom many, if not most, are not Lutheran) Luther's emphasis on justification. Luther's unalterable starting point is that man is saved by grace alone and anything that disagrees with this is wrong. Justification, the Word, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel are bound together inseparably. All Scripture was to be interpreted Christocentrically. It was on these grounds that Luther even dared to question the inclusion of James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation in the normal canon of Scripture.

Having been justified by the grace of God, the Christian is free. Therefore Luther is extremely reluctant to establish laws for worship. He replaces "shall" rubrics with "may" rubrics. But Luther voluntarily refrains from using some of his freedom, so as not to offend the weak in faith. Just because Luther classed liturgical ceremonies as *adiaphora* does not mean that he was indifferent to liturgy and liturgical forms. Indeed, he pointed out that, while there is no public worship without forms, what is *binding* is the word of God.

Luther objected to the strong emphasis on sacrifice in the sacrament, reminding that, according to Scripture, there are only two sacrifices: the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of praise. He emphasized the testament aspect of the supper in which Christ bequeaths to us forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

The words of the canon were a serious problem for Luther, as they were simply incompatible with the Gospel. Indeed, they had taken the place of the Gospel! It was a question of Baal or Yahweh. He came to the conclusion that the entire canon would have to be removed, for it was an enemy of the gospel.

In the *Formula Missae* Luther retained the *Sursum corda* and the Preface. While these disappeared in the *Deutsche Messe*, they were replaced by a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer and a brief exhortation, because there were not yet suitable German versions of the liturgical forms.

The Words of Institution were retained for they were "the Gospel in a nutshell." While in the *Formula Missae* Luther suggested that they were to be intoned to the same intonation as the Lord's Prayer, because of Christian freedom he allowed that they could still be recited silently.⁵⁷ There is no longer such an option mentioned in the *Deutsche Messe*, published three years later, for the Gospel must be proclaimed!⁵⁸ The verba were now to be chanted to the Gospel intonation. Luther had replaced the corrupt canon with the words of institution, which were the Gospel itself.

Because of Luther's firm emphasis on the doctrine of justification, the entire old canon had to go. That the Words of Institution were also found in the new worship orders was due to their theological basis, not as a concession to the traditional canon. The old and new were completely different in their focus. Spinks concludes that "far from being a conservative and unimaginative liturgiologist, Luther was in fact giving radical liturgical expression to justification by faith, and deserves to be regarded as a serious Reformation liturgist."⁵⁹

⁵⁷LW, 53:28.

⁵⁸LW, 53:80-81.

⁵⁹Spinks, 40.

Vilmos Vajta has a similarly high opinion of the liturgical work of Luther. He writes that Luther regarded both papists and enthusiasts as enemies of Christian liberty, for both meant to replace faith with human rites. The papists had said that people must do certain things. The enthusiasts had made a new law of Christian liberty by saying that people could no longer do certain things. Luther rejected those ceremonies which conflicted with the Word of God. There were other customs that he believed to be of little value, which he allowed, so as not to harm the faith of the weak. Vajta concludes by stating that Luther's middle road was not a spineless compromise but the expression of Christian freedom.⁶⁰

In spite of Luther's strong emphasis upon Christian freedom, he insisted that the Words of Institution be said loud and clear, that Holy Communion be given in both kinds, and that private masses not be said--for the former practices were contrary to the Gospel. In the Smalcald Articles, Luther listed several other practices that were a direct result of the abuse of the mass. They, too, would have to go, for they conflicted with the Gospel. Anything that was not consistent with the Word of God, anything that violated the *lex credendi* would have to be done away with, "no matter who takes offense."⁶¹

Not all ceremonies had to go. While some were rather useless, others were actually helpful. They could be retained or discarded according to personal preference. If anyone said that something in the realm of adiaphora could not be retained, as when Karlstadt objected to Luther's use of the elevation and the term "mass," Luther insisted upon his right to keep the custom.

Knowing what was consistent with the Gospel would take some study, and that is why Luther placed the desire for a good catechism above that of an order of service.⁶² He believed

⁶⁰Vajta, 179.

⁶¹LW 36:254.

⁶²Elert, 324.

that catechetical instruction should be given from the pulpit at stated times, and also in the homes for the children and servants.

Luther encouraged the continuation of daily Matins and Vespers in which the Scriptures would be read in sequential nature, with explanation (in the vernacular). Latin was used in these services, that the schoolboys might become familiar with it, and also German, for the sake of any layman who might be present. While Luther realized that the whole congregation would not be present on a daily basis (and should not be so compelled), he hoped that priests and pupils would regularly and willingly take part, for it would make them better preachers and pastors. He also hoped that the entire congregation would gather for Sunday Vespers (in addition to the morning mass), that they might receive further instruction in the Word. Such was the importance of the *lex credendi* for Martin Luther.

Later Lutherans

Where Lutherans remained orthodox, they continually paid close attention to doctrine as the norm for worship. Such was the case in Leipzig in the early eighteenth century. Günther Stiller writes that Johann Sebastian Bach attached the greatest importance to making the text of his music proclaim the Gospel as purely as possible. He would settle for an "imperfect form, an infelicitous rhyme, or an uneven rhythm" rather than compromise the spiritual content of the text.⁶³ In the same context, Carl Gottlieb Hoffman, when he published a songbook in 1737, noted that he had found it necessary to alter offensive passages in several of the newer hymns, since purity and clarity of doctrine were the first priority.⁶⁴

⁶³Günther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and the Liturgical Life in Leipzig* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 213.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 212.

During the nineteenth century in America, the term "American Lutheranism" referred to the Lutheran faith as it had been significantly influenced by general Protestant beliefs and practices. With the arrival of new immigrants from Germany and the Scandinavian countries, there came a renewed concern for pure Lutheran doctrine. Names such as Krauth, Fritschel, Loy, Walther, Bernard Schmucker, Lochner, and Koren are associated with a new confessional awakening. With the return to Lutheran teachings, they also led the movement to restore the older forms of public worship which were consistent with the orthodox Lutheran faith.⁶⁵

Sasse maintains that in the nineteenth century, wherever Luther's doctrine of the real presence was understood and believed, there was a new hunger for the Sacrament of the Altar and the liturgy was renewed. He sees signs of the same thing happening today.⁶⁶

While some thought it to be needless quibbling, that same concern for the priority of pure doctrine was the primary consideration of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod when producing *Lutheran Worship* in the early 1980s. Even the familiar "Amazing Grace" had to be modified, for it is not "grace" that teaches our hearts to fear.

Other Traditions

Orthodox Lutherans have by no means been the only ones to purposely modify their worship practices in light of their doctrinal beliefs. Pietism arose in response to what was perceived to be a rather dead form of orthodoxy. A new emphasis was placed upon the role of emotion in the Christian experience. Jacob Spener and other pietists depreciated doctrinal definitions and confessions and exalted personal morality and spirituality. The "little churches" within the larger congregation stressed the ministry of all believers. Their beliefs had the effect of

⁶⁵Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 299-300.

⁶⁶Sasse, 130.

placing personal prayer and Bible reading before public worship. Departing from traditional forms, their worship services came to be used to produce certain emotional states within the participants. Whether one agrees with their doctrine and practice or not, they are an example of a group which produced worship forms that were in line with their doctrine.

While John and Charles Wesley were influenced by--and greatly appreciated--the Anglican sacramental tradition, their emphasis upon a personal experience of God's love led to new worship practices for them and their followers. Before this time, most of the worship of the Church had been God-centered, focusing upon the graciousness of his acts in Jesus Christ. With the focus upon the subjective, hymns placed a new emphasis upon "I" and "me" and the state of personal feeling.

Rationalists were also consistent in adapting their worship forms to their unique beliefs. Having been influenced by the Enlightenment, they believed that reasonableness as the ultimate test of reality was to be the basis of all religion. They sought to reduce religion to a few rational principles which would be free of the superstition and narrow-mindedness of the past. This emphasis upon reason had a profound effect upon their worship, which was reduced to little more than a sermon on a morality. Once again, their worship forms were a logical result of their beliefs.

Even the Roman Catholic Church in recent years has sought to place a greater emphasis upon the *lex credendi*. Vatican II ruled that the liturgical year would need to be revised. Feasts of saints and of Mary would have to yield to feasts pertaining to Christ. Saints who were only the result of legend and the piety of the people were to be eliminated. While applauding the strides made, Jaroslav Pelikan was still somewhat pessimistic, writing: "the devotion to legends

and the sentimental pictures and ditties will continue to resist liturgical reformation, especially when some of them carry official endorsement."⁶⁷

Worship as Reinforcement of Doctrine

For most Protestants, and certainly for Lutherans, the *lex credendi* will properly determine the *lex orandi*. But that does not mean that the *lex orandi* cannot have a positive effect upon the propagation of the *lex credendi*. Ideally, good doctrine will lead to good worship, which will reinforce the teachings of the good doctrine. The *lex credendi* and *lex orandi* are always going to influence one another.

Pedagogy must never be seen as the primary goal of worship (as it was by rationalists). We gather together in worship to receive the gifts God offers to us in the Word and sacraments. In turn, we give him praise. When the worship service is seen as primarily a classroom or a place to push some institutional or programmatic goal, something is seriously amiss. "Wills Awareness" may be a laudable goal, but not so important that the Sunday morning worship should be twisted to serve this goal. Likewise, stewardship, education, or evangelism goals may flow from the worship service but are not to dictate what happens. If worship is seen as merely one technique among many of achieving certain goals, then worship is being used for the wrong purpose.

That said, one must now also concede that what we do in worship does teach. While not the prime reason for worshiping, it is a certain by-product. It is a waste of time to debate whether or not worship serves a pedagogical function; better to acknowledge that fact and to pay attention to "what" is being taught in the service. It is hoped that the worship of the church will reinforce the solid doctrine upon which it is based.

⁶⁷Jaroslav Pelikan, "A Response," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 181.

Luther and Pedagogy--Pro and Con

Luther learned the pedagogical value of worship as a boy, for materials which he and other pupils were to memorize were largely selected from the hymns, prayers, and versicles of the church. The school day would normally open with prayer and the singing of a song, usually the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, or the *Veni Creator*. The goal was to prepare good Roman Catholics.⁶⁸

Luther believed such fine forms as the *Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Credo, Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* had actually preserved the faith of the common people, when the mass as a whole had become little more than idolatry.⁶⁹ He cited such hymns as "God be praised and blessed, who himself has nourished us with his flesh and blood," and "Lord, by your holy blood, help us, Lord, in every need," as originating in that period when people still received both kinds in the sacrament, and thus keeping the proper belief alive among many of the common people.⁷⁰

While maintaining the principle of freedom in worship, Luther also maintained that the "Admonition for Communicants" should follow a prescribed wording in a certain area for the sake of the common people. If everyone did it his own way and even changed from day to day, the people would "neither learn nor retain anything. What chiefly matters is the teaching and guiding of the people."⁷¹

Some have criticized Luther for his emphasis upon the pedagogical function of worship, as Werner Elert writes:

If Melancthon was charged with being in error when he occasionally designated the church as a school, the man primarily responsible for this is Luther, who speaks here and elsewhere about divine service as if he were thinking of an

⁶⁸Schalk, 13.

⁶⁹Vajta, 30.

⁷⁰LW, 38:206-207.

⁷¹LW, 53:80.

instruction period in a school in which the teacher is the only one who does the talking.⁷²

This seems to be too narrow a view of Luther, who also wrote "the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music and by providing sweet melodies with words."⁷³ For Luther, praise was a major purpose of worship, but he also recognized the teaching function. That is why he was so adamant that those sections which taught falsely must be eliminated.

Music

Luther wrote and encouraged others to write hymns, both for liturgical purposes (that the congregation might participate in public worship) and for catechetical purposes (that true doctrine and piety might be inculcated). He cited the fathers and the prophets as desiring that nothing else be so associated with the Word of God as music. It is for that reason that there are so many hymns and psalms in which "message and music join to move the listener's soul."⁷⁴ A Jesuit once complained that Luther's hymns had damned more souls than all Luther's sermons put together.⁷⁵

Günther Stiller cites H. Keller in calling music the "great guardian of the church" which resisted widespread decay of doctrine for two hundred years from Luther to Bach.⁷⁶ The

⁷²Elert, 324.

⁷³LW, 53:323-24.

⁷⁴LW, 53:323.

⁷⁵Leaver, 9.

⁷⁶Stiller, 25.

introduction to *Lutheran Worship* reads: "The song of this Church has weathered and withstood such influences as pietism, rationalism, modernism, and universalism in one form or another."⁷⁷

For worship to accomplish this task, it will need to be objective in character, directed to God rather than man. Music must not be the object of worship but its servant. It will extol the glory of God rather than that of the musician. Above all, its words will be consistent with the faith of the church.

Ceremony

External ceremonies, while never ends in themselves, can be of use in reinforcing the doctrine of the church. Standing has been a way of expressing praise and joy for over a thousand years. When people stand for the Gospel, sing special responses, perhaps see a special procession, or even smell incense, they know that what is being read is of the utmost importance. Likewise, sitting is a time for learning, and kneeling is the posture for confession and prayer.

A congregation can learn that sometimes the pastor is speaking on behalf of God to them and sometimes on their behalf to God, depending upon the direction he is facing. The sign of the cross will be a reminder of one's baptism; the crucifix will be a reminder of Christ's sacrifice for us.

Paul Lang writes: "Rites and ceremonies have a very real and practical value in teaching, preserving, recalling, familiarizing, and impressing the truths of the Christian faith."⁷⁸ Werner Elert writes that external customs "stimulate devotion" and "give indirect support to the proclamation of the Word."⁷⁹

⁷⁷*Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 7.

⁷⁸Lang, 14.

⁷⁹Elert, 328.

It was for these reasons that the Lutheran reformers did not abolish all the historic ceremonies, as did some Protestants, but kept those which were useful for the propagation of the faith.

Additional Examples

Because Anglicans have never been bound together by a common confession, they have gravitated in many directions theologically. Yet it has been their *Book of Common Prayer* which has served to keep them from going too far afield. Similarly, the liturgical books of the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox served to minimize the impact of Pietism and Rationalism upon those churches. This is in contrast to Lutheranism, which was ripe to be influenced by Rationalism after the forces of Pietism had truncated historic Lutheran liturgy.

In response to the influence of American Lutheranism in the nineteenth century, Matthias Loy wrote that the cultus of the church is the expression of the church's life and spirit and, in that sense, bears a "confessional character." It is also an important means of propagating that life and spirit and therefore deserves prayerful concern.⁸⁰

Similarly Wilhelm Loehe had earlier written that if there were to be orthodox Lutherans, there would have to be orthodox Lutheran hymns and worship. He published a study of some two hundred orthodox orders dating back to the Reformation, with the goal of helping pastors to lead truly Lutheran worship.

In every age, it has been discovered that the doctrinal decisions of the church become concrete in her liturgy. Those elements of the liturgy which are repeated week after week impress themselves upon the minds of the worshipers until they become fixed in memories.

⁸⁰Matthias Loy, "Restoration of the Cultus in the Lutheran Church," in Tappert, 302.

Implications for Today

The *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* are integrally related. Ideally, there should never be any conflict. The *credendi*, which stems from God's inspired word, will become real in the *orandi* of the people. In turn, the worship of the Christian community will support and reinforce the good doctrine which gave it birth. Realistically, sometimes there is a gap between what is prayed and what is believed. In that case the *lex credendi* must have priority and reorder the *lex orandi* of the community.

What effect should this have upon the everyday life of the church? From an Orthodox perspective, Alexander Schmemmann makes some interesting points when he questions the Western practice of splitting theology into virtually autonomous disciplines, such as Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, Liturgy, and the like. By so doing, we fail to appreciate the important relationship between the disciplines.⁸¹

Schmemmann's suggestions do not sound too unlike those proposed by Vatican II, which stated in the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" that liturgy is to be "taught under its theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical aspects." Those who teach other subjects are to point out the relationship of their material to the liturgy, emphasizing the unity of it all.⁸²

While not forgetting that in times past the *lex credendi* has sometimes suffered at the hands of the *lex orandi* in both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, the suggestions coming from each seem to make sense. Worship and doctrine do need to be taught in relationship to one another.

The assumption is made that people coming to God's house on Sunday morning sincerely want to worship God. It is the task of the pastor to help them in that endeavor. It is

⁸¹Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology," 47.

⁸²Flannery, 8.

inappropriate to think that since one has pure doctrine, it is not necessary to be aware of or concerned about the specific needs of members of the congregation. This does not mean designing worship to entertain people or to cater to each new whim or taste--for the truth of the Gospel transcends transitory cultural fashion. It does imply catechesis and also tailoring good worship to the current abilities of the people.

Olof Herrlin says that a good worship service is "saturated with dogma."⁸³ How tragic to use simple services that say almost nothing when the historic services have so much to offer. But the pastor will have to first understand and learn to appreciate good worship before he can properly instruct his people. A pastor who seems to be floundering about in worship with no particular base is giving the impression that what we do in worship is of minimal importance. If the service is completely different each Sunday, it may confuse, drawing attention to itself rather than the Word.

Lex orandi--lex credendi is perhaps only an odd little phrase to many, and there is no great purpose in making sure everyone understands the Latin. The most important thing is that leaders of worship understand, appreciate, and teach the dynamic that it describes.

⁸³Herrlin, 65.

CHAPTER TWO
FORMATIVE INFLUENCES
UPON LUTHERAN WORSHIP PRACTICES

Early Lutherans worshiped very much like their brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic Church. In contrast to the changes made by more radical reformers, the changes Martin Luther made in the mass were minimal. He eliminated those things (such as the sacrificial words of the canon) which were clearly contradictory to the teaching of Scripture, but retained that which had sound Scriptural basis (such as the *verba*). From a Roman Catholic perspective, Louis Bouyer writes: "for a long time the secret words recited low by the priest during the singing of the *Sanctus* or the *Benedictus* had hardly been known or followed by the people."¹ Bouyer believes that Luther's removal of the eucharistic prayer would not even have been noticed by most people. While that is certainly seeking to minimize the impact of Luther's changes, the general opinion is that Luther and his early followers were quite conservative in liturgical reform.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a great decline in church life and worship.² The liturgy was virtually abandoned in most places. (Leipzig was a notable exception.) The nineteenth century was a period of gradual restoration in both Europe and America, as Lutherans sought to recover the beauty of the Reformation liturgies. In this century, there has been a further effort to recover historical roots, as Lutherans have joined others in the liturgical renewal

¹Louis Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality* (New York: Desclee Company, 1969), 74.

²Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947), 109.

movement, seeking to restore ancient worship forms of the early church. At the same time, others have sought to move in different directions, saying we need new ways of worship for a new age.

As we continue our study of the relationship of theology and worship, it is now important to determine why it is that Lutherans worship in the way in which they do. Four categories of influence will be considered: 1) biblical and doctrinal influences, 2) history and tradition, 3) cultural setting and pastoral concern, and 4) theological trends and other denominations.

Biblical and Doctrinal Influences

Doctrine as the norm for liturgy

In the last chapter we saw that the old Latin phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* can be taken in either of two ways. It is most often used taken in the sense that the rule of prayer provides a norm for belief. However, it can also be used as a reminder that the rule of faith is the norm for prayer.

Martin Luther emphasized this second sense of the interplay between doctrine and worship. He saw the *lex credendi* as having a determinative function for the *lex orandi*. Luther would not have suggested changing the worship of the church at all, except that in many areas it was in conflict with the teachings of Scripture. In those points, it had to be changed.

Luther's treatise of 1520, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, was a radical challenge to the whole late-medieval system of worship and sacramental theology. His attack upon the sacramental system cost him a great deal of support among older clerics. In the treatise Luther objected to three captivities: 1) the withholding of the cup from the laity, 2) the philosophical concept of "transubstantiation," and 3) the idea that the mass is a work that people offer to God. The mass was being presented as "sacrifice," something we do for God, rather than as "sacrament," a gracious gift of God for his people.

While Luther did not object to the concept of the eucharistic prayer as such, he maintained that it was so thoroughly riddled with sacrificial language and images that it had to go. He retained only the *verba*, the actual words of institution of Jesus. In this he was not original. Some Roman Catholic theologians contend that he was only continuing a trend which had its roots in late-medieval piety, which sought to place greater emphasis upon the real presence.³ This misses the point. Luther had no desire to be original in worship. He made his changes for different reasons than earlier worship innovators. As we have seen in greater detail in the previous chapter, Luther only sought to assure that the worship of the church might express true Biblical doctrine. It is for this reason that he also eliminated the *fraction*, the breaking of the bread, because of the allegory which had become strongly attached to this symbolic act. He eliminated the *offertory*, for it also focused upon the human element in the sacrament. He suggested that the bread and wine be prepared during the creed, to eliminate any suggestion that this was a prelude to a propitiatory sacrifice.

While Luther retained the *preface* and *sanctus* in his Latin service, the *Formula Missae* of 1523, he omitted these in his service in the vernacular, the *Deutsche Messe* of 1526. It is not because he objected to their theology, but because he did not have an adequate German setting for either. It would take time to develop quality worship in a new language. He wrote and also encouraged others to write German hymns, both to facilitate participation in public worship and also to teach true doctrine and piety, in order to undo some of the damage of the old ways of worship.

In time, the Lutheran reformers had to drop many traditional worship practices which were hopelessly associated with false doctrine. These included: processions with the Blessed Sacrament, private masses, daily aspersions of holy water, the distinction of meats, penitential

³Bouyer, 73-74.

satisfactions such as pilgrimages, indulgences, the Dominican Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, relics of the saints, the seven canonical hours, masses and prayers for the deliverance of souls from purgatory, and the worship of saints in the place of Christ.⁴

One Extreme--Orthodoxy

But what is the pure doctrine to which all of worship should conform? That was the concern of many in the seventeenth century. Methodist William Willimon writes:

In fighting Lutheran "heresies," orthodox Lutherans had emphasized adherence to pure doctrine as the basis for the Christian life rather than the vital relationship between the believer and God which Luther himself had taught. The task of the laity was to understand and accept these doctrinal statements.⁵

Catechisms were widely used and memorized. Confirmation, which Luther had allowed but not advocated, became common. Included was a public examination before the congregation. The emphasis in worship was on being able to hear. Confession was usually linked to the announcement for communion. In some areas, Saturday evening confessional services were held. Hymns continued to be written for the dual purpose of teaching and adoration. There were fines for not attending Holy Communion. Civil offenders were sometimes sentenced by the courts to confession and communion.

⁴Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *What the Symbolical Books Have to Say About Worship and the Sacraments* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), 14.

⁵William H. Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine, and Bread: How Worship Has Changed Over the Years* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1980), 95.

While the people seemed to know their doctrine, the "general trend was towards a rather dry Protestant scholasticism."⁶ Liturgy was evaluated theologically, "but usually in a negative fashion, i.e., purging it of heresy."⁷

Another Extreme—Free Church

Luther was quite concerned that, while people should look to the Scriptures as the norm for their worship, they should not look to the New Testament as another Leviticus. This he believed would be contrary to the believer's Christian freedom.⁸ While he used the precise Biblical text for the *verba*, he was not afraid to paraphrase the Lord's Prayer. He believed that God has given us five senses to worship him and that it would be ingratitude on our part to use any less. Whatever was helpful and/or traditional was fine to use, as long as it did not conflict with the Word of God.

The radical reformers went in a different direction. Only what was specifically prescribed by Scripture could be used in worship. Since organ music was not called for in the New Testament, it was forbidden. Images and vestments also had to go. While this tradition is called "free," and local congregations are free to worship as they choose, they are not free in what the Reformers called *adiaphora*. Traditions were off-limits if they were not directly called for by Scripture.

⁶Ibid., 95.

⁷Michael Bjercknes Aune, "Doctrine and Doxology: Toward a Creative Balance in American Lutheran Liturgical Theology and Practice, 1946-1976" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1981), 255.

⁸Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Westminster, Maryland: Dacre Press, 1948), 16.

Doctrine As the Answer To "American Lutheranism"

During the nineteenth century, Lutheranism in America faced a severe test as Samuel Schmucker and others sought to Americanize (minimize) its doctrine and worship. In 1853, Matthias Loy pointed to what this could do, and was doing, to the teaching of the church as a reason to conform to the more traditional ways of worship.

But the relationship of church and cultus is rather the organic one of soul and body, the former always influencing the latter and adapting it to itself. The life and spirit of the church must ever stamp itself upon the forms and order of its public worship and make the latter a general confession of faith.⁹

In May 1883, the General Synod North considered the petition of fifty-five of its ministers, which expressed a need for a liturgy more in harmony with the historic books of worship and enunciating more clearly the doctrines of the church.¹⁰ This eventually led to the "Common Service of 1888," which served as the standard for the English Lutheran liturgy for nearly a century.

History and Tradition

"We have always done it that way!" Such is the power and influence of tradition. Elaine Ramshaw, in her book *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, has some excellent things to say about the importance of ritual, or tradition, in our lives. In our fast-changing, mobile society, we should be very careful about interfering with people's ritual practices. Especially in times of transition or tragedy, we have a hunger for continuity that assures us that everything is not going to change all at once. We need something "solid" to hang unto.¹¹ David Luecke suggests that that is why

⁹Matthias Loy, "Restoration of the Cultus in the Lutheran Church," in Theodore Tappert, ed., *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 303.

¹⁰Reed, 184.

¹¹Elaine Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 22-28.

many in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod were very suspicious of changes in worship practices after the doctrinal controversies of the 1970s.¹²

Wise worship planners have always been careful not to make too many changes at once. They have also realized that forms which have developed over time have been thoroughly tested for their orthodoxy as well as their beauty and "staying power." If disagreement has arisen, it has sometimes been over what should be the standard, the historical benchmark, by which current practices should be evaluated. Following are several standards which have had significant influence upon Lutheran worship practices.

The Late-medieval Period

Luther was familiar and comfortable with the worship practices in existence at the beginning of the Reformation era. He loved the Latin and the music of the services. Whereas Zwingli renounced the Western Catholic tradition and looked to his own creativity for worship, Luther sought to affirm, whenever doctrinally possible, the continuity of the Reformation movement with the universal church. He believed that "to reject the gift of tradition was to go it alone and to be cut off from the mutual edification of the whole company of saints."¹³

When Luther first wrote a new service, the *Formula Missae* in 1523, it was in his beloved Latin. It was very similar to the worship practices of his day (with the addition of preaching in the vernacular), except that he left out those elements which were doctrinally unacceptable. Luther was not the first to write a service in the vernacular. In fact, some twenty German services had already been produced before he produced the *Deutsche Messe* in 1526. Luther was reluctant

¹²David Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 36.

¹³Carl Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 45-47.

to write such a service, because he did not want to set a new standard which people would be reluctant to change--because it had come from Luther.

While Luther never questioned the right to change the historic service, he rebelled against those such as Karlstadt who insisted that Protestant worship should be rid of everything that had been a part of the Roman Catholic tradition. He believed Karlstadt's changes were too radical, too quickly implemented, and generally without theological basis. After the *elevation* was eliminated in Wittenberg because it was part of Roman Catholic tradition, Luther wrote in his *Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament* (1544) that, if the fanatics like Karlstadt insisted upon the abolition of the elevation "I would still today not only retain the elevation but, where one would not be enough, assist in introducing three, seven, or ten elevations."¹⁴ No one was going to forcibly deprive Luther of his tie to the worship tradition of the historic church.

Discarding only what had to be omitted because of false doctrine, the Lutheran reformers continued most of the worship traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, including: the pericopal system, sermons, the ordinary of the mass and other chants, Sunday, the ecclesiastical year, the dignity of feasts, the ancient collects, the Whitsunday sequence, Eucharistic and other vestments, candles, altarware of gold, the use of Latin, chanting of Psalter, the sign of the Holy Cross, the customary ceremonial of the mass, kneeling for prayer, and folded hands.¹⁵

Reformation worship as a new standard

What Luther feared came to be reality. His services had a strong impact upon the people. When the Elector desired that the *Deutsche Messe* be introduced everywhere by authority, Luther

¹⁴Frank Senn, ed., *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986), 24.

¹⁵Piepkorn, 12.

objected. (Some districts actually did mandate similar services.) Actually, Luther preferred his Latin service, seeing the German service as best suited for the uneducated laity.

Certain features of the German service had a lasting effect upon the people, such as the principle of a vernacular service, the historic outline, congregational hymns, and active congregational participation. However, many aspects of this service were eventually modified, including Luther's omission of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, his exhortation to communicants in place of the historic preface, his paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, the impractical division of the *verba* and the separate distribution of the bread and the wine, and his retention of the *elevation*. Luther most certainly would have said, "Fine, change what you will as long as the changes are doctrinally sound and helpful to the people."

While the sixteenth-century reformers took worship very seriously, this unfortunately did not continue in the next two centuries which saw a great decline in church life and worship. Luther Reed maintains that this might not have happened if the Lutheran reformers had left a more complete book of worship, as had Cranmer with his *Book of Common Prayer* for the Anglican Church.¹⁶ Various districts were left to go in their own directions, most of which were not helpful, as Lutherans strayed further and further from the historic worship traditions of the church.

However, there were always pockets of "Old Lutherans" who continued the faith and practices of the Reformation era. In America, Muhlenberg's liturgy of 1748 seems to have been written in the Reformation tradition. But Lutherans, under the influence of other Protestants, soon departed from that pattern. In America, Lutherans no longer had the luxury of being a territorial church. The mixture of denominations heightened the pressure to adopt the worship practices of others. When worship then appeared to be similar, or the same, parishioners would then begin

¹⁶Reed, 109-10.

to assume that doctrine was essentially the same as well. Early on, Lutherans were heavily influenced by the revival mind-set, first in worship and then in doctrine.

In the nineteenth century, immigrants from Germany and Scandinavian countries attempted to change the new directions. They eagerly sought and purchased copies of dogmatic textbooks and liturgical specimens from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Theodore Tappert writes:

Hand in hand with an attachment to the doctrinal formulations of an earlier age went a predilection for older forms of public worship. The revival of scholastic theology was accompanied by a restoration of old liturgies. Significantly, the leading representatives of the Lutheran confessional awakening in America were at the same time active supporters of and contributors to the movement to reform public worship.

The liturgical renewal saw a restoration of forms of worship from the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. A virtue was made of the repristination of old rites and ceremonies, and archaic language was preferred to modern speech.¹⁷

The *Church Book* of the General Council of 1868 rooted eastern Lutheranism in the *Formula Missae* tradition. Included once again were introits for Sundays and festivals, the Old Testament reading, the Nicene Creed for Holy Communion, the proper prefaces, and the ordinary in prose texts. Reed judges that this book was the best yet produced in America, because it was a return to Muhlenberg's liturgy of 1748, which in turn was grounded in the Reformation era.¹⁸

When, in 1879, the United Synod of the South, the General Synod, and the General Council appointed a joint committee to produce a common service book, they were to follow this working principle:

¹⁷Theodore Tappert, ed., *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 299-300.

¹⁸Reed, 179.

. . . the common consent of the pure Lutheran liturgies of the sixteenth century, and where there is not common agreement among them, the consensus of the largest number of the greatest weight.¹⁹

As a result, the Common Service of 1888 was not a new service, but an English translation of the consensus of Reformation liturgies.

The Ancient Church As a Still Newer Historical Standard

The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW), appointed in the late 1960s to produce a common Lutheran hymnal, sought to recover still more of the worship tradition of the ancient church. To do this, they would have to abandon the Reformation era as the assumed standard for Lutheran worship in favor of following older, more ecumenical standards. They believed that the reformers had done the best they could with a limited knowledge and understanding of liturgical history. Many of the Reformation orders were prepared for definite areas and definite situations by people who had little liturgical experience beyond the local Roman rites.

The work of the ILCW was strongly influenced by ecumenical liturgical studies. Michael Aune states that the committee came to regard the ancient church, especially the fourth century, as a new norm for Lutheran liturgical development and interpretation.²⁰ They came to the conclusion that the liturgy from the early church "frequently grasped and expressed the essential Christian engagement--Christ for us! We with Christ!--more clearly and adequately than later liturgical forms."²¹

There would now be a greater emphasis on the history and tradition of liturgy, rather than doctrine, as the determining factor for new liturgies. Robert Wilken wrote:

¹⁹Aune, 48.

²⁰Ibid., 186.

²¹Ibid., 17.

. . . the liturgy has an integrity of its own and does not easily bend to fit our theological ideas. Moreover, its primary function is not a didactic one. Theology does not determine how a community worships God.²²

According to Aune, the shift in thinking has been from a doctrinal mind-set, in which the theology and liturgy of the Lutheran Reformation are considered normative and determinative, to a doxological one, in which the liturgical tradition of the united church of the East and West is the basic source.²³

Limitations Of History and Tradition As a Norm for Worship Practices

If the past is to be normative for the present, which period is the golden age? Is it the late-medieval period, Reformation Lutheranism, the fourth century, or yet another time? Many would respond that things should be the way they were when they were growing up. Just because something has an older background than immediate past practice does not mean the people will accept it. Is older always better? Such are questions that one must consider when appealing to history as a norm for worship practices.

Lack of agreement as to proper historical benchmarks has led to recent service books offering more than one option. The compilers of the *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958) revised the eucharistic prayer and called it "The Prayer of Thanksgiving." They also offered the traditional Lutheran practice of using the *verba* alone. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) offers a variety of options for the transfer of gifts, including a "may" rubric for an offertory procession. Three alternates are offered for the eucharistic liturgy: 1) eucharistic prayer, 2) Words of Institution alone, or 3) Prayer of Thanksgiving and Words of Institution.

²²Robert L. Wilken, "The Liturgy and the Lutheran Book of Worship," *Dialog*, 17(1978), 4.

²³Aune, 7.

Lutheran Worship (1982) includes three orders for the Divine Service. Divine Service I, a revision of the basic order in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), is based upon the Reformation heritage as expressed in the Common Service of 1888. Divine Service II, based upon the work of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, is a contemporary rendition of the liturgical pattern of the ancient church. Divine Service III follows the pattern of Luther's *Deutsche Messe*.

Luther did not consider it to be a handicap that he had limited knowledge of ancient worship practices, as he wrote:

And as for the example of the fathers, (their liturgical orders) are partly unknown, partly so much at variance with each other that nothing can be established about them, evidently because they themselves used their liberty. And even if they would be perfectly definite and clear, yet they could not impose on us a law or the obligation to follow them.²⁴

On the other hand, Luther would not have agreed with the radical reformers or those of the later free-church tradition who argued that anything that was part of the pre-Reformation tradition, and was not explicitly mandated by Scripture, was automatically bad and needed to be discarded. Tradition was a helpful tool, not a taskmaster. Old forms in new settings do not necessarily convey the same meanings.

There seems to have been a constant tension in the history of the church between those who have emphasized tradition and those who have lifted up cultural relevance as the determining factor in the worship of the church. Such a debate took place in America in the nineteenth century as the Common Service was being put together. J. W. Richard objected to the consensus rule of pure sixteenth century liturgies. Who was to decide which liturgies were "pure"? He objected to what he perceived as an "older is better" mentality. He believed that a liturgy could be Lutheran without having to "reproduce some golden age of Lutheranism."²⁵ Many of the

²⁴LW, 53:37.

²⁵Aune, 50-60.

same arguments are being heard today in relationship to Lutheranism and "church growth" principles in worship.

Cultural Setting and Pastoral Concern

Luther's pastoral concern

In addition to Luther's utmost concern for correct doctrine in worship and his fondness for the worship tradition in which he was nurtured, he had great pastoral concern for ordinary people. While not wanting to write a service in the vernacular because he was concerned that people would look to it as a standard, he wrote the *Deutsche Messe* in 1526 for the sake of the common person. This vernacular service was generally used on Sunday for the uneducated laity, while daily Matins and Vespers included both Latin and German.

The *Deutsche Messe* was a fairly simple service, for Luther was not content to simply give German words to the Latin chants. He wrote: "Both the text and notes, accent, melody, and manner of rendering ought to grow out of the true mother tongue and its inflection, otherwise all of it becomes an imitation, in the manner of apes."²⁶ Any old hymns would not do. For Luther the congregational hymn was a vehicle for involving the faithful in the singing of the liturgy.²⁷ Only those who were specially gifted for it should set about writing hymns. Court language would not do, only the simplest and most common words, but they also needed to be pure and

²⁶Schalk, 27.

²⁷Ibid., 41.

apt.²⁸ He despised those who "act like unclean swine, rush wildly about and rejoice only in the novel, and as soon as the novelty has worn off forthwith become disgusted with it."²⁹

Luther could have been just as radical as some of the other reformers, but he recognized that this would not have been helpful to the common people who needed the comfort of tradition. This attitude was formalized in the Confessions in which we are reminded that the community of God has the right to change, diminish, or increase ceremonies, but that this will always be done in an orderly way.³⁰

Some of the early services (such as the Brandenburg-Nuremberg 1533) seem to use good sense in that they used both German and Latin during this time of transition. Luther used familiar tunes so that the people might find it easier to sing his new hymns. For instance, the first stanza and original tune of "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come" were based on the secular song, "Good News From Far Abroad I Bring."

In some cases, Luther's insistence upon Christian liberty led to some changes he was not particularly fond of. Even though Luther was distressed that the people did not seem to want to go to communion (now that they were not compelled to do so), and encouraged pastors to preach in such a way that people would compel their pastors to administer it to them,³¹ he had little success in changing people's habits. Since he did not believe the communion service should be used if no one had announced for communion, the service of the Word was used more and more often. Within two centuries it had become the norm among Lutherans.³² Because the

²⁸Ibid., 26.

²⁹LW 53:19.

³⁰FC SD X9.

³¹Small Catechism, Preface, 21-22.

³²Reed, 80.

Reformation churches no longer required fasting or private confession, these traditions also generally fell into disuse. For the majority, "evangelical freedom" came to be interpreted in terms of what one no longer must do. Still, where there were no Scriptural grounds, Luther would not speak legalistically.

The Enlightenment and Rationalism

The era called the Enlightenment led to what the church generally refers to as Rationalism, that mind-set which seeks to explain religion in natural, or rational, terms. While the new thinking first affected doctrine, its effects were soon felt in worship forms, as Luther Reed writes of this period in the eighteenth century: "As doctrinal definiteness declined, the expression of Lutheran principles in worship was clouded."³³

The traditional service of worship as the visible people of God gathered together before a God who was really present was replaced by a service of instruction, edification, and personal inspiration. The sacraments were often dismissed as "anachronistic holdovers from an irrational and superstitious past."³⁴ Most often, communion was celebrated only four times a year. The preaching service came to be the norm. The pulpit was seen as a lecture pulpit for moral instruction in the all-important sermon. Hymns were modernized, with the hope of appealing to the minds and emotions of the hearers. Ancient forms were either ignored or rejected, as many private orders were used. Many of the rubrics were omitted, as well as such things as the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the Collect for the Day, and the Creed.

The influence of Rationalism was probably strongest in Europe, where, according to Piepkorn, it had "achieved an apparently all but complete triumph during the optimistic years of

³³Reed, 169.

³⁴Willimon, 95.

the turn of the century" (1900).³⁵ Candidates for ordination were no longer required to subscribe to the Lutheran confessions. An agenda prepared in 1818 for Prussian Union churches retained barely a trace of responsive service.

Many "Old Lutherans" left Europe for North America where they could practice a more confessional brand of Lutheranism. But here, too, the influence of Rationalism was felt. A hymnal, not produced by but recommended by the Pennsylvania Ministerium in 1835 as a help in "English work," had "rationalistic tendencies throughout."³⁶ Many Lutherans in the eastern United States opted for following the general (non-liturgical) worship patterns of the majority of American Protestants.

Liturgical Renewal vs. Church Growth

Arthur Carl Piepkorn maintains that liturgical renewal was a protest against rationalism and humanism in the church.³⁷ On the other hand, David Luecke wonders if the goal of liturgical renewal is not to "expunge the last vestiges of Pietism from Lutheran worship."³⁸ Perhaps both are true? At any rate, the often-times conflicting claims and goals of those who emphasize liturgical renewal and those who favor what is called "church growth" present an interesting comparison.

Advocates of liturgical renewal take strong objection to the view that Lutheranism is just one more Protestant denomination (as was certainly the view of most rationalists). Lutheran

³⁵Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The Protestant Worship Revival and the Lutheran Liturgical Movement," in Massey Shepherd, ed., *The Liturgical Renewal of the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 83-84.

³⁶Reed, 171.

³⁷Piepkorn, "The Protestant Worship Revival and the Lutheran Liturgical Movement," 83-84.

³⁸Luecke, 87.

theology is not merely "fundamentalism plus baptismal regeneration and some kind of doctrine of the Real Presence." It is a continuation of the genuine catholic tradition. Emphasis upon historic forms serves as a "prophylactic against lapsing into Protestantism."³⁹

Author David Luecke, while certainly granting past need for reform in the liturgical life of the church, asks whether some of these "reforms" might be less than relevant today, at least to the vast majority of people that we would seek to serve. He points out that the liturgical movement became especially popular among Lutheran churches in the 1960s, just when the numeric decline in those bodies began.⁴⁰ Luecke maintains that most Lutherans come out of a "village" setting in which people are born into the church. When one has known certain forms since childhood, they provide a great deal of meaning. However, a liturgical service can be a real barrier in evangelistic efforts to outsiders. Most will not stay long enough to learn to appreciate the tradition.

Luecke and other advocates of church growth principles maintain that we can learn from the "style" of the Evangelical movement. Greater attention needs to be given to the needs of the "audience." While Lutherans would traditionally shy away from such talk, not wanting to be accused of "entertaining," Evangelicals have actively sought to determine the widespread felt needs of people today and to gear their worship accordingly. This influence is being reflected in Lutheran churches today in modes of dress, informality, hymnology, and all sorts of home-spun liturgies.

Not all agree with Luecke's thinking. How many other books have necessitated reviews from two different reviewers in the *Concordia Journal*?⁴¹ Charles Evanson goes so far as to ask

³⁹Piepkorn, "The Protestant Worship Revival and the Lutheran Liturgical Movement," 91.

⁴⁰Luecke, 86.

⁴¹Elmer Matthias, Andrew Bartelt, *Concordia Journal* 15(July 1989)3:387-92.

whether Luecke is Lutheran.⁴² While not referring directly to Luecke (their books were published about the same time), Harold Senkbeil provides some helpful cautions. He agrees that conservative confessional Lutherans have sometimes sought to perpetuate their own culture and that this has sometimes led to "culture shock" in mission efforts. He also readily concedes that we live in a consumer society in which people will and do church shop for a church that will provide "the right mix of preaching and worship to suit their tastes," and, for many, style is more important than doctrine.⁴³ But he also argues that Evangelical style is intrinsically linked to its substance (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). A different style of worship is fine, but, when the spotlight in worship is not on God, but on the feelings of the worshipers, worship has become man-centered entertainment.⁴⁴ The sacraments are easily diminished, as communion becomes a way in which we fulfill Jesus' will that he be memorialized until he returns, and baptism becomes the act by which the believer confirms his prior decision to accept Jesus.⁴⁵

Since pastors strive to make worship more meaningful, it can be tempting to place greater emphasis upon the worshiper, at the expense of the worshiped. Eugene Peterson has some strong words about this tendency, likening it to the pagan religion of Baalism, which was always so troubling to Old Testament Israel.

The emphasis of Baalism was on psychological relatedness and subjective experience. The gulf between people and God was leveled out of existence by means of participatory rites. The terrifying majesty of God, his "otherness," was assimilated to the religious passions of the worshiper. The god of the bull image,

⁴²Charles J. Evanson, "Is Luecke Lutheran? And Extended Review of *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance* by David S. Luecke (Concordia, 1988)," *The Bride of Christ* XV(Advent 1990)1:11-13.

⁴³Harold Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 45, 175.

⁴⁴Ibid., 176.

⁴⁵Ibid., 152.

the god of wine, the god of the fertility figurine was the god of relevance, fulfilling personal needs with convincing immediacy. The desires that inflamed the soul were fulfilled in the cultic act of worship. The transcendence of the deity was overcome in the ecstasy of feeling.

Sensory participation was featured. Images were necessary--the bolder, the more colorful, the more sensational, the better. Music and dance became the means for drawing persons out of their private diversities and merging them into a mass response. Sexual activity in the cult was frequent since it achieved the primary Baalistic goal so completely--the ecstatic plunge of the whole sensory person into the passion of the religious moment.

. . . Baalism is worship reduced to the spiritual stature of the worshiper. Its canons are that it should be interesting, relevant, and exciting.

. . . Pastors are subjected to two recurrent phrases from people to whom they give spiritual leadership. Both are reminiscent of Baalism, enough to earn the label, "Neo-Baalism." The phrases are: "Let's have a worship experience" and "I don't get anything out of it."⁴⁶

People like stories, jokes, short sermons, easy music, visual aids, and the like. None of these things are wrong in and of themselves, in fact can and might be used to the glory of God. But if they become ends in themselves, the church is soon in the entertainment business. While such techniques have been openly used by some churches, in the end it will be self-defeating. How can the church compete with television, movies, and the like, which will spend hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars producing each minute of their entertainment packages? Worse yet, such techniques could portray God as a genie in a bottle whose sole responsibility is providing for our pleasure.

Senkbeil believes that even as foreign visitors must come to appreciate American football, new Christians must learn to appreciate the historic forms.⁴⁷ While most people have a "gut level," vernacular, idea of what they like in worship, their tastes can be cultivated, even to the

⁴⁶Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 143-145.

⁴⁷Senkbeil, 178-79.

point where what is new (to them) becomes vastly preferable to the old. Although outside the Lutheran tradition, Robert Webber is one such person who moved from an Evangelical background to a greater appreciation of the historic catholic worship tradition of the church.⁴⁸

While it would seem to make sense to draw from the contributions of both those who promote church growth and those who are concerned about liturgical renewal, it may not be so easy, for many in both camps are convinced that they are right. Only time will tell which, if either, will have the greater impact upon Lutheran worship in the future.

Theological Trends and Other Denominations

Pietism

In reaction to the perception of cold intellectualism in Orthodoxy, small groups began to gather for mutual edification and support under the direction of Jacob Spener in 1675. These early Pietists stressed the importance of personal prayer, piety, and Bible reading. Personal feelings were more important than doctrinal formulations. Sunday morning corporate worship was less important than the individual's personal spiritual pilgrimage. Worship services were designed as a type of psychological experience to help the individual; services tended to be man-centered rather than God-centered.

The movement had a strong influence on Lutheranism in Europe, especially through the Gruntvigian movement in Denmark, Haugeanism in Norway, and the Mission Covenant movement (which would spawn the Evangelical Covenant and Evangelical Free denominations) in Sweden. Immigrants also brought to America pietistic attitudes, which prepared the way for many of them to adopt the "new measures" of their Protestant neighbors.

⁴⁸Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (Waco: Word Books, 1985).

Under Pietism the historic way of worship gave way to more informal expressions of emotion. Apart from the singing of hymns, the congregation rarely actively participated in worship. The historic church year and formal prayer were dropped. Having done away with the ancient liturgy, the services generally followed a pattern of informal prayer, singing, and preaching.

David Luecke has a warmer feeling towards Pietism than many, emphasizing the important contributions that Pietism made towards the formation and growth of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. He characterizes the immigrants who would later form the Missouri Synod as pietistic and orthodox. This was in reaction to the rationalism which was so powerful in Europe at the time. Provisions were made for feelings and conversion experiences, although these Lutherans handled them quite differently than those favoring revivalism. Luecke concludes that these experiential pietistic influences have receded significantly in recent years because of the emphasis on more formal liturgical experiences.⁴⁹ Of course, Luecke's point is that we could use a little more modern-day Pietism in our worship today.

Adapting to the American Culture

While Lutherans were influenced by free-church ideas in Europe, their options were limited by state churches which controlled worship formats. When many of these Lutherans emigrated to America in the eighteenth century, they enjoyed greater religious freedom than they had known in their homelands. The tendency was to adapt to the new-found Protestant worship patterns.

Muhlenberg sought to stem the tide, hoping that all Lutherans in America would eventually be united by a common Lutheran liturgy. The service he proposed in 1748 was

⁴⁹Luecke, 88-91.

essentially a Reformation order. It was ratified by the first meeting of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania and served as the only authorized service for some forty years. Each minister promised to introduce no other service.

However, the American culture and other Protestants were having a greater and greater effect. By the middle of the nineteenth century advocates of "American Lutheranism" were denouncing liturgical worship as formalism. Revival methods were encouraged. Those who opposed the new measures, learned from American Protestantism, were denounced as "head Christians" or "catechism Christians." Samuel Schmucker, Benjamin Kurtz, Samuel Sprecher, and others argued that the only way the Lutheran church could develop on American soil would be to adjust to its new environment, making wide concessions to the revivalistic and puritanical spirit of other denominations.

These advocates of "American Lutheranism" were opposed by Charles Porterfield Krauth and by many newly arrived Lutherans of the Missouri, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods. The latter were concerned that those who advocated non-Lutheran ways of worship would also forsake the Lutheran doctrine. Their fears seem to have been well-founded. Schmucker, for example, wrote that one's understanding of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper should be a matter of individual decision. Advocates of what was called the "Definite Synodical Platform" urged a revision of the Augsburg Confession to eliminate errors (such as the approval of the mass, private confession, and the concept of the real presence). When the proponents of American Lutheranism were defeated, some left to form the Frankean Synod, which abandoned the Augsburg Confession completely and pressed the new measures to the extreme.

While the Lutheran church eventually returned to a more conservative liturgical stance, the American culture and the denominations spawned by its frontier have had a significant influence over the years. Lutherans have retained the historic church year but have also integrated

such observances as Mother's Day, Thanksgiving, Rally Sunday, Loyalty Sunday, New Year's Day, and the like. While most Lutherans shy away from revivalistic methods in regular worship services, we (in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod) borrowed from them in the "Preaching--Teaching--Reaching" outreach efforts of the 1950s and in the more recent "Open House" concept. The "camp church" experience of the American frontier seems to serve as a model for Lutheran church camps and many Vacation Bible Schools.

If not for the American culture, most congregations would still have men sitting on one side with women and children on the other, listening to a sermon in a European language. Lutherans sing hymns from a wide variety of sources. We have greetings, announcements, and children's sermons.

Most change has not come easily. Compilers of new hymnals have had to decide which Biblical translation to use. Should "Christian" or "catholic" be used in the Apostles Creed? Deciding on which hymns to include is always a challenge (especially in terms of tunes). We have learned to ask "What is effective?" Women are being involved in more and more leadership aspects of the worship service. Currently being debated is the appropriate use of "inclusive language." The American culture and American-bred denominations will continue to have their influence upon our worship practices.

Vatican II and the Ecumenical Movement

When Pope John XXIII sought to let some "fresh air" into the Roman Catholic Church with the calling of the Second Vatican Council in 1959, he certainly had no idea how much some of the forthcoming reforms, especially those concerning worship, would influence Protestants as well.

A revised calendar was introduced in the Roman Missal in 1969. Lutherans have generally followed the proposed revisions, including a three-year cycle of readings, the removal

of the pre-Lenten Sundays, the reduction of Passiontide to one week, renewed prominence to the Easter vigil, and a fifty-day Easter season. From Roman Catholics, Lutherans and many other Protestants have received a new appreciation for corporate worship. Whereas Protestants have often involved themselves in the "business" of the church and accused Catholics of worshipping in response to legalism, Roman Catholics have learned the importance of thinking of the mass as the service of the church.⁵⁰

The influence of Vatican II has, at the same time, brought greater unity and also greater separation among Protestants. By and large, the groups from the liturgical right and center have accepted the directions of the Roman Catholic reforms (many of which were stimulated by things Protestants had been doing for centuries). As a result, past distinctions in worship forms between such groups as Lutherans, Episcopalians, Disciples of Christ, and Methodists are becoming increasingly blurred. At the same time, descendants of the frontier tradition (Southern Baptists, Church of Christ, etc.) seem to have pretty much resisted the same forces.⁵¹ The gap widens.

Influences of other Protestant denominations

In addition to having been influenced by many theological trends, Lutheran worship has been influenced in many ways by practices first used by other Protestants. "Mass" originally referred to that portion of the communion service before the catechumens were required to leave. Later it came to refer to the entire service. Early English reformers began to use the term "Holy Communion" rather than mass. Later, the Puritans favored "Lord's Supper" rather than communion or eucharist, for it best described the authority for the sacrament.

⁵⁰Marshall Romey and Michael J. Taylor, *Liturgy and Christian Unity* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 13.

⁵¹James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1989), 190-91.

Zwingli began his services with a strong exhortation, for the purpose of "fencing the table," so that no one would commune unworthily. John Calvin would begin with Ps. 124:8, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." This was followed by the confession of sins, which had been absent since the time of Justyn Martyr. (*The Lutheran Book of Worship* has removed it once again from the regular service and placed it as an option. It remains in *Lutheran Worship*, although the *Altar Book* rubrics allow for its optional use.) In Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier's "A Form of the Supper of Christ" in 1527, a rite is given which makes clear the importance of worthy partaking of the sacrament. It includes a period of self-examination, an exhortation to brotherly love, and a further exhortation to live uprightly.

Hymn boards came about through the Reformed influence. Some Lutherans have followed the Methodist practice of using a song leader. It took many years, but new Lutheran agendas now follow Wesley's advice in omitting the giving of the bride as a standard part of the wedding service. Some are following something like the Methodist's annual "Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows" (which Wesley borrowed from the Presbyterians).⁵²

Lutherans, as well as many other mainline Protestants, have been influenced by Pentecostal worship practices through the charismatic movement. In some churches, the traditional liturgy has all but been replaced.

Lutherans have been strongly influenced by the Anglicans, although some would claim that the Anglican liturgy of 1549 was essentially a Reformation Lutheran rite translated into English.⁵³ When it came time to look for rites in the English vernacular, the *Book of Common Prayer* was a natural place to begin. The Authorized Version of the Bible was incorporated into the Lutheran liturgies, as were English texts of many collects, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the creeds,

⁵²Ibid., 155.

⁵³Piepkorn, "The Protestant Revival and the Lutheran Liturgical Movement," 90-91.

and the *Te Deum*. The concept of the surplice and stole used together came from the Anglicans. Cranmer combined the offices of Matins, Lauds, and Prime into Morning Prayer; and Vespers and Compline into Evening Prayer, as we now have in *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *Lutheran Worship*. While the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* indicated that the communion bread should be placed in the mouth rather than in the hand so that it might not be used superstitiously, subsequent prayer books decreed that the bread should be placed in people's hands, as many Lutherans are also now doing. Late in the nineteenth century, the choir first began the practice of entering with the clergy during the entrance song (a practice which is discouraged by the *Lutheran Book of Worship*).⁵⁴

Lutherans have also influenced other Lutherans. Late in the nineteenth century, the Church of Sweden underwent a liturgical revival, restoring such things as the introits, proper prefaces, the *Sanctus* and the like. Other Lutherans eventually followed. The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod borrowed the Common Service from other Lutherans who had had much more experience in English. At the present time, Lutherans from free-church and pietistic backgrounds are gradually being absorbed into the tradition of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Conclusions

At the present time, many Lutherans are wondering which is the best direction to go in worship. Should we look to the ancient catholic tradition, Reformation liturgies, the free-church tradition, or whatever? Following are several lessons drawn from this historical study which may help to shed light on the current challenge.

1. Our worship must express correct doctrine. Even small aberrations are not to be tolerated.

⁵⁴Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 114.

2. Anything is permissible, as long as it is helpful and does not conflict with the Word of God.
3. Dry orthodoxy can drive people away.
4. When we adopt worship customs from other traditions we run the risk of also being influenced by their doctrine.
5. People will generally resist changes in worship practices.
6. Historic liturgies have stood the "test of time" and should not be discarded lightly.
7. Worship traditions bind us together with Christians who have gone before and those who will come after.
8. We need to be careful so that one service does not become such a standard that people will never want to change.
9. A worship tradition is not wrong simply because Roman Catholics or someone else uses it.
10. There will always be a strong tendency to adopt what are perceived to be "successful" practices of other traditions.
11. In times of doubt and uncertainty, people may wish to look to old forms for security.
12. There is likely to continue to be a tension between those who favor liturgical renewal and those who promote a more evangelical style.
13. It is easy to place the focus upon man, rather than God, in the worship service.
14. Some worship forms take time for us to learn to appreciate them.
15. New worship forms sometimes arise because of a reaction against the old.
16. In contrast to the Anglicans, Lutherans have been united by doctrinal confessions rather than a worship book.
17. We must keep the contemporary needs of the worshipers in mind as we design worship.
18. While theologians debate over the text of the liturgy, many people in the pew are more concerned about the singability of the tune.

CHAPTER THREE

ADULT EDUCATION IN THE PARISH

Lutheran worship is based upon, and expressive of, Lutheran doctrine. How this finding can be put into practice is the practical component of this project.

This chapter begins with a look at how adults learn and at what things can and cannot be done to facilitate adult education in the parish. Next to be described will be how these strategies were employed as the basis for the Sunday adult educational program at Zion Lutheran Church in Albert Lea, Minnesota.

The groundwork having been laid, the next chapter will describe how a new adult class, "Celebrating God's Grace," was developed as a part of this new educational program, with the objective of relating the doctrine and worship of the Lutheran church.

Barriers to Participation in Adult Christian Education

Some "cannot" participate

Cyril Houle reminds us that there was a time in the past in which adult education in the modern context would have been impossible. The people were poor; they overworked; they lived in remote places; their inadequate diet made them listless; and most significantly, they had not received enough schooling as children to provide them with even basic learning skills. He goes on to say that most of the people of the world still have these handicaps!¹

¹Cyril Houle, *Continuing Your Education* (San Francisco: McGraw Hill, 1964), 7.

While the people of the writer's community have been blessed compared to the world as a whole, there will be some who simply will not be able to take part in traditional adult education offerings.

Here Abraham Maslow's concept of a "hierarchy of needs" can be helpful. One must first satisfy physiological needs before one can be concerned about safety/security needs, and then love/affection, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs in turn. Most traditional classes are in the realm of the latter three needs. People struggling to eat or to provide for their basic shelter needs are not likely to be involved.

Some work on Sunday mornings, when most classes are offered. It is not realistic for them to change their schedules or quit their jobs. Others will not be able to afford materials needed for certain classes or the funds necessary for child-care. Lack of transportation may make it impossible for some to attend. Stairs may provide a barrier for some and hard chairs for still others. Some are simply too infirm to go any place. A few are not mentally capable of participating in any kind of traditional class.

Age will gradually make it more difficult to attend classes. Stairs, hard chairs, small print, dim lighting, and impaired hearing and other ailments make it more and more difficult for some who were once active to take part.

Those with lower incomes may genuinely have to devote a greater proportion of their time and energy to basic survival needs. It should not be surprising if education seems low on their priority list.

There may also be "subtle" barriers such as the age group, race, or economic level of the other participants. Paul Bergevin states: "Adults have more emotional connections with words,

situations, institutions, and people than do children."² A negative self-image may make such barriers virtually insurmountable.

Some people will simply not be able to take part in any educational programs as long as these barriers remain.

Some "will not" participate

Many believe that learning in general, and Sunday School in particular, is only for children. We should not be surprised, for we have taught that lesson well. While there are records of adult Sunday School classes in New England as early as 1815, for the most part, Sunday School classes in the nineteenth century were limited to children.

William Thorndike was somewhat radical when he suggested in 1928 that adults could continue to learn, if the curriculum was properly adjusted to meet their needs. This is easily confirmed by a look at the early church, in which virtually all formal educational efforts were directed at adults.³

However, Thorndike's theory was not demonstrated in the modern world until huge numbers of veterans returned to school after World War II. But not everyone in the church has gotten the message. Many continue to believe that they learned everything they need to know about their faith in junior confirmation.

Most adults tend to resist changes which threaten their present attitudes and behavior. And so, in spite of sermons and personal invitations, many will stubbornly persist in their belief that, at least for them, their learning is complete. Some may even feel betrayed. The rules have changed! David Forsberg believes that may explain why his congregation had greater success in

²Paul Bergevin, *A Philosophy for Adult Education* (New York: Seabury Press, 1961), 122.

³Henry J. Boetcher, *Adult Education in the Parish* (New York: Vantage Press, 1975), x-xiii.

enlisting newer members in a new multiple-elective Sunday morning Bible class program. He concluded that most people were given, either implicitly or explicitly, expectations for church membership when they first joined the congregation. If, at that time, active members were those who worshiped twice a month or every Sunday, and little else was expected, they would certainly resist someone new changing the rules. That implies that they must now do something different and perhaps somewhat scary.⁴

In reality, it is often the fear of embarrassment which will keep many from changing their ideas and becoming active participants. Bergevin believes that many, not wanting to reveal their ignorance or inadequacy, are afraid of each other and the minister.⁵ Not that most people would admit that to others, or even to themselves.

Forsberg writes of their follow-up study concerning those people who had not attended any of the twenty offerings during the previous thirty-six weeks. The results of this study were mixed, confusing, and indecisive, since the reasons given seemed to be more in the nature of handy excuses than valid reasons. He concluded that many people are not sure themselves why they react as they do. While the classes were designed around the expressed needs of the people, for some of the same people to attend a class on a certain subject (perhaps parenting, addiction, marital communication, etc.) would be to admit publicly that they had a weakness in that area.⁶

It should not be surprising that those with less formal education are more reluctant to participate in further education. Roger Axford cites one study in which participation in continuing education, in a given year, ranged from four percent among adults with no formal schooling to

⁴David Forsberg, "How we developed an Adult Education Program," *Church Teachers*, Jan.-Feb. 1980, 153.

⁵Bergevin, 122.

⁶Forsberg, 153.

forty-seven percent among those with more than sixteen years of school.⁷ John Elias agrees, stating that "the more education people have, the more they want."⁸ Those with less education are afraid their inadequacies will be revealed. Elias goes on to say that this is especially true of those in the fifty-four-plus age group. It is easier to resist change than to try something which may end in failure.⁹

Alan Knox speaks of the influence of family background. Positive characteristics would include: 1) a general acceptance by family members that adult life entails growth and change; 2) familiarity with other adults learning; 3) willingness of other family members to adapt; and 4) the experience of children seeing adults continuing to learn.¹⁰ Conversely, those who have grown up in families with negative attitudes toward continuing education will tend to be influenced by those same attitudes.

Some are simply not "joiners." While they may learn, it is generally a by-product of experience rather than a deliberate plan. One study in an urban Roman Catholic parish in the Midwest indicated that this may include one-third of all adults.¹¹

Some are alienated from the church. They feel "left out" and in some cases want nothing to do with anything the church will sponsor. This is a deeper problem which must first be addressed before one can even hope to involve them in a learning group of any sort.

⁷Roger Axford, *Adult Education: The Open Door* (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1969), 75-76.

⁸John L. Elias, *The Foundations and Practice of Adult Religious Education* (Malabar, FL: R. E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1982), 95.

⁹*Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰Alan Knox, *Adult Development and Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1977), 66-67.

¹¹Elias, 97.

Some "might" participate

In the "information age," we are seeing an explosion of knowledge. Continuous education is necessary just to keep up. Warren Wilbert states that the average adult engages in about five learning experiences per year, devoting an average of one hundred hours to each project. About 70 percent of this is self-planned learning.¹² In spite of the barriers previously mentioned, adults are learning, and more so than ever before. We have more leisure time, a longer life-span, and more convenient opportunities.

Attitudes are changing, gradually but dramatically. More and more people are making career changes, and these career changes often require going back to school. The older student is no longer unusual in our post-secondary schools. It even seems that adult students have become the number one target of some higher education institutions. These institutions seem to be bending over backwards to make it easier for the non-traditional student.

But there is still a limited amount of time in each person's life, which means there will be greater competition for that time. Each person continually makes decisions as to which opportunities best serve his own needs. In the church, we might do all the right things but, since our programs are not obligatory, some, who may have good intentions, will not follow through.

Bergevin, Morris, and Smith remind us that adults are looking to satisfy specific problems with specific solutions:

The adult tends to see life as a series of problems or obstacles he must overcome or with which he learns to live. He is usually more likely to involve himself in a learning activity centered in problems than in organized subject matter like psychology, history, economics, etc.¹³ [or theology?]

¹²Warren Wilbert, *Teaching Christian Adults* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 83.

¹³Paul Bergevin, Dwight Morris, and Robert M. Smith, *Adult Education Procedures* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury, 1975), 29-30.

Most adults will eliminate those options which they do not see as being interesting, relevant, practical, useful, or generally to their advantage. They must be convinced "why" they should pursue one option over many others which are available. In the church, some programs will be rejected by the members who see them as too elementary and, thus, not a good use of their time. In a society which many believe is becoming increasingly self-centered, commitment is not what it used to be. Someone may sign up for a certain class, even attend a time or two but, if he does not believe he is receiving something of value from a particular class, he will not return.

While one might expect that it would be easier to involve younger members in adult classes, since they are more likely to understand the need for life-long education, they are also the same people who may already be overly involved in educational pursuits of one sort or another. Elias notes that those devoting significant time and energy to career advancement are less likely to be active in church classes. They only have so much time and energy and have already chosen their priorities. More likely to be involved are retired people, unemployed spouses, and the well-educated who have already achieved career success.¹⁴

The "mights" are those who value their time. They will participate if they see a particular program at a particular time to be to their advantage.

Strategies for Involving More Adults

The foregoing has shown that adults are different. They have varying backgrounds and current circumstances. Furthermore, they are at different places in their faith development. In this section, several possible strategies will be examined in an effort to see how one might involve

¹⁴Elias, 106.

more people in the adult education programs of the church. Different approaches will be needed for those who cannot, those who will not, and those who might participate.

Addressing the needs of those who "cannot" participate

One should begin by asking if some barriers, which are literally preventing people from coming, can be eliminated. While Sunday morning will probably continue to be the best time for most people, there are some who must work on Sunday morning. Can we offer classes in a greater variety of time slots? Can we offer transportation? Can some classes which are held downstairs (no elevator) be held on the main floor? Obviously, not all barriers can or will be overcome, but, perhaps, there are some things that we can do.

Richard Troup offers some helpful suggestions which could serve as a useful checklist. Depending on the style of presentation, there should be ten to eighteen square feet of space for each person. There needs to be adequate lighting, cheerful colors, good acoustics, and adequate ventilation. The room needs to be in a location that can be easily found by visitors. Restrooms should be convenient. Chairs should be sturdy and comfortable. Tables will encourage note-taking and more active participation. While recognizing that all of these are important, some are more in the realm of desirable than essential. He also states that children should have priority on the best space, for adults will find it somewhat easier to adapt and make do.¹⁵

The challenge of those who "will not" come

While people in this category are able to attend, there seem to be some internal barriers which keep them away. This is particularly true for those people who have had minimal or no formal religious education since confirmation.

¹⁵Roy B. Zuck and Gene A. Getz, eds., *Adult Education in the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), 225-30.

A climate for change needs to be created. It needs to be clear through sermons, visits, and other communications that educational involvement is expected. And then let it be known that other people are participating.

Some will stubbornly resist such invitations, questioning the necessity of Christian education for adults. Rather than argue, we need to recognize that most resistance to change stems from fear of failure. Some of these people will change if they have expectations of personal success. Bergevin and McKinley say that the potential learner will change when: 1) no one insists on changing him; 2) he can express himself freely; 3) he feels accepted regardless of attitude; and 4) he is not attacked or put on the defensive as a person.¹⁶

But how will the person who has not been previously involved know that these things will be true? The programs must be publicized and interpreted in such a way that those who would consider coming will believe they will be accepted if they do decide to take part. Some of this publicity will be through newsletters, special letters, bulletin announcements, and the like. But that can only be preliminary. Especially for those who have not been in the habit of coming to classes, a personal invitation will be most effective. The writer tried this a few years ago, telephoning dozens of people the day before the beginning of a new class on Christian marriage. Not everyone came, but many did, including several who had never come before.

Unfortunately, there might be some who participated at some time in the past and had an unpleasant experience. Some teachers of adults do not realize that adults do not learn in the same manner as children. Those teachers may have given church classes a bad reputation. Others may simply have unpleasant memories from their school days or confirmation memory work. For that

¹⁶Paul Bergevin and John McKinley, *Design for Adult Education in the Church* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1958), 43.

reason, some suggest that alternate terms be used such as "discussion group," "forum," or "presentation," as opposed to "class."

A new class may be needed in order to involve certain people. They might have dropped out of the present class for some reason. It can then be difficult to return. Dick Murray suggests that organizing new classes is the best, and sometimes the only, way to get present church members into a class. Putting it very bluntly, he writes: "One of the major reasons people don't go to Sunday School is because of the people who do."¹⁷

But one can also use other people to advantage, especially those people who command respect in the congregation. A certain person teaching a class may draw people who might otherwise not come. Especially for a new class, it may be helpful to publicize the names of those who have already indicated that they will participate. Others may want to "jump on the bandwagon" as well.

Particular attention should be given to new members. They may not have been involved in any adult class in their previous congregation, never having seriously considered it. But if it is expected in the new congregation, they might just give it a try. But, if they are not challenged to do so in those first months, they will easily settle into the old routine which may be very tough to change later.

Because we are here working with some people who very likely have a fear of the new and unknown, it needs to be clearly stated that, in at least certain classes, there will be no required oral reading or the answering of questions. Neither will there be the assignments, tests, nor memory work that some remember from confirmation. It is not always easy to convince people

¹⁷Dick Murray, *Strengthening the Adult Sunday School Class* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 35.

of this. Usually the toughest part of teaching an adult information class is getting the people to come the first time.

The instructor will need to recognize that some people have had to overcome a great deal of fear just to come for that initial session. He will be especially careful not to put the timid (or anyone) on the spot. He will ask for suggestions and watch for signs of dissatisfaction which he will seek to remedy as soon as possible. Robert Smith writes that this opening session is critical. The instructor will want to develop a "climate of freedom." This is encouraged through tone of voice, perhaps sitting rather than standing, and accepting all questions in a gracious way. While there is no exact prescription for such a climate, Smith believes that, if the instructor sincerely wants such an atmosphere, he will find a way to promote it.¹⁸

Because we are here dealing with some very "fragile" people who could easily slip back into their old ways, it is especially important to remember, not only in the first session but in every session, the principles of androgogy, as developed by Malcolm Knowles:¹⁹

PEDAGOGY

ANDROGOGY

Concept of the learner:

The role of the learner is, by definition, a dependent one. The teacher is expected by society to take full responsibility for determining what is to be learned, when it is to be learned, how it is to be learned, and if it has been learned.

People will normally move from dependency to increasing self-directedness, but at different rates for different people. Teachers have a responsibility to encourage and nurture this movement. While adults have a need to be generally self-directing, they may be dependent in particular temporary situations.

¹⁸Dale Griffin, *The Subject is Persons* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 82-84.

¹⁹Malcolm Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1978), 55ff.

PEDAGOGY

Role of the learner's experience:

The experience learners bring to a learning situation is minimal. It may be used as a starting point, but it is assumed they will learn more from the experience of the teacher and the textbook writer. Accordingly, the primary teaching techniques are transmittal techniques, such as lecture and assigned reading.

Readiness to learn:

Children are ready to learn whenever society (the school) says they ought to learn, provided the pressures (such as fear of failure) are great enough. Most people the same age are ready to learn the same things, therefore the curriculum is fairly standard.

Orientation to learning:

Learners see education as a process of acquiring subject-matter content, most of which they understand will be useful only at a later time in life. Therefore the curriculum is organized into subject-matter units.

Motivation for learning

The motivation is primarily from external elements such as pressure from parents, teachers, grades and the like.

ANDROGOGY

As people grow and develop they accumulate an increasing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning--for themselves and others. People attach more meaning to learnings that they acquire by experience than that which they acquire passively. Accordingly, the primary techniques in education are those that include experience.

People become ready to learn something when they experience a need to learn it in order to cope with real-life tasks or problems. Learning programs should be organized around life-application categories and sequenced according to the learner's readiness to learn.

Learners see education as a process of developing increased competence to achieve their full potential in life. They want to be able to apply whatever knowledge and skill they gain today to living more effectively tomorrow. People are performance centered in their orientation to learning.

While there may be some response to external (e.g. a job promotion), the most effective motivation is from internal pressures such as a desire for self-esteem or an improved quality of life.

Involving those who "might" participate

In this group there is the most realistic opportunity for growth. A recent national study on Christian education in several Protestant denominations found that most adults want to grow in their faith. The majority reported "strong interest in developing a deeper relationship to God, a more significant encounter with Jesus, and a fuller understanding of Scripture."²⁰

As congregations seek to help their members grow in faith, it soon becomes apparent that any "one" class will not be the answer. A group of adults will usually have more variations in skills, interest, experience, and education than a similar group of children. Writing from the Baptist tradition (and they seem to have a better track record of educating adults than Lutherans do), Ruth Haycock suggests several advantages to the elective method:

- 1) members can choose subjects in which they are interested,
- 2) over a period of time, the individual receives the benefit of learning from several teachers,
- 3) students can shift classes without offending or causing misunderstanding,
- 4) teachers can be recruited for single courses, and
- 5) courses can be repeated as often as necessary.²¹

She also suggests the possibility of offering sequences, with certain courses as prerequisites. Certificates or other recognition could be used. There might, occasionally, be joint activities for the entire group.

Such a program will constantly be adding new classes. This seems to be the best way to grow in numbers, since, as Dick Murray reports, "most adult classes reach their maximum size within a year," and "persons who once belonged to such classes but are now inactive rarely return to their old class but may find a new class attractive."²²

²⁰Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Elkin, "Description of a National Study on Christian Education," *Issues*, Fall 1970, 15.

²¹Zuck, 149.

²²Murray, 62.

While some Protestant traditions look with pride to certain Sunday School classes which have continued for decades, there are advantages to including short-term classes within the elective structure. Whether we like it or not, we live in an era in which adults do not like to commit themselves for long periods of time. Because of increased mobility, some cannot make long-term commitments. Shorter terms allow people to "complete" a study with a sense of accomplishment, rather than to just catch part of the whole. It also becomes necessary to remember that many, if not most, will not be in attendance for all sessions. It is helpful for each week's class to be a specific unit or, at the least, the instructor should give a careful review of the previous week before continuing.

A variety of classes will also give opportunity to reach different age levels. However, there are some differences of opinion on this subject. Benson and Elkin suggest that it is desirable to promote intergenerational contact. They believe that it makes sense to connect older adults, whose faith seems to be more integrated, with youth.²³ While Dick Murray would probably not disagree with the desirability of this, he seems to be saying that it usually does not work. He has discovered that adult classes rarely attract members more than a few years younger than the youngest charter member. (He is here speaking in the context of ongoing classes.) He also states that it is difficult to get three generations in the same class.²⁴ His observations seem to be borne out by experience. While the ladies' circles in the writer's congregation always warmly invited and welcomed younger members, they had only minimal success. They managed to span two generations, but seldom three. The younger ladies did not come until we established a special circle for mothers of young children. Like it or not, the homogenous unit principle of church growth advocates is fairly accurate. By having several classes going at one time, no one is ever

²³Benson, 16.

²⁴Murray, 30, 39.

excluded from intergenerational contact, but those who prefer to gather with "their own kind" also have that opportunity.

Electives also allow for larger and smaller classes. There are advantages to each. A smaller class is essential if everyone wants to participate in the discussion. But some prefer to attend a larger class in which they are free to sit back and listen. It seems that most people prefer that to which they are most accustomed.

A variety of classes will necessitate a number of teachers. Some classes could be taught by the pastor or other staff. Professional church workers have the advantage of special training and, hopefully, a good reputation. But in some areas, certain lay people may have greater expertise or interest. They may have the opportunity to devote more time to a particular class.

The individual's level of faith development will not only determine if he will attend an adult class, but also what kind of class he will attend. Some want to dig in, while others prefer something fairly light. Each kind of study can and should be offered.

Obviously, not every kind of class can be offered at every time in every place. Planners will want to discover the needs and interests of the potential participants. This can be done by: 1) conducting personal interviews; 2) using a check list in a survey; 3) involving six to eight people from the group to determine common problems; 4) through observers; or 5) through informal discussion and observation.²⁵

Who should actually decide which classes will be offered? Most adult educators agree with Paul Bergevin that adults learn best when they have an active part in designing their course of study. But Dick Murray adds an interesting wrinkle. He states that that assumes that the adults are highly interested in a certain subject or motivated to solve a particular problem. He does not say it quite so bluntly, but there are others who are "lazy." They would much rather have

²⁵Bergevin, Morris, and Smith, 22-33.

someone else do the planning, especially if they trust that person and believe that he has the necessary expertise.²⁶ (The pastor?) In most churches a middle ground may be necessary. The Pastor, Director of Christian Education, or Education Committee may do much of the planning, but they should look for and find ways of getting input from those who they hope will be in the class.

After establishing the courses to be offered, one must publicize the program. It might be good to integrate all of the courses under an attractive theme, slogan, title, or symbol. Publicity will begin with letters, posters, bulletin announcements, and the like. Many believe that the most powerful promotion will come from the pulpit. This will most often need to be followed up by personal contact. It is highly desirable to get people to make a personal commitment to attend.

If continued learning for adults is perceived as a high priority in the congregation, more people are likely to take it seriously and to be involved. This mindset is taught in many ways. Elias was quite perceptive when he stated, "Budget statements are theological statements of priorities."²⁷ Under what kinds of conditions will the class be offered? Will there be an adequate supply of Bibles and study materials? Will the room be well lighted? Are there suitable tables and chairs? What does the publicity material look like? People know when you are serious!

The publicity will need to be specific, including more information than simply where and when the class will be offered. We have to assume that we are dealing with people who value their time and are discriminating in their use of it. They will want to know what the subject matter is and how it will relate to their needs. In larger churches it will be necessary not only to say who the leader will be, but also what his credentials are.

²⁶Murray, 112.

²⁷Elias, 194.

Richard Troup offers the example of an interesting box chart in which, for each class, not only the schedule and the subject is listed, but also the type of student for which the class is geared. The classes might variously be targeted for new converts; beginning, growing, and advanced Bible students; teachers; general devotional for all; or members and unchurched friends.²⁸

Based on the findings of Cyril Houle, Roger Axford would suggest classes be offered which will relate to adults who are variously: 1) goal-oriented; 2) activity-oriented; or 3) learning-oriented.²⁹ Donald Deffner describes the same three-fold motivating factors among adults. He describes the first group as those who are aware of some gap in their knowledge, a weakness in their faith, or a defect in their personality. Their goal is to do something about it. Deffner characterizes the second group as those who "want to be where the action is." He describes the third group as being "insatiably curious about life."³⁰ Classes relating to these three types of people will now be examined in greater detail.

1) Goal-oriented

Cyril Houle writes that most people "want to achieve a goal that will make their lives better." This may include such things as higher paying and more satisfying jobs; being good husbands, wives, parents, homemakers, or citizens; how to get along with other people; enriching their leisure hours by more rewarding hobbies and amusements; or how to carry out a special responsibility they might have.³¹

²⁸Zuck, 231.

²⁹Axford, 79ff.

³⁰Donald L. Deffner, *How to Teach Adults* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 12.

³¹Houle, 7.

Houle's rather extensive list did not include anything that might specifically be called "religious." He would probably reply that that, too, may very well be a need of many people, but that he was not writing a religious book. The significant point here is that it is so very easy to think of all kinds of needs and overlook the spiritual. People in our community seek to do their very best for their children. They will bring them to piano or ballet lessons, gymnastics, swimming, hockey, football, baseball, basketball, and the like. They are so busy that sometimes things like Sunday School and worship are relegated to the back burner. They would not say that these things are less important; it is just that so many other things seem to demand immediate attention.

Here it is helpful to keep in mind the distinction Bergevin makes between "real" or "felt" needs. He maintains that the person often cannot tell the difference. An astute adult educator will help people to properly discover their real needs.³² Many aspects of pastoral care are here involved, including preaching and counseling. Since spiritual needs may seem remote to many, it is important for the pastor to help people to identify the root causes of many of their problems.

The writer's experience has borne out the thought that a greater number of people will come to a class in which spiritual studies are given practical application. A class on the problem of suffering, based on Job, will attract more people than a class which is simply advertised as a study of Job. Likewise, a class on I Corinthians can be a class on Christians struggling with the temptations of the world around them. (It is important not just to publicize the practical application but also to follow through.)

Edward Hayes insists that such "Bible" classes be Bible based. He bemoans the fact that in many mainline denominations the Bible has been relegated to the role of one "resource" among

³²Bergevin, Morris, and Smith, 30.

many. He writes: "Education that is Christian must be absorbed with Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, and with leading men to spiritual maturity through Him."³³

Leon McKenzie would not agree with him, stating that many of our classes are so "churchy" they only appeal to "churchy" people. He would say the vast majority of people are completely bewildered by "catechetical" language. He would suggest that the church identify needs and seek to offer classes which will address them, whether the classes are secular or sacred.³⁴

The writer's own sympathies would be with Hayes. While not disputing the value of the type of classes McKenzie suggests and not being against their being offered in a church setting on occasion, we, as a church, have to remember our primary mission. Most churches have only so many resources and these should be put to the greatest use. The Scriptures have great relevance to everyday living, and they can and need to be taught in that way. Victor Constien says it well:

Because the Gospel is the power of God and the Holy Scriptures convey that Gospel power by holding up Christ as the Author and Finisher of our faith, Bible study should be central in every program of Christian education.³⁵

Courses will want to make the "abundant life," of which Christ spoke (John 10:10), alive and clear for today. Many people believe that growing in their personal relationship with Christ is a most practical and desirable goal. Constien writes that man's yearning to know more about himself and his relationship to God, the world, and other people, as well as learning about the Holy Scriptures (where God reveals himself), is something which comes from within. While he

³³Zuck, 23-25.

³⁴Leon McKenzie, *The Religious Education of Adults* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1982), 82-83.

³⁵Victor A. Constien, "Adults are Learning (More than we think they are)," *Lutheran Education*, November 1972, 95.

does not specifically say it, he seems to be pointing to the work of the Holy Spirit in calling us to faith and also keeping us in that faith. Constien goes on to say that this curiosity (prompted by the Holy Spirit) can be stimulated by a presentation which creates uncertainty. The person will want to come to a class that will promise to provide some answers to these most important questions in his life.³⁶

Elias suggests that most people need, and are looking for, guidance as they enter and deal with new stages in their lives. Young adults are concerned about marriage, family, and getting established. Middle age adults begin to come to the painful awareness that they will eventually die. There is interest in such things as Marriage Encounter, the charismatic movement, prayer groups, Cursillo, and the like. Older adults will gradually be less involved in religious practices outside the home.³⁷

Wilbert has an extensive chart detailing needs and concerns of various age groups. These are some of the programs that he suggests for various stages of adult life:

LEAVING HOME (18-22)

1. Living alone
2. Career workshops
3. Consumer education

BECOMING ADULT (23-28)

1. Marriage workshops
2. Parenting workshops
3. Creative problem solving

CATCH-30 (29-34)

1. Marriage counseling
2. Values clarification
3. Parent-child relationships

³⁶Constien, 92.

³⁷Elias, 79-80.

MIDLIFE REEXAMINATION (35-43)

1. Mid-career workshops
2. Relating to aging parents
3. Stress management

RESTABILIZATION (44-55)

1. Human relations
2. Gerontology
3. Civic and social issues

PREPARATION FOR RETIREMENT (55-64)

1. Nutrition, health
2. Preretirement workshops
3. Creative problem solving

RETIREMENT (65+)

1. Death and dying
2. Aloneness and loneliness
3. Retirement³⁸

Obviously, many of these programs apply to more than one age group. Some, such as stress management, would apply to all, although the issues would be different. While these programs can all be looked at in a purely secular sense, I would hope that in the church setting, God's Word would bring some particularly helpful insights.

Axford makes an interesting observation that, while adults will learn independently about some subjects (such as home and family life) in other areas (such as public affairs or religion), they are not likely to learn unless involved in more formal instruction.³⁹ By offering several classes, the church is more likely to have subjects which will be seen as timely and relevant for people who are at different points in their walk through life.

2) Activity-oriented

For some people, the participants in the class are more important than the subject matter. Some will attend because they want someplace to go and want to meet other people. Knowles

³⁸Adapted from Wilbert, 88-89.

³⁹Axford, 74.

states that some begin classes at times when their personal problems and needs are most pressing.⁴⁰ Constien writes that people want to fit in: "Within everyone of us there is a built-in need, a desire and a capability for this kind of working together, this fitting into an operation."⁴¹ In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, once we have had our physiological and safety/security needs met, we need the love and affection which must come from other people.

Some classes will need to be geared particularly to those who need the nurture of their fellow Christians. But this need will be fulfilled in different ways for different people. Houle states that these are the people for whom the particular processes of learning are more important than the particular subject. But, while one might prefer to go to a discussion group because he is stimulated by vital interchange of opinion, another might go to a lecture because he likes to hear a particular subject outlined with authority, directness, and clarity.⁴²

Here the Indiana Plan of Paul Bergevin and John McKinley can be helpful in deciding what style will best relate to the needs of the group. They say, "Ask the people involved." They begin with the (humanistic) assumption that man is neither good nor bad and therefore the group will come up with the right answer.⁴³ Elias writes that such thinking has been influenced by Rogers and Maslow and has been popularized by Lyman Coleman and his Serendipity Bible studies.⁴⁴ While one will certainly not want to agree with all of the humanistic presuppositions

⁴⁰Knowles, 45.

⁴¹Constien, 96.

⁴²Houle, 7.

⁴³Bergevin and McKinley, 5-8. They also extend this humanistic thinking into the content of the course and would object to those who would seek to propagate "unalterable truths and indoctrination," 18, 27.

⁴⁴Elias, 170-71.

of some of these authors, it is an important reminder of the need many have for interaction as a part of their learning.

The time spent around the coffee pot before or after the class period should not be seen as wasted. For it is there that relationships are sometimes built and often nurtured. Occasionally, people will bring up questions or concerns to a friend during coffee time which they would be reluctant to verbalize before the entire class.

But there can also be dangers if the social interaction becomes more important than the class itself. Dick Murray, coming from a tradition in which Sunday School classes sometimes go on for years and years, writes, "The focus of the class is the class itself, not the subject that is being studied at a particular time."⁴⁵ Such a class can be very difficult for a newcomer to break into. This concern for people and how they relate to each other will certainly need to be a concern in all classes that are offered. Name tags of some sort may be a good idea, for all the members, not just the newcomers.

Westerhoff writes that learning is more than an assembly line of facts. It is experiencing, and doing, the Word.⁴⁶ This begins with the example of the instructor, even as Willbert speaks of "modeling faith."⁴⁷

While being concerned about taking this approach to its extreme in which all concern for inspired truth would be abandoned, we need to remember the value of group interaction. Adults know more than children and should be encouraged to share of themselves as a rich resource for the class.

⁴⁵Murray, 21.

⁴⁶John H. Westerhoff III, *Building God's People in a Materialistic Society* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 124.

⁴⁷Willbert, 125.

While people should be a concern in all of our classes, there will probably be a need for some classes which are a little "lighter" in content and have a greater emphasis on sharing. These might prepare people for some "meatier" offerings in the future.

3) Learning-oriented

Finally, there are some adults who are interested in learning for the sake of learning, although Bergevin says these are "few".⁴⁸ Knowles says that these people have been engaged in learning as long as they can remember.⁴⁹ These are often older people or people in professional classes.

For these people (God bless them), some more challenging classes need to be offered, or they are likely to become bored or frustrated with those who seem to be more concerned about visiting or their own practical concerns.

Perhaps there are even more people in this category than we would first surmise. Benson writes that the recent National Study on Christian Education indicated that only 46 percent of adults felt that their churches were challenging their thinking.⁵⁰ (Of course, that does not mean that all of these people would readily come to such a class.)

In these classes, as Milford Henkel remarks, "Real learning takes place when a person relates the new knowledge to what is already known. Thus, learning isn't the passive listening to facts or even reproduction of facts. These must be related to prior knowledge."⁵¹

Obviously, these three categories do not account for every reason for which people decide to participate in programs of adult education. For instance, some may come purely to please a

⁴⁸Bergevin, 123.

⁴⁹Knowles, 45.

⁵⁰Benson, 16.

⁵¹Zuck, 111.

spouse or another significant figure. But Houle maintains that the vast majority of people participate because they are either goal-oriented, activity-oriented, or learning-oriented--or a combination of these.⁵²

A Plan for Adult Education at Zion Lutheran Church

In this section, the general findings of the previous sections will be brought to bear upon a particular situation, the educational programs of Zion Lutheran Church in Albert Lea, Minnesota.

The setting

This congregation numbers approximately seven hundred baptized members, primarily "working class" of northern European backgrounds. Most of the older adult members grew up in rural Lutheran congregations in which it was assumed that you learned all you needed to know about your faith in Sunday School and confirmation. While there is a two-year technical college in the community, other opportunities for higher education are limited.

Past experiences

When the present pastor accepted the call to Zion in the Spring of 1979, he found a small lay-led class, averaging about twelve faithful members. The previous pastor did not teach an adult class on Sunday mornings, believing that all of his energy should be focused upon the two worship services. The congregation readily agreed to the new pastor's request to teach the adult class. He then taught the new class for about two months, until the summer break.

During the summer, plans were made for greater involvement of adults in the Sunday morning educational program. One class was offered, led by the pastor, in a much bigger space

⁵²Houle, 8.

with tables and coffee and "popular topics." A goal was set to involve one hundred adults, and while that was realized on occasion, the average for the year was in the fifty/sixty range.

An attempt was made to draw a balance between "relevant" topics and studies of Biblical books. Attendance was always greater for the former than the latter. Particularly popular were series on marriage, death and dying, other religions, various ethical issues, lodges, the end times, and the like.

After a couple of years of success with the one large class, an attempt was made to offer a variety of classes from which to choose. This was not successful, for most people had grown accustomed to the style and fellowship of the pastor's large class. It was decided that that is what worked best for the congregation.

New Ideas

And then the pastor went "back to school" in January 1991 and came up with many of the suggestions presented earlier in this chapter. What the congregation had grown accustomed to had some very glaring weaknesses.

The class had not grown, still averaging fifty/sixty, depending upon the topic and time of year. People could, and did, drop out of the class without really being missed. The size of the class inhibited certain people from freely expressing their opinions. And even those who were not afraid to speak up were sometimes reluctant to do so as often as they would have liked, desiring that everyone might have their turn. Questions would frequently be directed for table discussion, but this was difficult because of noise in the crowded church basement.

It was becoming increasingly difficult to come up with topics which had not been studied before by the class. Topics suggested by newer members had frequently been covered a few years before. Other topics were excluded because they would only be of interest to certain segments, such as the elderly, the married, those with children, and the like. The pastor, fresh "back from

school," started hinting that some changes might need to be made, realizing there is always resistance to changing the status quo.

A survey was taken of the class members as to their preferences. (This survey only polled those who were already attending the class, not those who were staying away for whatever reason.) The survey indicated that most preferred a mix of lecture and discussion. They preferred topics that related their faith to current issues (although about one-third indicated a preference for either doctrinal or "verse by verse" studies). Half preferred a class size of thirty-five or more, with the other half being divided between various smaller options. About forty percent preferred to personally share and discuss, while about the same number indicated they would just as soon listen to the others discuss. About twenty percent preferred to listen to only the teacher. Not surprisingly the majority view in each case supported what was already happening, but there was a significant minority that indicated they would prefer a smaller class and different types of topics.

At the same time, other adult educational opportunities were available. The congregation was participating in the *LifeLight* program which combined individual study, group discussion, and lecture in looking intensively at one Biblical book at a time. At least once or twice a year the pastor taught a class entitled "Basic Lutheranism" for prospective members and current members wanting to review the basic teachings of the church. There were frequent Bible studies sponsored and led by members of the Ladies' Society.

A committee is formed

With the approval of the Board of Education a committee was formed to make recommendations for the congregation's Sunday morning adult education needs. The committee consisted of three lay people, the congregation's Director of Christian Education, and the Pastor. They began to meet in the summer of 1991.

It was decided to conduct a telephone survey of the entire congregation, believing that this would reach a broader spectrum of members than those who were already attending Bible class or simply worshipping on Sunday morning. It was also believed that this would generate interest in what was happening. Those called were asked to indicate which of about twenty general types of classes they might attend on Sunday mornings. Virtually all indicated an openness to possibly attending. Not surprisingly, the largest number opted for "relevant" types of classes.

Of particular interest were the large numbers who indicated a desire for smaller classes, responding in this way:

53- 8-10 in a class

45- 11-15 in a class

33- 15-20 in a class

86- 21 or more in a class

While the largest number opted for the large size, sixty percent preferred a class of twenty or less, which was simply not offered on Sunday morning. It was decided to propose something new for the 1991-92 education year. A variety of classes would be offered each quarter. The pastor would lead one and the DCE another. (Previous to this the DCE had been leading the high school class each Sunday. He believed that a change would be good for him and the youth.) Three lay people would also be needed to teach each week.

It was thought that lay people might be more willing to teach if the class were smaller, in an area of interest to them, and of limited duration. A list was compiled by the committee of possible teachers. A letter was sent to each of them explaining the program and asking if they might be willing to teach at some point during the year. The letters were followed up by personal telephone calls. About half of the twenty-six who received letters were willing to give it a try.

"Two Hours in God's House"

The new program was publicized using the theme "Two Hours in God's House." This theme was used on banners, posters, the local newspaper, in the church bulletin, and newsletter, in preparation for the Rally Day kickoff. Classes were scheduled to coincide with the Sunday School quarter, so that those teachers who taught Sunday School for a quarter at a time could easily fit into new Bible classes when getting a break from teaching. It was decided to integrate the youth program with the adults, with the possibility that older high school youth could either take part in the high school class or one of the adult classes. Each week all the classes would meet for a common opening, in an effort to continue the large group excitement.

The Pastor would teach a class entitled "Lutherans at Worship," which was designed for prospective new members and those wanting to review the teachings of the church. It was also advertised as an experiment, not a final product. The class would be limited to eighteen for the sake of discussion (and also to prevent everyone from going to the same old class). The DCE would teach a class on "Success," and then one on "Friendships," geared towards "younger" adults. A lay person would take the high school class, considering the topics of peer pressure, parents, and decision making. A layperson would teach a class entitled "Habakkuk: God's Answers to Modern Problems." The final class was from the *Review/Renew* series, using the first two six-week studies: "A Word of Life" and "God of Life, God of Love." Two lay people were in charge of this class. Members were encouraged to pre-enroll so that plans might be made for proper classroom set up (and also that they might make a commitment).

Not surprisingly, the class designed to consider "relevant" topics, "Habakkuk: God's Answers to Modern Problems," had the largest enrollment. This was fine, in that it continued the tradition of the large fellowship-oriented class. However, it also quickly brought to the fore a problem that would plague the program all year--noise. Previously, the one large adult class used

the entire church basement. With the multiple class set up, the old sliding curtains were put back into use. They effectively blocked the classes from seeing each other, but not from being distracted by the noise of other people talking.

An evaluation determined that some of the classes were a bit too long. People were used to switching topics more often than every three months. This was a problem addressed in the next two quarters, which featured both longer and shorter classes, with more opportunity for people to start new classes. The schedule looked like this:

WINTER QUARTER

"Renewing the Family Spirit" (pastor) (Dec., Jan., Feb.)

"Augsburg for our Day" (lay person) (Dec., Jan., Feb.)

"Announcing the Advent" (DCE) (Dec.)

"Wellness: Caring for Your Total Health" (lay person) (Dec.)

"Hot Topics: School Struggles" (High School) (lay person) (Dec.)

"Miracles" (lay person) (Jan.)

"Facing Changes" (ages 50-70) (lay person) (Jan.)

"Sex: A Christian Perspective" (High School) (DCE) (Jan.)

"Parables" (DCE) (Feb.)

"Are we there Yet?" (70+) (lay person) (Feb.)

"Your Life as a Disciple" (High School) (lay person) (Feb.)

The class led by the pastor, "Renewing the Family Spirit," was geared toward families with young children. Special telephone invitations were given and several attended who had not come before. The class on the Augsburg Confession was geared towards those with a real desire to learn. It was capably taught by a lay person who really helped the participants to "dig in." The other classes offered new choices for people each month. The class for those 70+ did not have enough people and so was cancelled, which was bound to happen sooner or later. It was judged that the system was now starting to give the flexibility which was part of the goal.

Spring Quarter did not fit so nicely into month-long segments. There was one special class on Easter, since many "regulars" leave to visit their families. Consistent with Sunday

School, the classes would continue into early June. The quarter was divided into three terms: A (six weeks), B (four weeks), and C (four weeks).

SPRING QUARTER

"First Peter" (lay person) (A,B,C)

"World Religions" (lay person) (A)

"Lent" (DCE) (A)

"Holy Communion" (pastor) (A)

"Friends and Enemies" (High School) (lay person) (A)

"The Sandwich Generation" (lay person) (B)

"Teaching the Young Child About God" (lay person) (B)

"Infant Baptism" (DCE) (B)

"Teach the Pastor" (High School) (pastor) (B)

"Money" (DCE) (C)

"Life Issues" (lay person) (C)

"Reading the Scripture as Law and Gospel" (pastor) (C)

"Youth Hot Topics" (High School) (lay person) (C)

The course on First Peter was designed for those looking for a verse by verse study. The Pastor purposely taught two "heavy" doctrinal classes, in order to encourage more people to take the other classes. He also spent four weeks with the youth: a time for him to listen, share, and learn what was happening in their lives. That was not possible under the old system in which he was always with the adult class. One class, Lent, was not taught due to insufficient enrollment.

Evaluation

At the end of the year, evaluation forms were provided for the participants. These were also available in the narthex for anyone else who would like to offer comments. On the whole, people appreciated the wide variety of topics and smaller classes. Some missed being able to be taught by the pastor each week. Some did not attend because of that reason and also because of the noise factor. Some perceived that there had been fewer involved; actual statistics, however, revealed that attendance for the year was slightly higher than previous years.

The committee would have liked to have seen huge increases in attendance, but they also realized that it was a transition year and old habits and preferences are not easily changed. All in all, it was a good year and a foundation upon which to build for the future. Sixteen different lay teachers took part. Noise and space problems are still a challenge. The committee will follow the suggestion that occasionally a large group class should be offered. This will happen in January 1993 and will be taught by the pastor on a topic of widespread interest. But this will only be part of the total program, not a permanent pattern as had been the case.

CHAPTER FOUR

"CELEBRATING GOD'S GRACE"

As a part of the larger "Two Hours in God's House" program, a new class, "Celebrating God's Grace," was developed by the writer, with the express purpose of teaching the doctrine of the church as it relates to the worship of the church. The class was designed to provide a basis for confirmation for adult inquirers and a review for current members.

Developing "Celebrating God's Grace"

The need

The writer has used the same adult information course for six years in a row. While that makes it very easy to prepare for class, it can also lead to a certain "staleness." A new course can also encourage more present members to attend for review. Those most likely to come have, for the most part, already attended the previous class or the similar one that was taught before that.

An analysis of the classes taught each fall for the last six years indicated that the average class size had been nine (with a range of six to fifteen). These numbers have been fairly evenly split between non-members and members.

While the class sizes and mixes have been fairly satisfactory, the writer has been somewhat concerned about the long-term results. Of the twenty-eight non-members who participated in the classes, twenty-seven joined the congregation. At the present time, seven of these are regularly in worship, thirteen are somewhat regular, and seven are seldom or never there. Of this last category, several of these were sporadic in worship while they were attending the

class. Of these same twenty-seven, fourteen had spouses who were already members; the rest did not, including all those in the least active category. What is even more disturbing is that only three of the twenty-seven are now continuing to learn of their faith, either through teaching Sunday School or involvement in an adult class. It becomes evident that a stronger base must be laid for new members, beginning in the pre-membership class itself.

The goal

The intent is to offer a class which examines basic Lutheran teaching, taught in the context of the worshipping community, with the goal that the participants will be more likely to continue as active and growing members of that same community. It will combine instruction in Christian doctrine with a discussion of the meaning of the various parts of the worship service.

While the immediate inspiration for this came from Donald Deffner's *The Doctrine in the Liturgy*,¹ the concept is not new. In 1968, Robert Conrad mentioned "liturgical" as one of several possible organizing principles for an adult pre-membership class. Others mentioned were "systematic," "topical," "*Heilsgeschichte*," and "creedal." He referred to a survey which he did in 1963 of seven hundred seventeen LC-MS pastors, in which he asked, "If you were to organize your own course, which format would you follow?" The majority (fifty-eight percent) opted for organizing systematically around Luther's Small Catechism. A much smaller number (five percent) indicated they would organize their class around the order of worship.² Given our present circumstance, and the confusion we seem to have in our church today over where we are going in worship, this may be an idea whose time has come.

¹Donald L. Deffner, *The Doctrine in the Liturgy* (Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Seminary Press, 1988).

²Robert Conrad, "Principles for the Development of Adult Premembership Instruction," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 39(February 1968):78.

Motivated by studies concerning the relationship between worship and doctrine, the writer began to question if some of the confusion which the church seems to be experiencing in the field of worship might be due to an incorrect understanding of this relationship. A class which looks at the basic teaching of the church, as it is expressed in our worship customs, might lead people to a greater understanding and appreciation of worship, as well as reinforce the Biblical teachings.

Prototype one

With the permission of the Board of Elders and Board of Education, as part of the new "Two Hours In God's House" emphasis, the writer began to experiment with a few things in the Fall of 1991. He announced an experimental class, "Lutherans at Worship," which would be limited to eighteen brave "guinea pigs." There would be no limit to the number of non-members who could take the class. Partly because of the perception of this class being mainly for non-members, and perhaps a desire to wait for the "finished product," no one had to be turned away.

Nineteen took part, including four non-members. Average attendance was twelve. The class was hampered by some of the worst fall weather that Minnesota has ever seen and by the pastor's "flying by the seat of his pants." While there was some forethought as to the topics to be considered, it was hoped to tie the classes into what was happening in worship on that day. For instance, baptism would be considered when there was a baptism, communion when there would be communion, the Christian life on Stewardship Sunday, and so on. Due to the weather, that worked out better in theory than in actual practice. Somewhat to the leader's dismay and bewilderment, some non-members came only for the class and not for worship.

All in all, the evaluations were good (or kind). The people seemed to indicate they liked the concept of teaching doctrine in relationship to the worship of the church. Most helpful were the units on Holy Communion and Baptism. The pastor was far from satisfied.

Prototype two

The next "experiment" took place in the late Spring and Summer of 1992. This writer was not sure if he was yet ready for the next class, but there were some non-members wanting to take such a class. With the caution that they were still "guinea pigs," a new class was undertaken. Since Sunday morning was scheduled, this class would be on Thursday evening, following the Thursday night worship service. As expected, this was a smaller class. There was not a great effort to "push" this for present members. Four non-members took part. Two others started, but a change in work schedules prevented them from continuing. The pastor spent a good deal more time planning and preparing for this session. The sequence of units was established before the course began. However, the style of presentation was changed half-way through the course (this will be detailed later). Because of the small number involved, there was no written evaluation, but comments received were very positive, and the pastor also felt much more positive about what had happened and future possibilities.

Content of "Celebrating God's Grace"**The organizing principle**

The original plan was seemingly an easy one. The weekly order of service would suggest the topic for discussion. What happened in worship would highlight and reinforce what had been taught in class and vice-versa. This was the goal of the first prototype class. The class began on Rally Sunday. The congregation used a special Rally Day worship service based upon Ps. 119:104: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." The word of God became a natural subject for class that day. Baptism was studied on a Sunday when there was a baptism, Holy Communion on a Communion Sunday. Confession and Absolution were examined using

the form used on that Sunday. When it was time to study the life of Jesus, since the order of Matins was used on that day, Jesus' life was highlighted through examples from Matins.

While the plan had some merit, actual practice also revealed several shortcomings. Each week some in the class had been to early service, others were planning to attend the late service, while a few were not going to worship at all (extremely frustrating to the instructor). On October 31, 1991, the ice storm of the century hit southern Minnesota. Many were without power for several days. While utilities had been restored to the church by Saturday afternoon, attendance was poor for both worship and Bible classes on Sunday morning. It was no use trying to cover too much material, thus Holy Communion was basically delayed to the next Sunday (non-communion). An excellent discussion on the day of the ice storm Sunday reminded the instructor that he was trying to go too fast. Some questions needed to be addressed when they were asked, and people should not be reluctant to ask, for fear of slowing down the class. Also, Matins was probably not the best way to illustrate the life of Jesus.

Further study also convinced the writer that, while such an organizational principle may have merit for some groups, for a class which includes inquirers, the sequence of subjects should flow from the teaching of the church rather than from the worship practices. While the *lex orandi* is important, it must flow from the *lex credendi* and be subservient to it.

The instructor also gained a new appreciation for the six chief parts of the catechism as a way to organize basic Biblical teachings. For even though the six chief parts were somewhat mixed up in order, these were the topics that were covered in the class.

In preparing for the second prototype class, the instructor knew that he would have to give more thought to the basic outline of material. At the same time, it was becoming more and more clear to him that the greatest difference between Lutherans and other Christians was the strong emphasis which Lutherans place on the grace of God. Doing a Lenten series on Baptism and a

six-week Bible study on Holy Communion only served to reinforce this conclusion. Whereas those in the Roman Catholic church look upon the sacraments as things they can do to gain the grace of God, most Protestants look to the sacraments as ordinances, things we are commanded to do, to remind us of God's grace. While Roman Catholics tend to answer all questions through church tradition, and the Reformed would answer questions through "common sense," Lutherans are content to trust God to take care of those things which cannot be understood. This dependence upon the loving grace of God is manifested in the confession of sins, reading the Word, our view of death and the second coming, our prayer life--in addition to our view of the sacraments. However the course would be organized, this emphasis upon grace would have to come through again and again, not only for potential new members, but also for long-time Lutherans who may tend to be somewhat law-oriented. And it must be "caught" as well as "taught" from the Pastor and, one would hope, also from those long-time, faithful, gospel-centered Christians who will take the course as a review. Robert Conrad writes: "Despite what may be *said*, the members of the adult group will tend to become the kind of Christians that they observe others around them to *be*."³

Survey of materials

In preparing and teaching the second trial run, the instructor consulted several other courses of pre-membership instruction for inspiration and ideas. While the list is not meant to be exhaustive, its purpose is to give an idea of formats currently in use among Lutherans.

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (as offered by Concordia Publishing House)

Oesch, Norbert. *Invited by God: Basics of the Christian Faith* (Inquirers Guide and Leaders Guide). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990.

³Conrad, 74.

Riess, Oswald. *That I May Know Him: A Book of Instruction in the Christian Faith*. Detroit: By the author, 1970.

Riess, Oswald. *What Does the Bible Say? A Book of Instruction in the Christian Faith* (New International Version). Kiel, Wisconsin: By the author, 1985.

Rudnick, Milton. *Christianity Is For You: A Manual of Instruction in Christian Teaching and Worship for Those Who Are Considering Membership in the Lutheran Church*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961.

Starr, Frank. *Sharing the Christian Faith: A Guide for Adult Instruction for Church Membership*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985.

Strelan, D. T. *God for Us: An Introduction to Lutheran Teaching*. Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1988.

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (as offered by Northwestern Publishing House)

Bivens, Forest L., and David J. Valleskey. *New Life in Christ: A Bible Information Course on Basic Christian Doctrine and Christian Discipleship*. Milwaukee: Board for Parish Education, Wisconsin Evangelical Synod, 1986.

Diener, Robert. *The Basics of Christianity: An Adult Instruction Manual*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1987.

Westendorf, Rolfe F. *By Grace Alone: An Adult Instruction Manual*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (as offered by Augsburg Fortress)

Marshall, Robert J. *On Becoming A Church Member in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1988.

Marty, Martin E. *Invitation to Discipleship: Adult Inquirer's Manual*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986.

Independent Lutheran (not offered by the major denominational publishing houses)

Deffner, Donald L. *The Doctrine in the Liturgy*. Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1988.

Ginkel, Donald F. *I Have Good News For You*. Overland Park, Kansas: By the author.

Pless, John. *Catechesis and Liturgy*. Minneapolis: By the author.

Thiess, Herman C. *Life with God: A Manual for the Christian Instruction of Adults*. Seattle: Morse Press, 1961.

Thompson, William. *The Catechism in the Liturgy*. Liberty Center, Ohio: By the author.

A study of these reveals that several share the same concern for emphasizing the grace of God. Deffner writes that the "starting point should be justification by grace through faith in Christ--as God's mighty act in response to the existential need and condition of fallen humanity."⁴ Rolfe Westendorf writes that he is heavily indebted to Oswald Riess's *What Does the Bible Say*, but found in his evangelism that a much stronger emphasis needed to be placed upon the Gospel. He thus revised the Riess manual, but with "dominant and repeated emphasis given to the fact that we have eternal life because God's Son, Jesus Christ, suffered and died for our sins."⁵ He has a great title for his manual, *By Grace Alone*. When Riess himself published a shorter course, he entitled it *That I May Know Him* and wrote that this new course "from its very first sentence, begins with Christ--and stays with Him to the end."⁶ David Strelan emphasizes his focus upon grace with his title, *God For Us*.

Norbert Oesch says it well:

As we look at Scripture, one key doctrine dominates. Indeed, the story of humanity's salvation pivots around this doctrine. It is the core from which all other teachings grow. This pivotal teaching is God's grace in Jesus Christ. By *grace* we mean *God's surprising, forgiving, and undeserved love for people*.

Because God's grace is central to the Christian faith, this material departs from the traditional sequence of doctrinal teaching as found in Luther's Small Catechism. These lessons do not begin with the Ten Commandments, nor the doctrine of the Word. The lessons first focus on the gracious acts of God and

⁴Deffner, ii.

⁵Westendorf, 5.

⁶Riess, *That I Might Know Him*, 3.

help the learner come into growing relationship with Him. The focus moves to the Ten Commandments, Law/Gospel, and the Scriptures later.⁷

While some speak of the need for a greater initial emphasis upon the grace of God for the sake of the unchurched, anyone who has ever made a habit of asking the "Kennedy questions"⁸ of members of his own congregation would confirm that life-long Lutherans also need to be reminded of the grace of God again and again.

Others, while they would certainly agree that grace is central, seem to have different organizing principles for their material. The works by Marshall and Starr seem to place a greater emphasis upon making loyal members of the ELCA and LC-MS, respectively. The title of Ginkel's course, *I Have Good News for You*, reminds one of his strong emphasis upon evangelism. Diener seems to be very serious about systematically covering all of *The Basics of Christianity*. Riess, to the greatest degree in his first volume, wants to let people know *What the Bible Says*. Theiss also emphasizes grace, but focuses upon the abundant *life* we live as Christians. Marty does the best job of making inquirers feel at home with his winsome and inviting manual. John Pless, while looking at worship and doctrine together, obviously places a high value upon the catechism.

Use of Luther's Small Catechism

William Thompson, in a recent article decries the lessening use of Luther's Small Catechism in the church:

Luther's Small Catechism is no longer the basis of catechism in our church. Where it is in use, it is usually in either a manner which was never intended or in a form which makes it unrecognizable.

⁷Oesch (Inquirers Guide), 3.

⁸1) If you were to die tonight, are you sure you would go heaven, and 2) if you were to stand before God and he would say to you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" what would you say?

It is a characteristic of our age to believe we can constantly create something which is new and improved. . . . We are not good at heeding the admonition of the writer to the Hebrews to "honor our fathers in the faith."⁹

In Thompson's course, *The Catechism in the Liturgy*, he uses the order of service as an outline; however, he has written in a personal letter to the author, "I DO NOT use this material to replace the *Small and Large Catechisms*. Rather, I use it following a study strictly on the Catechisms." A survey of the materials offered suggests that Thompson's observance of the lessening use of the Catechisms is at least somewhat true, if one thinks in terms of the traditional catechism categories.

The writer, in preparing his course, sought to consult many other courses to see what material and techniques were used for certain chapters. While this was fairly easy to identify for topics such as Baptism and Holy Communion, in many of the courses it was difficult to identify where such topics as the Holy Spirit and Confession were covered. In some courses, the topics were there, but with cute titles. An example is Strelan in which the First Article is "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," the Second Article is "Amazing Grace," and the Third Article is "But How Do We Know?"¹⁰ Starr uses fairly traditional titles for his chapters, which makes it seem strange that he would then entitle his chapter on the Apostles' Creed "Person to Person."¹¹ While Oesch uses chapter titles that tie into his theme, he also lists the doctrinal content each chapter contains.¹² This is the pattern to be followed in "Celebrating God's Grace." For while systematic categories are nice and make it easy for the rare person who does a comparative study

⁹William E. Thompson, "Catechesis: The Quiet Crisis" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 56(April-July 1992)2-3: 100.

¹⁰Strelan, 4.

¹¹Starr, 3.

¹²Oesch, 2.

of various instructional materials, most people are going to be more interested in how what is being taught applies to their lives.

It was hardest to find the six chief parts in the two ELCA courses by Marshall and Marty, for they each have their materials sorted in very different ways. But, interestingly enough, once found, these two studies did more with the enchiridion than most of the other courses, many of which proudly claim in their introductions that the catechism is central, next to the Bible. Surprisingly, the three WELS studies seemed to make the least use of the catechism. "Celebrating God's Grace" will at times print out the relevant sections of the Small Catechism (at the appropriate place, rather than in an appendix), and will at other times refer to the catechism as printed in *Lutheran Worship*. This assists class members to learn that it is there, so that they might be able to refer to it in the future.

Use of the Scriptures

Donald Deffner, apparently referring to Oswald Riess's *What Does the Bible Say?*, states that the starting point is more Calvinistic than Lutheran, for it begins with the Scriptures rather than God's gracious act in Christ. He says the "impression is given that to become a member of the Lutheran Church the primary requisite is to assent noetically to various Biblical doctrines, among which we find Christ and his work."¹³ Franz Pieper is cited:

Our missionaries in heathen countries, our home missionaries, and our institutional workers do not therefore begin with rational arguments for the divinity of Holy Scripture, but they preach to "one and all" ("*in den Haufen hinein*") repentance and remission of sins. And when faith in *Christum "crucifixum"* has once been created, there is no worry about securing faith in the divinity of Holy Scripture.¹⁴

¹³Deffner, i.

¹⁴Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I:313.

Riess, in his newer study, *That I May Know Him*, keeps the same "What does the Bible say?" format, but begins with a session on Christ and the Bible. A survey of other materials reveals that Diener begins with the inspiration of Scripture in his very first chapter; Rudnick, Theiss, and Ginkel in their second. At the other extreme, Martin Marty seems to go out of his way to seek to refute the "modern" doctrine of inerrancy.¹⁵

In "Celebrating God's Grace" it is made clear at the beginning that the Bible is the prime textbook, for the course is taught mainly to Christians. However, a more detailed look at the Scriptures and inerrancy does not happen until chapter six, in the context of the work of the Holy Spirit. Emphasis is placed upon what the Word says rather than upon defending the Word. Luther believed that the Word is self-authenticating; it does not depend upon us to defend it.

Place of the Ten Commandments

If too much emphasis is placed upon the Ten Commandments, they can be seen as "ten steps to heaven" and work against the proper goal of lifting up the grace of God. But neither are the commandments to be abandoned, for they lead to the Gospel.

Luther modified the medieval sequence, which was 1) Creed, 2) Lord's Prayer, 3) Ten Commandments, and 4) *Ave Maria*. He dismissed the fourth and reordered the others as 1) Ten Commandments, 2) Creed, and 3) Lord's Prayer. To these he appended Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar. Luther believed that man must first know what he should or should not do, and then when he feels the weight of the Law he will eagerly hear the Gospel message. Thompson maintains that, when the Law of God is taken up after a discussion of the sacraments,

¹⁵Marty, 41.

the implication is that the primary use of the Law is not to accuse the sinner but to direct his life.¹⁶

The challenge seems to lie in the reality that there is more than one use of the Law. "Celebrating God's Grace" seeks to recognize this by looking at the Ten Commandments in two different places. In the first chapter, they are used as a curb and a mirror, with particular emphasis upon the latter. Later, in the ninth chapter on "The Christian Life," they are reintroduced as a friend for forgiven sinners, giving us guidance as we seek to lead a life pleasing to God and fulfilling for ourselves.

Relationship to worship

About half the courses which were examined included virtually nothing on the worship practices of the Lutheran church. A few others relegated worship and/or the church year to an appendix. In the writer's opinion, this is unfortunate, since this is something people from other denominations are particularly interested in and often have questions on. While the Concordia Publishing House catalog advertises Rudnick's book as teaching about Lutheran doctrine and worship, the interrelationship of the two seems to be limited to the printing of a hymn at the end of one chapter and the Nicene Creed after another. He does have three good chapters (of twenty-two) on various aspects of worship. Both Starr and Theiss also have excellent chapters on worship. Marty, Marshall, Deffner, and Pless use worship practices as illustrative of the teachings being presented. It is this last practice which is a central part of "Celebrating God's Grace." While it was not the original intention to have a separate chapter on corporate worship, it turned out best that way. However, this chapter is less integral to the course than the worship materials which are used for illustrative purposes throughout.

¹⁶Thompson, "Catechesis: The Quiet Crisis," 109.

Other subjects sometimes considered

Anyone preparing a premembership course is certainly faced with the frustration of not being able to include everything he would like. There is only so much time (whether it be six or twenty-four sessions). Other things included in certain courses are Bible history, early church history, Reformation background, the development of various Lutheran denominations, some information about the organization and program of the national denomination, the history and mission of the particular congregation, and opportunities to serve within the congregation. These are all good things, but no survey course can do them all. "Celebrating God's Grace" sticks to church teachings, as illustrated by worship practices, for the body of the course. Some of these other things are offered in an appendix, for those who are interested.

Progression

As might be expected, there is a wide variation among the various courses. The most common order would seem to be something like this: natural knowledge of God, who the Bible reveals God to be (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), prayer, the sacraments, the life we live in response to God's grace. Marty's book is unique in that it begins with the seemingly simple desire to help all the class members feel at home. While the book is somewhat weak doctrinally, it will probably be fairly well received because of its warm and friendly approach.

"Celebrating God's Grace" begins with a welcome, which also serves as the introduction. The welcome seeks to set people at ease, giving them the feeling that they are in the right place. The textbooks are introduced, and the basic theme of grace is lifted up.

The first section looks at man's guilt and God's grace, through the means of confession and absolution. This is a good place to begin, because here is Law and Gospel at work in a plain and simple way. Beginning with the first use of the Law, we see the demands which society places upon individuals through parents, rulers, neighbors, spouses, children, and sometimes even

our own consciences. Guilt, whether true or false, is something everyone can identify with. The Ten Commandments are then used in the second sense to show that we are indeed guilty before God, but we are quickly reminded that we have the assurance of forgiveness for Jesus' sake. Confession and absolution come at the very beginning of the liturgy and provide opportunity to illustrate how we practice what we preach.

The second section looks at the "grace-full God" we worship. Much of what is taught here is similar to other denominations. Good! One does not want to alienate prospective members by giving them the impression that this Lutheran teaching is different from everything they have ever learned. But at the same time, the emphasis is on the grace of God all the way through. By grace God created us and sent his Son into the world to redeem us. By grace Jesus died on the cross for us. It is even by grace that we believe, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The next section looks at how we receive this grace, how the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. Here we give thanks for the gift of the Scriptures, rather than having to defend them. We see that we are brought to faith through God's promise in Baptism and strengthened and sustained through the words of Christ together with his body and blood in Holy Communion. All of this is in the context of God's work--what he graciously does in our lives.

Only after spending several weeks looking at the tremendous grace of God, does the class consider man's response. This follows the pattern of the book of Romans, which does not say until 12:1: "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer . . ." Here the emphasis is upon the fact that this is only a response to God's grace, not a way in which we earn or obtain it. First, we are reminded that all of life is worship. We are different in who we are and in what we say and do, because we know the grace of God. We come together to worship, not because we must, or because we ought, but to receive God's gifts (another reminder of grace); and simply to say thanks. Prayer is presented as the most basic form of worship, a privilege we

have because of the grace of God. While all of the parts of the course are important, if time is running short, it would be better to shorten these chapters, rather than the earlier chapters which focus upon God's grace.

The course concludes with a reminder that God's grace continues forever. As grace-oriented Christians, we do not spend a great deal of time worrying about all the details of death, the second coming, judgment day, or heaven, for by the grace of God we know where we are going and can confidently leave the specific arrangements to God. This is a final way of showing what it means to live by the grace of God.

The title

"Celebrating God's Grace" was not the original title envisioned for this course, nor did it come easily. The writer had previously dubbed such pre-membership courses "Basic Lutheranism" (the basic doctrines of the Bible as confessed by the Lutheran church). He was somewhat surprised to see that most of the courses surveyed, at least in their sub-titles, in effect said that they were teaching "Basic Christianity." While also believing that what Lutherans believe is true Christianity, one would assume that Baptists, Methodists, Roman Catholics and all the rest would argue the same for their faiths.

As this new course was being developed it was labeled "Lutherans at Worship," for this seemed to be what it was going to be all about. However, about half-way through the second trial run, the writer realized that a new title would be in order. Part of the reason concerned the directions the course had taken. There would be a much greater emphasis upon grace than originally envisioned. The course was not primarily on worship as the original title might have implied. The teachings of the Scripture would be central, with grace as the organizing principle. Worship practices would be used to illustrate this primary teaching.

The second reason for a change in title was one of strategy. The writer wanted to introduce this as a new course in the Fall of 1992. Indeed, it would be considerably different than either of the practice groups. But how would people be convinced of that if it had the same name as a course they had been seeing in the bulletin for the last year?

"Grace" would have to be part of the course title, perhaps also something suggesting the worship setting. "Living by Grace" placed the focus upon man's response. "Here's Grace" seemed a bit corny. "God's Amazing Grace" and "Celebrating God's Grace" were the two finalists. The first was a bit more memorable, but would perhaps be too tied to the (Methodist) hymn. The second used an active verb suggesting our joyful and worshipful response to God's grace. The writer asked his church council members which of two courses they would be more likely to attend: 1)"God's Amazing Grace," or 2) "Celebrating God's Grace." "Celebrating God's Grace" got the majority and so it is!

Educational strategy in "Celebrating God's Grace"

The target audience

The assumption is here being made, based on past experience, that most non-members taking this class are from that group that normally "will not" take part in adult educational programs. They are in the pre-membership class because it is a requirement for membership. In that way, it is compared to junior confirmation, something you "graduate" from. If people tend to live up to those expectations which are set when they join the congregation, this would seem be an excellent time to raise those expectations. By making the worship service an integral part of the class itself, it is hoped that new members will not only begin to worship regularly, but also to see that the church assumes they will do so.

The class normally includes those church members who are taking the class as a review. In some respects, they are quite different from many of the non-member participants. These are people who want to learn. They are people who believe that doctrine is relevant to life. While having two different groups in the class can be a challenge in some ways, this can also be used to advantage. These active, learning-oriented, church members are a good influence upon the prospective new members. They also provide a bridge to the active church community.

Since the participants have chosen to come to the class because of the subject matter, not because of the format of the class, there will be a variety of personalities. Some would prefer to sit and listen, while others would rather discuss the whole time. There will need to be some of each, but great care must be taken not to put more timid members "on the spot."

Robert Conrad maintains that since one cannot assume that those (non-members) in the class are Christians, one must start with the assumption that they are not.¹⁷ The writer has found that the vast majority of those in classes he has taught are at least nominally Christians. Southern Minnesota is one of the most "churched" areas of the nation. However, most (including members) have a very weak appreciation of the grace of God.

Since this class is geared for adults, it is assumed that the members will be at least out of high school. Experience has shown that most non-members taking such a class have been in their twenties or thirties. There has been an occasional high school student, who for one reason or another was not confirmed at the traditional time. This is not the ideal situation, for there is generally a "generation gap" between such a person and other members of the class. Ideally there should be a separate class for those in this age group, although that is not necessarily realistic.

¹⁷Conrad, 68.

Number of sessions

Oswald Riess writes in the foreword to the Instructor's Manual for *What Does the Bible*

Say?:

Under ordinary circumstances there is no justification whatsoever for short courses. Realizing the tremendous importance of being firmly grounded in the saving faith, the conscientious Lutheran minister will earnestly desire to impart, and the sincere class member will be just as eager to receive, not a minimum but a maximum of instruction in the Word of God.¹⁸

While one could hardly argue with that notable goal, actual experience seems to indicate something much less consistent. While *What Does the Bible Say?* contains twenty-four lessons, in 1970 Riess published *That I May Know Him* which had only fourteen. While he certainly preferred the longer time, he published the new course because "brethren in the ministry have been asking for a somewhat shorter course."¹⁹ The courses examined showed a wide divergence in number of sessions suggested, ranging from six to twenty-four. Even this is deceptive because some are designed for sixty minutes, others for ninety, and others are certainly only a convenient way of dividing the material, leaving the actual number of sessions up to the pastor. More recently published courses generally have fewer sessions than those that have been available for several years. On the whole, the Wisconsin Synod materials called for a longer commitment, with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America materials requiring the least. This is a trend that seems to be consistent with the author's observations. Not just ELCA congregations, but many "mega-churches" and those heavily into "church growth" seek to make it as easy as possible for members to join. Sometimes the three or four sessions are little more than an orientation to the

¹⁸Oswald Riess, *Instructor's Manual for What Does the Bible Say?* Fourth and Revised Edition, forward.

¹⁹Riess, *That I Might Know Him*, 3.

local congregation. While such a practice may lead to numerical growth, one wonders what kind of theological base "Lutherans" will have in the future.

"Celebrating God's Grace" is not designed for a definite number of sessions. It could be taught in as few as ten or as many as an entire year. The more the better. Its five sections and twelve chapters are just how the material naturally seemed to break. Such divisions are helpful in making reading assignments, but they do not necessarily correspond to class sessions. Some of the chapters are much longer than others (such as "Confession and Absolution" and "We Worship God the Son") and will take more time. To seek to divide the material into neat, equal packages can lead to some strange divisions. An example is Oesch's course in which God the Father and half of God the Son are covered in chapter two, and then the latter half of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are covered in chapter three.²⁰

While such flexibility may not be desirable for all such courses, it seems to fit the writer's style and circumstance. He would rather spend the time necessary on individual units, rather than feel compelled to begin and end a unit in a certain day. This course will also be taught in different settings. The first prototype had twelve one-hour sessions on Sunday morning (too short); the second had ten ninety-minute sessions on Thursday evenings. The first real class was taught on fifteen Sunday mornings. There will likely be similar variations in the future. The goal of having more sessions always has to be balanced with other demands upon the time of the pastor and participants. A given seems to be that there is never enough time.

Timing of the class

In spite of growing competition from camping, weekend sports tournaments, work schedules, and the like, Sunday morning is still the time with the greatest possible constituency. In

²⁰Oesch, 10-17.

addition to this, it seems to be extremely important that the class be integrally tied to the worship experience. This also gives opportunity for the class members to continue in another class as soon as this one has concluded.

Because there are some who "cannot" attend on Sunday morning, it is also desirable to have a week-night option. This gives Sunday School teachers an opportunity to attend. For the sake of the worship experience, this can be tied into the Thursday evening worship service.

Teaching Style

In the first trial in the fall of 1991, the instructor used the style that he is most comfortable with. He gathered the material and shared it with class, inviting (and receiving) discussion along the way. There were a few handouts and some use of a writing board. At that time the new explanation of Luther's Small Catechism had just been published. The instructor sought to use that resource as part of the class, but, after a few weeks, discovered that there simply was not time to adequately use that book along with other material. Since the class realized that the instructor was rushing to get through the material, discussion was stifled. The best discussion came the week of the big ice storm, when there was no rush to move forward because most of the class was absent.

The second trial took place in the spring and summer of 1992. The instructor composed a teacher's manual for himself and an outline for the class members. This was an attempt to emulate the style in Norbert Oesch's course, in which class members take notes as an aid to the learning process. In spite of encouragement, the members of this class never took to that. This fact was really brought home when one purposely left her (blank) outline on the table so that she would not lose it before the next session. Also, following Oesch, the class members were asked to look up many Bible passages. While this was good, it contributed to the instructor's frustration in being able to cover only a small portion of the material he had compiled. He realized that,

while this type of presentation may be best for Oesch and many others, it did not fit his own strengths, which were in the area of promoting and facilitating class discussion. After having consulted the class members, the instructor changed styles in the middle of the course. He printed his notes for the class members, so that they might read the appropriate material during the previous week. (This eventually became the manual.) This took away the pressure of having to cover all the materials during class. The major points were highlighted and some Scripture readings were looked up. This left much more time for spontaneous discussion and even for many of the discussion questions at the end of each unit.

Assignments

The material surveyed provide a wide variety of possible "homework" assignments. It seems to make sense that a narrative style manual would need to be read before the class session. However, the book by Starr also includes many discussion questions within the text, seemingly assuming that the material is being read together (there would never be time). Milton Rudnick writes that his material was written in short sentences with the thought that it would be read aloud in class.²¹ One wonders if that is the best educational strategy for adults who are certainly capable of reading the material for themselves. The writer had better experience with participants reading ahead when he used the Theiss series than when he used the course by Ginkel. One wonders if the style makes a difference. Theiss's book is completely narrative, whereas Ginkel's is written more in a catechetical question and answer style. The latter would seem to be much easier (it is certainly shorter), but perhaps it was also perceived as being less important.

One wonders if these manuals, with their worksheets, "quickie quizzes," and memory assignments, are not more influenced by a pedagogical rather than androgogical way of thinking.

²¹Rudnick, vii.

Since these are adults who are voluntarily taking the course, one has to give assignments by way of encouragement, not as a requirement.

Those taking the first "Lutherans at Worship" class were not asked to do any outside reading. (The instructor had not yet prepared any.) Similarly, those in the second class were not given any reading assignments, until the format was changed halfway through, and then the assignments were given with their permission. (To have changed the rules without their permission would have been grossly unfair.)

"Celebrating God's Grace" encourages participants to do these things: 1) read the suggested material, so that more class time might be devoted to questions and discussion, 2) jot down any notes and/or questions in the wide margins provided for that purpose, 3) ask questions at any time, and 4) worship, paying attention to how what is studied is applied in the service. All of these things are presented as aids which will help the participants to get the most out of the class.

If one expects the class members to do outside reading, it should be as pleasant and meaningful as possible. The writer sought to keep the material fairly simple, with plenty of sub-headings, and bold print signaling the most important points. While the writer was initially concerned to put all of the material in neat outline form, he determined that to be of little importance to the average person. Diagrams, charts, and pictures are more important. The manual should be so attractive that people would want to keep it. For this reason, the lessons are collated and distributed together, rather than as a series of handouts. While the wide margins were originally included so that the writer might be able to see all of the text on his computer screen at once, it was decided to keep that format, with the suggestion that notes and questions be jotted down as part of the reading and class discussion.

Teaching techniques

Most educators would seem to agree that inductive learning is usually more desirable than deductive. However, in a class of this nature some of the teaching must be done in a deductive way, for the instructor has promised to share what Lutheran Christians believe. As much of this as possible is done by directing the class members to the Scriptures and letting them see what the Scriptures have to say. Nothing is more rewarding to the instructor than the "aha" experience of a class member saying, "Wow, this eternal life really is free!"

As mentioned above, the instructor's natural style is one of presenting the material with questions and discussion along the way. (He hates straight lecture.) If the presentation has not generated enough discussion, the discussion questions always seem to. Questions have been purposely chosen that can either be true or false, depending upon how one reads the question. When one explains this, class members are more likely to go out on a limb and agree or disagree with the statement. When one hears some off-base reasoning, one must be careful not to come out and say, "You are wrong," but carefully and lovingly explain another way to look at it.

Over the years the writer has learned a great deal about other denominations from listening to people who have grown up in them. By letting people know that and consulting them about certain Baptist, Catholic, or Methodist practices, they can realize that they are important contributors to the class.

The assumption is made that some dedicated "learning oriented" individuals will take the time at home to look up and read the Bible passages, but that most will not. For that reason, the most crucial passages are printed out as part of the narrative. Others are looked up in class. Volunteers are solicited to read, making it clear that no one should ever feel that he or she must read in class. One Bible version is used in the class. This makes it easier, and less embarrassing,

for those who are not used to looking things up in the Bible. The first one to find it calls out the page number.

Some catechism references are also printed out. At other times the student is directed to pages 300-307 of *Lutheran Worship*, for the author hopes that class members will consult this catechism in the future. At such times they may not remember where their class manual is or where a pocket catechism was left, but they will likely have access to a hymnal, at least on Sunday morning.

The instructor makes extensive use of overhead transparencies for diagrams, outlines, sections of Scripture and the liturgy. At other times visual aids are used, such as the baptismal candle or the Greek New Testament. At times the class takes a "field trip" to the sanctuary to look at the symbols, the altar, the cross, the font, and so many other things which remind us of our faith.

What is studied is also related to the worship that day, as appropriate, whether it be a Baptism, the Communion liturgy, a special prayer, or even a special stewardship theme. This is the immediate practical application. It is also a great stimulus for discussion.

Whatever the specific technique, the approach must always be positive and winsome. One does not win friends for the Lutheran church by effectively tearing down others. The battle could be won, even as the war is lost, as a class member might be led to defend the church of his or her youth. For this reason, most of the specific references to comparative teachings and practices of other denominations were excluded after the initial draft of the manual. Some comparisons cannot be avoided in a class of this type, and more will come from questions and discussion. Lutherans have something very good to celebrate, the grace of God, and this should be the focus of our teaching.

Leader's Guide

Since the manual is in narrative form, the leader's guide is fairly simple. It calls attention to the most significant objectives that need to be stressed in class. It offers suggestions for techniques that can be used for the specific topic. Any special resources which will be helpful are listed. Pertinent collects and hymns are suggested for opening and closing devotions.

Goals and Objectives

"Celebrating God's Grace" seeks to provide an answer to this question: "How can we help potential new members and interested current members grow in their knowledge of, and appreciation for, Lutheran doctrine and worship?" The overall purpose of the class can be expressed in the following goals and objectives:

Goal--That the participants will come to a better understanding of the relationship between the doctrine and the worship of the Lutheran Church.

Objective--Participants will be introduced to the six chief parts of doctrine as outlined in Luther's Small Catechism.

Objective--Each of the major parts of the liturgy will be explained.

Objective--Participants will come to understand that the liturgy of the church proceeds from its doctrine, which proceeds from the Bible.

Objective--Participants will be able to tell which differences in worship practices are a matter of adiaphora and which stem from true differences in belief.

Goal--That the participants will want to continue as active learners and worshipers in the church.

Objective--That each participant will want to continue as a regular worshiper.

Objective--That each participant will want to continue in adult Christian education classes.

Objective--That participants will be open to various styles of worship which are consistent with their faith.

Objective--That participants will voluntarily tell others about the class and encourage them to participate.

Goal--That participants will become active members of the Christian congregation.

Objective--That all participants will be regularly worshipping during the period when the class is being taught.

Objective--That all participants will be in worship at least sixty percent of Sundays, one year after the class.

Objective--That seventy-five percent of the participants will be pre-enrolled in another class by the conclusion of this class.

Objective--Within five years, at least fifty percent of the adult membership of the congregation will have taken this class.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTION

Teaching the Class—Fall 1992

The setting

"Celebrating God's Grace" was first offered to the congregation as part of the Sunday morning education hour from September until December 1992. While "Lutherans At Worship" had been offered twice before, in both instances it had been described as an unfinished experiment. The class had not only a new name, but a new focus and style.

The class was not in perfect form. The manuals were assembled a few days before the class began and contained numerous typographical errors. However, the writer believed that it was more important for participants to have the whole manual at the beginning of the session than to wait until the manual was in better form. (And further reflection shows that neither the class nor manual will ever be in final form.) It was time to begin.

The class took place from 9:15 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. on Sunday mornings, beginning on Rally Day, September 13, and continuing for fifteen sessions, until December 27. (One Sunday all classes were suspended for a special mission festival.)

Six non-members took part (one couple had to drop out because of change in work schedules), and the rest were members, mostly "Bible class veterans."

Class members were asked to read ahead, although a specific schedule was not passed out until the third week. It was planned to spend two weeks on the chapter, "God the Son," and three

weeks studying Baptism and Holy Communion. The unit on the sacraments actually took four weeks, and therefore the chapter on corporate worship was covered only briefly.

The class had been advertized as being limited to twenty-five participants. (Two other adult classes were also being offered.) Since not everyone would be in attendance on any given Sunday, it was thought that this would lead to a weekly class size of fifteen to twenty--large enough to stimulate discussion, but not so large as to discourage newer people from asking questions. The instructor was not able to keep the class to this size. Several reasons led to this failure. Advance sign-ups indicated that one of the other adult classes ("Christian Lifestyles") would have about the same number. To limit the pastor's class too legalistically would only increase the numbers in the "Christian Lifestyles" class and would hamper discussion or simply discourage people from attending any class at all. Also, the pastor did not have a good handle on how many were in the class. Thirty (a manageable number) were present the first Sunday, but this did not include some who had signed up in advance. There were twenty-eight the next week, but these were not all the same people. As had been previous practice, a blank sheet of paper was passed around for people to sign as an attendance record. A roster, upon which people could have checked off their names, would have given a better idea of how many were participating. While doing lip service to the limited number, the pastor had a difficult time firmly saying "no more." Perhaps it was an "ego" problem; it is nice to have a large class. New folks kept joining for the next several weeks, but the pastor had no idea how many had joined until he did an attendance analysis in December. He then discovered that forty-eight people had participated at least once!

The situation was not quite as horrendous as it first sounds, for the total number included eight individuals who dropped in once or twice. One couple soon dropped out due to an extended hospitalization. Another couple could not continue because of a new job which required Sunday work. Six "snow-birds" started but left with the annual migration to warmer climates. Thirty-five

people were actually involved from start to finish. Average attendance was twenty-seven, with a low of twenty-two and a high of thirty-three. (This does not include the final session, Christmas weekend, in which there were only thirteen.)

The instructor discovered that by conducting the class on Sunday morning it is possible to reach more people, but, in our mobile society attendance may be a bit more sporadic than at another time, such as a weekday evening. While the course is not meant for "drop-ins," the instructor (even with the benefit of hindsight) would still be reluctant to turn them away, hoping that they might get a taste for a more consistent participation in the future. The answer seems to be to set a somewhat lower maximum, but to still be somewhat flexible (and evangelical) in applying it.

Adjustments en route

There was not as much discussion, nor as many questions, as the instructor would have liked. Several things contributed to this. There was a huge amount of material to be covered in fifteen weeks. The class sensed that the instructor was always behind. It helped when the instructor decided that he had to trust people to do the reading at home and to cover only a few of the most significant points in class. The size of the class was a deterrent which kept some new people from asking questions. It will be smaller next time. A question box was added towards the end of each period, in which people could place written questions that they had not been able to ask in class.

Evaluation

A simple evaluation instrument was distributed to all participants, in which they were asked to rate each of the five sections of the course on a ten point scale, in terms of how memorable and helpful each was. The results were as follows:

I.	Man's Guilt and God's Grace	8.25
II.	The Grace-full God We Worship	8.67
III.	The Means of God's Grace	8.91
IV.	Living By Grace	8.50
V.	God's Grace Forever	8.30

Of interest is the remarkable similarity of the cumulative responses, although all of the participants, including the instructor, thought some sections were more helpful than others.

Participants were also asked to respond to the question, "What do you think of the general concept of teaching the doctrine of the church in relationship to worship?" On the same ten point scale, the average response was 8.30. The next question was "How helpful has this course been in helping you to understand and appreciate our worship services?" The response was 9.00.

The evaluation also included open-ended questions, asking for ideas for improvement and to list topics which they would like to see pursued in greater depth in the future. There was not much response to either question. They were also asked to indicate what they thought would be the ideal size for future classes, to best facilitate discussion. Most indicated twenty or twenty-five. The instructor would opt for a slightly smaller number.

With some fear and trepidation, the instructor also queried as to how many had actually read the material in advance of the class and how much time it took them. (He had not told them ahead of time that they would ever be asked--and of course this was done anonymously.) The typical response was that they had read the lesson about half the time and had spent about thirty minutes doing so.

The instructor's subjective feelings about the course were somewhat mixed. Such a course is never going to have the interest and excitement of a "practical" course (such as marriage, family issues, or life-styles) or one on some "relevant" social issue (such as gambling, "The Christian and

War," or "Women in the Church"), and those who are mostly interested in such courses are going to be disappointed. At times the instructor was frustrated with the "survey" nature of the course. He had spent six weeks with some of the same people on the topic of Holy Communion just the previous Spring. There was quite a mix of backgrounds among participants. For some the material was far too easy, and for others, a bit over their heads.

Future Plans

"Celebrating God's Grace" will next be taught on Sunday mornings during the Spring Quarter, March-June 1993. It will be limited to twenty participants (which can be stretched a bit, but not as much as in Fall 1992). The instructor, trusting the participants to read the rest of the material on their own, will be careful from the outset to pick which are the most important points to highlight in class. This should give more time for questions and discussion during class. Some materials have already been transferred to different chapters. New ways will be sought to show how all of the units relate to the grace of God. Perhaps some kind of permanent poster or wall chart could be designed.

Future offerings will depend upon the advice of the Adult Education Committee. One thought is to teach the class once a year on Sunday mornings and another time on a weekday evening, so that Sunday School teachers might attend. It is not good to make prospective members wait too long for a class to start.

Other Possible Applications

Junior confirmands need to learn more about worship than a brief session on the third commandment can provide. The writer has begun the custom of requiring "worship" reports rather than "sermon" reports, with the assumption that what we do on Sunday morning involves more

than just listening to the sermon. Also with junior confirmands, one can continuously illustrate how the doctrine of the catechism is beautifully expressed in the liturgy of the church.

As explained in chapter three, some adults will not come to any Bible class. Why not recognize the power of the service itself to instruct? While this is not the primary purpose of worship, it certainly does happen. If the sermon refers to baptism, confession, communion, or whatever, why not use the corresponding section of the liturgy as an illustration? On some occasions, a certain part of the worship service could be explained and highlighted. Here caution would need to be taken not to "intrude" upon the integrity of the service.

What worship goes on in other classes or meetings of the church? Do we pray? Do we sing hymns? Or do we give the impression that what we do on Sunday morning is separate from the "real work" of the church? We may not mean to give that impression, but, unless we do more intentional work of integrating worship and theology, they may remain separate in the eyes of many people.

Benefits of the Project to the Writer

The writer had never considered systematic theology to be his strong suit and had not intended it to be the major component of this project, which it turned out to be. Perhaps for that reason, it was a struggle; but it was also a tremendous learning experience to be forced to put together the basic teachings of the church in a systematic way. The organizing principle did not turn out to be that original, nor was the material new, but it was not printed without a great deal of thought given to it.

This project also forced the Pastor, DCE, and congregation to rethink their concept of adult education. While the writer had always enjoyed teaching adult classes, the project forced him to leave what had become a "comfortable rut." "Celebrating God's Grace" will not continue

to be taught for years and years (it would only become stale), but the writer is at least in a better position to develop future offerings.

While this project concentrated mainly upon the formation of worship practices in the past, it has even greater relevance for the future. The writer is neither traditionalist, high church, nor contemporary when it comes to worship style. Neither is he particularly creative. But as a result of this study, he is much better able to be discriminating as he picks and chooses among the massive amounts of material that are offered as "creative" worship today. Worship, whatever its style, must be consistent with and flow from Biblical doctrine. In turn, it will reinforce that same sound doctrine.

Perhaps most importantly, the central role of "grace" in our life and theology was affirmed for the writer. It caused the name of the course to be changed. It was wonderful to see how every chapter so beautifully related to the grace of God. What a joy it is to have class members have that "aha" experience, as they see that our entire life is simply a response to the amazing grace of God.

APPENDIX ONE

LEADER'S GUIDE

LEADER'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

CENTRAL FOCUS

God's grace is at the center of everything we believe and practice as Lutherans.

OBJECTIVES

The participants will feel welcome and will be pleased that they decided to attend this class.

A preview of the material to be covered will create a sense of anticipation.

The participants will be enthusiastic enough to begin reading ahead.

The participants will begin to see the central role of grace in Lutheran practice and teaching.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles for all

Copies of *Lutheran Worship* for all

The Book of Concord

One or more volumes of *Luther's Works*

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The instructor seeks to make the people feel welcome and may give an overview of the process of development of the class. Manuals are handed out. Since it is assumed

that the class members have not read ahead, the instructor follows the content of the manual fairly closely.

After the section on "grace," the table of contents can be used to preview the material to be covered and to point out that everything will be tied into the grace of God.

Various books (*The Book of Concord, Luther's Works*, catechisms) are shown and passed around, so that the people might become somewhat familiar with these. At the same time, it must be stressed that the Bible is the primary resource.

In making the "requests" of the class members, the instructor seeks not to be legalistic, but to encourage, reminding them that this will be to their own advantage.

It needs to be explained that the questions at the end of each chapter are purposely written to provoke discussion. In many cases one can agree or disagree with them depending upon how one interprets the question. These will be used as time and interest allow.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 378 "My Faith Looks Trustingly"

CHAPTER ONE

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

CENTRAL FOCUS

God's grace is the only lasting solution to the problem of guilt in our lives.

OBJECTIVES

The participants will relate to guilt as something that is very real to them and must be dealt with.

This lesson will serve as an introduction to the Law/Gospel dynamic.

Participants will see confession and absolution as a special gift of God, rather than as a sober opening rite.

Individual confession and absolution will be presented as a valid and helpful option for Lutherans.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all

Overhead transparencies

- Dealing with guilt
- Cartoon--"Talking about Daddy"
- Divine Service I--Confession
- Divine Service II--Confession

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Class members are invited to look at confession in one of the services in the hymnal and are asked what thoughts, impressions, or feelings come to mind as they take part in this section of the service. These are written on the board with little comment at this time.

Participants are asked if they have ever felt guilty, and then if they like feeling guilty. With that beginning, the topics of true and false guilt are summarized. Selected passages are looked up in the Bible, including the Ten Commandments in their context.

Ways of dealing with guilt are considered, using the special flow chart on the overhead as a guide. The goal is for participants to be able to identify with these various ways of seeking to deal with guilt, and also to see that nothing less than confession and absolution provides a lasting solution.

A copy of the confessional section from either Divine Service I or II is projected with the overhead. A green marker is used to highlight those sections which direct attention to the wonderful grace of God even as we are confessing. A red marker is used to highlight those words that show the thoroughness of the confession.

For discussion: A Lutheran pastor (ELCA) recently said that he thought that the confession as written on page 158 of *Lutheran Worship* (which is the same form used in Holy Communion I in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*) is too negative: people certainly have some good in them. How would you respond to him?

If a special service is being used the day of the class, it might be interesting to compare the confession which is used. Is it in the context of grace? Another option is to look to the "Service of Corporate Confession and Absolution" on pages 308-09.

Under the topic "Blessings of Confession and Absolution," the pure joy of God's grace will be emphasized. Depending upon the class, this can be contrasted to the Reformed viewpoint which offers nothing more than a declaration of grace, and to the Roman Catholic which ties the absolution to works of penance.

For discussion: Robert Webber, who has written much on the subject of worship from the Reformed perspective, indicates that the confession would be better utilized after the sermon, because the opening should be pure joy. How would you respond?

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

- Hymn 229 "Jesus Sinners Will Receive" verses 1, 3, 5
(note the gracious invitation, the reference to "sin's delusions")
- Hymn 231 "Lord, Jesus, Think on Me"
(note in verse 2, "By anxious thoughts oppressed")
- Hymn 279 "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds"

CHAPTER TWO

THE TRIUNE GOD

CENTRAL FOCUS

We rejoice that God works in wondrous ways to bring grace to us.

OBJECTIVES

The participants will learn what the Bible says about the Trinity, accepting with awe what is beyond our human comprehension.

Class members will see that the doctrine of the Trinity and the three ecumenical creeds bind us together with other Christians.

Participants will appreciate the use of an objective statement of faith in worship as opposed to a subjective testimony.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all

Transparencies

- Apostles' Creed
- Nicene Creed
- TRI-UNE

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

As a transition from the last unit, it can be asked: "Who is this God who gives us his grace?" The word "tri-une" is used to look at the concept of "three-in-one." While what can be understood about the Trinity needs to be shared, care should be taken not to try to make simple what only God can understand. It is by faith that we believe what he tells us about himself.

In the worship context, the invocation, benediction, and the creeds remind us of this doctrine. The creeds also remind Christian non-members that Lutherans have much in common with what they already believe. (The warm, welcome atmosphere still needs to be fostered.)

Time is used for a discussion of the pros and cons of the use of subjective testimony, as opposed to an objective statement of faith, within the context of worship. While we have much in common with some who make frequent use of personal testimony, we would rather keep the focus on God.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 173 "Glory Be To God the Father"

CHAPTER THREE

WE WORSHIP GOD THE FATHER

CENTRAL FOCUS

By grace, God the Father gives and sustains life.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will recognize and rejoice in the blessings of God which we see in our world.

Participants will begin to understand the function and purpose of several blessings which are a part of the worship service.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all.

Transparencies

-First Article

-Blessings

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

There is not time in this class to cover the problems of evolution adequately, nor the details of creation. Prime focus is upon the fact that it was God who purposely created our world in the beginning and that human beings were made in the image of God (not advanced monkeys).

Several blessings, which are a part of the worship service (and often taken for granted), are examined and shown to be weekly reminders of God's providence.

The Father's sending his Son into the world is presented as his greatest act of grace, and this also serves as a good lead into the next chapter.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 443 "Now Thank We All Our God"
Hymn 519 "How Great Thou Art"
Hymn 438 "Earth and All Stars"

CHAPTER FOUR

WE WORSHIP GOD THE SON

CENTRAL FOCUS

Grace is made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

OBJECTIVES

Class members will begin to understand and appreciate the meaning and flow of the church year.

Participants will catch the enthusiasm with which several worship customs highlight the reading of the Holy Gospel.

The life of Jesus will be summarized through selected Gospel lessons.

Participants will learn that our worship is governed by the Word (through the pericopal system) rather than by the whim of the pastor.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all.

Transparencies

- Church year
- Gospel lessons

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The term "gospel" will be examined, as it is used in referring to the first four books of the New Testament and as to its essential content. Several worship customs will be examined with the purpose of showing the great importance we give to the reading of the Gospel in our services.

Through the use of the circle diagram, the flow of the church year will be introduced. Selected Gospel lessons will be used to give a summary of the life of Jesus.

These (except for the lengthy Good Friday reading) are shown on the overhead projector, in order that a number of lessons might be examined in a relatively short amount of time.

In the context of the Advent season, there is opportunity to look at the Lutheran view of Mary and (as time and interest allow) to compare this to the Roman Catholic traditions of "Immaculate Conception," "Assumption," and prayers to Mary.

As part of the Good Friday and Easter lessons, the class is taken into the sanctuary to examine in detail the symbolism of our altar and of our chancel cross.

The lessons for the Sundays after Pentecost are presented as examples of Gospel lessons from the non-festival half of the year. There is no need to look at their teaching in detail, for that is covered in other parts of the course.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 42 "Let Us All With Gladsome Voice"
Hymn 139 "Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won"

CHAPTER FIVE

WE WORSHIP GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

CENTRAL FOCUS

The Holy Spirit brings us grace.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will come to see the power of the Holy Spirit, recognizing his past and present work in their lives.

Individuals will begin to recognize and utilize more fully the special gifts which the Holy Spirit has given to them.

The "sign gifts" will be explained in their proper Biblical perspective.

Participants will realize that, while some denominations may talk more about the Holy Spirit, Lutherans, perhaps more than anyone, give credit to the Spirit for calling us to and sustaining us in the faith.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all.

Transparencies

-Third Article

-"Holy Ghost firestorm"

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

A blank transparency is projected as a "picture" of the Holy Spirit, leading into a discussion of the term "spirit" and why it is difficult for us to comprehend the "person" of the Spirit. A brief survey is made of pertinent Biblical passages, including Genesis 1, Matthew 3, and Acts 2, with the purpose of showing that the Holy Spirit has always existed as a part of the Triune God.

More time is spent upon the "work" of the Spirit, looking at the "calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps" categories of the explanation to the Third Article. Special emphasis is given to 1 Corinthians 12:3 and the Lutheran insistence that even our believing is a gift of God. This is contrasted to "decision theology."

The transparency, "Holy Ghost firestorm," is used as a reminder that some Christians have a very different understanding of the work and gifts of the Spirit. There is no need to prove that God has not given or does not give such gifts. It does need to be pointed out, if anyone would imply that "tongues-speaking" is a higher gift or the definitive sign of the presence of the Spirit, that that is simply unbiblical. The list of gifts in Romans 12 does not include the "sign gifts," perhaps as a reminder that these gifts are not for all churches. Indeed, many churches which have people who speak in tongues (the early Corinthian church as well as congregations today) have found that this can be an extremely controversial and divisive gift.

The session needs to be closed by emphasizing that, even though Lutherans may spend less time talking about the Holy Spirit, we emphasize, perhaps more than anyone, the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives of faith.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 154 "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord"

CHAPTER SIX

THE WORD OF GOD

CENTRAL FOCUS

God's grace comes to us through the Scriptures.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will rejoice that God reveals his grace to us in the Scriptures.

Worshippers will recognize that the regular services are "drenched" in God's Word.

Class members will practice distinguishing Law and Gospel.

Daily Bible reading will be encouraged.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all

Hebrew and Greek Testaments

Various Bible translations

Transparencies

-Biblical library

-Christ and salvation

Portals of Prayer and other devotional resources

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

As an introduction to the new section, the term "means of grace" needs to be explained.

Some background is given on the origin and contents of the Bible, through the "Biblical library" transparency, Greek and Hebrew testaments, and various translations.

It is stressed that, while many have forsaken belief in an inspired and inerrant Bible, we continue to believe the Bible's own witness in this regard.

There is no need to explore each Biblical reference as used in the services; the important thing is that participants come to see how our worship stems from Scripture.

The concept of Law and Gospel is reviewed once more, with emphasis upon being able to distinguish between the two. The statements in the manual and various elements of the service are used as examples.

Daily Scriptural reading is encouraged by sharing several possible methods. Devotional resources are handed out, with the goal that this might inspire some to consider beginning such a practice.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 474 "How shall the Young Secure Their Hearts?" verses 1, 4, 5

Hymn 334 "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word"

Page 156 Collect for the Word

CHAPTER SEVEN

BAPTISM

CENTRAL FOCUS

The Holy Spirit brings people to grace through Baptism.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will have a new appreciation for the power of God in Baptism.

Participants will realize that, while many denominations speak highly of Baptism, few appreciate the real power of the sacrament.

The Baptism of infants will be seen as a logical consequence for those who recognize the working of God in Baptism.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all

Transparencies

- "What is happening?"

- Emergency Baptism

Baptismal candle

Baptismal napkin

Sponsor pamphlet

Jordan River water

Baptismal certificate

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The order for Emergency Baptism (page 312 in the hymnal) is used to help participants discover what is basic in Baptism. The transparency, "What is happening," can be used as a reminder that various Christian groups look at Baptism in different ways. Here, already, one begins to appreciate the great power that Lutherans discern in Baptism.

The concept of sacrament is introduced. The three criteria of a sacrament are used as a way of explaining Baptism, following the major points in the manual. Several visual aids can be used as they are appropriate to the text. Rather than seeking to justify infant Baptism, it is better to first show the power and grace of the sacrament, so that Baptism of infants will seem to be a perfectly logical consequence.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 224 "Baptized into Your Name Most Holy" verses 1 & 4

Page 125 Prayer for newness of life in Christ

Other hymns in the baptism section, LW 223-228

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOLY COMMUNION

CENTRAL FOCUS

The Holy Spirit brings grace to us through Holy Communion.

OBJECTIVES

By faith, participants will recognize the true body and blood of Christ in the sacrament.

All will recognize and rejoice in the gift of forgiveness offered in Holy Communion.

Close communion will be seen as a logical result of taking communion seriously.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all

A common cup

Latin missal

Transparencies

- Table showing comparative beliefs
- Words of Institution
- Receiving the sacrament

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The instructor may give a brief overview of the development of Holy Communion-
-looking at the Passover, the upper room, the situation at the time of Luther, and ending
with the basic words of institution.

Through use of the diagram (which is projected with the overhead and is also in
the student's manual), the instructor summarizes how various elements of Christendom
seek to explain what is happening in Holy Communion. Greatest emphasis needs to be

placed on the last column, in which it is pointed out that only Lutherans recognize God's great gift of grace offered in the sacrament.

The final section, "Receiving the sacrament," emphasizes the importance of communing often, with joy, and as a family. Plenty of time needs to be allowed for questions.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 242 "I Come, O Savior, to Your Table" verses 1 & 4

Hymn 245 "O Jesus, Blessed Lord, My Praise"

CHAPTER NINE

ALL OF LIFE AS WORSHIP

CENTRAL FOCUS

All of life is a joyful response to God's grace.

OBJECTIVES

Class members will broaden their definition of worship, applying it to their entire lives.

The Ten Commandments and other directives of God will be seen as leading to a better way of living.

Participants will begin to think of which class they will attend after the present class has concluded.

Stewardship will be seen in terms of opportunity as opposed to obligation.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all

Transparencies

- Cartoons showing contemporary views of marriage
- Cartoons showing common views of the church and money

Current stewardship materials

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The new section and chapter is introduced through a reading of Romans 12:1-2, which looks upon all of life as worship in response to the grace of God.

The Ten Commandments are looked at once more--this time in terms of the "third use" of the law (a guide for Christian living). It is not possible, nor necessary, to examine all of the commandments in detail. However, the point needs to be made that,

while much of society looks upon these commandments as onerous commands which would hamper our fun, they really show a better way of living. The transparency showing contemporary views of marriage is one example. As part of the third commandment, emphasis is placed upon the benefits of future Bible study.

Stewardship will be presented as a way of life and worship, as opposed to something that the church uses to get people's money. Here also, some cartoons are projected to remind of the common image of the church and money.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

- | | |
|--------|-------------------------------------|
| LW 404 | "Take My Life, O Lord, Renew" |
| LW 402 | "Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us" |
| LW 405 | "We Give You But Your Own" |

CHAPTER TEN

WE WORSHIP TOGETHER

CENTRAL FOCUS

Corporate worship is a chance to rejoice in the grace of God.

OBJECTIVES

Corporate worship will be presented as a wonderful opportunity for God's people to come together "in the name of Jesus."

Worship forms will be seen in their proper perspective as things that can and do change, but that also need to be consistent with the church's teaching.

Participants will have a chance to ask questions about Lutheran worship forms.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all

Various hymnal editions

Transparency
-Worship directions

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The questions posed by the first paragraph in the manual can be used to introduce the topic. Worship will need to be presented as something that is natural and helpful to Christians.

The overhead diagram on the directions of worship (also in the manual) can be used as the basis for discussion. Class members will look at various parts of the service and consider which direction the action is flowing.

After first setting the basis for worship, it is appropriate to consider any questions which the class might have on music, the choir, vestments, and the like. If there is time, it might be interesting to ask the class what they think worship will be like in the future.

The final section of the chapter serves as a good summary and reminder of why we worship.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 295 "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BASIC WORSHIP-PRAYER

CENTRAL FOCUS

By God's grace, we have the privilege of coming to him in prayer.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will come to realize that prayer is a precious gift of God.

All will be encouraged to "broaden" their prayer life.

The Lord's Prayer will be presented as an example of how we might pray, not the exact words which we must pray.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all.

Transparencies

- Dennis the Menace cartoon
- Gallup Poll: "Forms of Prayer"
- Lord's Prayer: Matthew 6 and Luke 11

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The Dennis the Menace cartoon, "Does anyone want anything?" can be used as an introduction to the subject, reminding that many look at prayer in a very narrow way. The Gallup Poll transparency is used to show how others view prayer. Participants will be challenged to look at prayer as a basic response to God's grace.

The most important section of this chapter is that which ties prayer into the grace of God. It is not a natural right, but a privilege earned for us by Christ on the cross.

The section examining the use of prayer in worship demonstrates that the service is permeated with prayer through and through. The Prayer of the Day can be used as an example of the ancient five-part prayer form.

"Questions about Prayer" seeks to anticipate common queries. These are covered as dictated by class interest. Especially important is the question, "To whom should we pray?" Application can be made to the generic prayers of civil religion as manifested in certain lodge, school, and government events.

Through use of the transparency comparing the two versions of the Lord's Prayer as recorded by Matthew and Luke, the point needs to be made that Jesus taught this prayer as an example of "how" to pray. This is to counter the common belief that we somehow earn the grace of God by the mere recitation of a specific formula. We learn from the Lord's Prayer of the importance that we will want to give to spiritual concerns in all of our prayers.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 431 "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above"

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE FUTURE

CENTRAL FOCUS

Because of God's grace, we have no need to worry about the future.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will become aware of various viewpoints concerning Christ's second coming but will be content to leave the details to God.

The Christian funeral will be explained in terms of the hope it offers to the people of God.

Class members will rejoice in the sure hope of heaven, for Jesus sake.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Bibles and hymnals for all

Transparencies

- "Christ is Coming" clipping
- Diagram of various millennial views

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The topic is introduced by sharing a newspaper ad which predicted that Christ would return on October 28, 1992. It is explained that Lutherans do not pay much attention to such predictions, for we neither can know nor need to know the exact day of the Lord's return.

Participants are encouraged to share what they think it will be like when Christ returns. Various millennial views are briefly presented as summarized on the overhead transparency. While giving permission to talk about such things, at the same time it is emphasized that only God knows the details. By grace, Lutherans are content to leave it in his hands.

Death needs to be looked at in realistic terms. Our faith does not eliminate grief at the time of loss, for we do miss our loved ones! But we do not mourn as those who have no hope of the afterlife. The importance of God's grace, versus a eulogy concerning the deceased, is highlighted in the funeral service. The participants are asked to look to the "Death and Burial" section in the hymnal, with encouragement to consider which hymn they would like to have sung at their own funeral.

Heaven is presented as a place of "true happiness" because God is there. Opportunity might be given for participants to speculate as to what it might be like, with the reminder that, here too, we will ultimately need to leave the details to God. Most importantly, the course ends as it began, with a focus upon the grace of God, giving the assurance that we can be sure of heaven--for Jesus' sake.

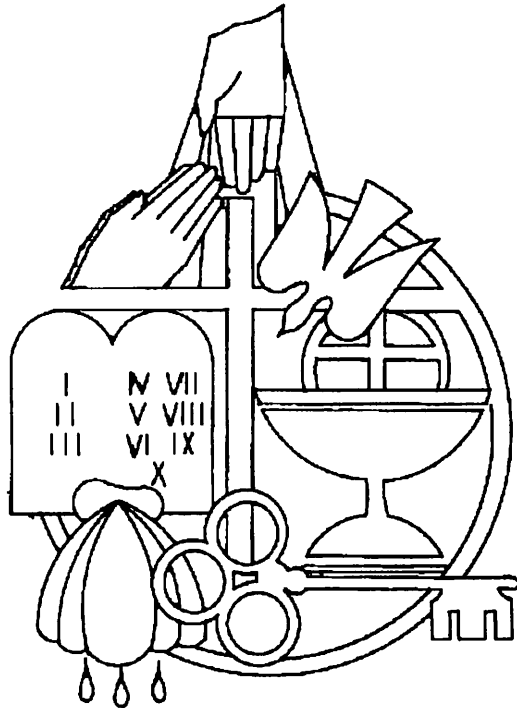
WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn 264 "I Know that My Redeemer Lives" verses 1, 6

APPENDIX TWO

MANUAL

CELEBRATING GOD'S GRACE



Rev. James W. Heining

Zion Lutheran Church
Albert Lea, Minnesota

Copyright March 1993

CELEBRATING GOD'S GRACE

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INTRODUCTION

A WORD OF WELCOME

This class is designed for many types of people. Perhaps you have never really been a part of a Christian church but have felt that there is something missing in your life. You are here genuinely seeking. We are glad to have you. Perhaps you grew up in a different Christian tradition but now have a Lutheran spouse, and so you are willing to listen and compare. We consider it an honor that you are willing to give of your time to learn more about what Lutheran Christians believe and practice.

Or perhaps you have been a lifelong Lutheran, but you are not afraid to admit that you can still learn a few things. You might be a Bible class veteran or novice. Maybe you know most of the other members of the class or none at all. In any event, the goal of this class is that **together we might grow in our appreciation of God's grace.**

THE GRACE OF GOD

"What makes Lutherans different from other Christians?" In simplest terms, it would have to be the strong emphasis we place upon the grace of God. In Eph. 2:8-9 we read:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.

These verses say it all. We are saved by the grace of God rather than by our accomplishments. Our salvation was assured by Christ when he died on the cross and rose again in victory over sin and death on Easter Sunday morning.

As Lutherans we identify with Paul as he wrote in Phil. 3:8-9:

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness

of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Unfortunately, this simple doctrine seems to run contrary to common sense and, as a result, against what all human wisdom seems to teach. What do people mean when they say, "I don't mean to give a sermon, but..." or "Don't preach at me"? All too often people think of religion as nothing more than a series of rules and regulations and that God is always ready to strike us down. That is quite a contrast to the beautiful words of grace we find in these verses.

DOCTRINE AND WORSHIP

We believe that our worship practices are integrally related to our doctrine. While the purpose of worship is to hear God speak and to speak to him, we realize that we are also teaching by what we say and do in worship. Therefore, worship services are carefully planned and led, lest we be teaching something in worship that is inconsistent with our belief.

This class is based on that important relationship between worship and doctrine. During the course of this class, we will see how what we believe is expressed in our worship and reinforced by that same worship.

RESOURCES

Our primary textbook is the Bible. It has to be that way. For that is the only authority we have from God. Unless otherwise stated, printed references are from the *New International Version*, an accurate and very readable translation.

Ideally, we would take many years and engage in a full-time study of nothing but the Bible; everything we know is there. Since that might be difficult for most schedules, we will be looking at Luther's Small Catechism, which summarizes the teachings of the Scriptures in a brief and simple way. Some references are printed out in this manual. At other times, we will look to this catechism as it is printed on pages 300-07 in the front section of our hymnal.

The Small Catechism is the most familiar of the "confessional" writings of the church. These were documents that were written in the sixteenth century for the purpose of summarizing what Lutherans believed. We accept these documents not because we believe they (or any other) are on the same level as

Scripture, but because we believe these documents are accurate summaries of the Scriptures. From time to time we will be referring to these other confessional documents, which are gathered together in what is called the *Book of Concord*.¹ These documents (and the abbreviations used for them in this manual) include:

- The Three Chief Symbols
 - The Apostles' Creed
 - The Nicene Creed
 - The Athanasian Creed
- Augsburg Confession (1530) (AC)
- Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531) (Apol)
- The Smalcald Articles (1537)
- Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537)
- The Small Catechism (1529) (SC)
- Large Catechism (1529) (LC)
- Formula of Concord (1577)

We will on occasion refer to the writings of Martin Luther. We do not look to everything the reformer wrote as authoritative, but we have included some quotations as a sampling of the writing of the man who went to great lengths to restore the Biblical emphasis upon grace. His writings will be referred to by LW (*volume*): (*page*).²

We will frequently look to our hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*,³ to see how our beliefs are put into practice in our worship.

SOME REQUESTS

Please, please, **read ahead**. You will not be tested on the material. You will not even be asked if you have done so, but you will get much more out of this class if you do. If the participants have read the material at home, it leaves much more time for questions and discussion in class.

¹Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

²Jaroslav Pelikan, and Helmut T. Lehman, general editors, *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Fortress Press and Concordia Publishing House, 1960-).

³*Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982).

Note that you are provided **wide margins** in this manual. Please jot down any questions that might arise at home or things that you want to remember from class.

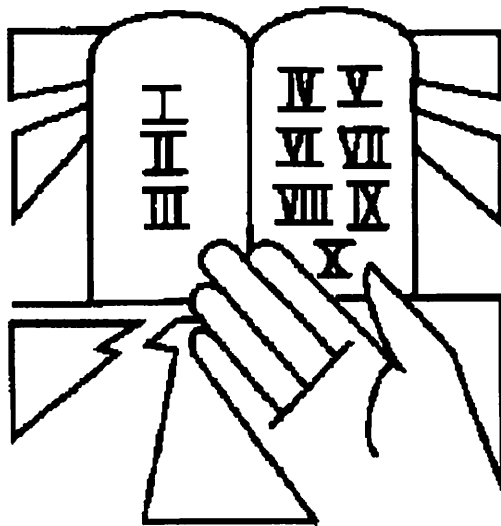
Please feel free to **ask questions** at any time. Someone else may have been wondering the same thing but was too timid to ask. We learn from each other. At the same time we respect the right of those who would prefer to quietly listen. We thank God for the wonderful mix of people we have in these classes.

It is assumed that all class members will be **worshiping regularly**. For it is from our worship services that class illustrations will be drawn, and what is learned in class will be applied. Missing worship means missing half the class.

SECTION ONE

MAN'S GUILT AND GOD'S GRACE

(Ten Commandments, Confession)



CHAPTER ONE

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

THE GUILT ALL PEOPLE HAVE IN COMMON

After the opening hymn, we customarily begin our worship by confessing our sins. Look briefly to the **Confession of sins and absolution** on page 158 in *Lutheran Worship*. What have your thoughts been as you have participated in this portion of the service?

Read Ps. 51:1-5. What is the mood of the writer? What kind of feelings seem to be expressed? We all have feelings of guilt. Paul Tournier, Christian counselor and author, believes that unresolved guilt has a much greater influence than most of us realize.⁴

False Guilt

Some of this guilt Tournier labels "false guilt." All of us feel guilty about some things for which there is **no real reason to feel guilty**. The hardest worker in the plant may feel the most guilty about being two minutes late for work. The mother may feel guilty because she is sick and cannot care for her children. The housewife may feel guilty when she sees unwashed dishes in the sink or dust on the table. Another may not worry about that at all but will feel guilty if she misses a school program or athletic event. The unemployed person may feel guilty about not being able to adequately provide for his family, while the affluent businessmen may feel just as guilty about not spending enough time with his family. A pile of unread magazines will cause another to feel guilty, but sitting down to read them will make her feel guilty about neglecting her family or another task.

Tournier calls such feelings false guilt, because we are **not violating anyones rules but our own**. Can you think of other examples of needless

⁴Paul Tournier, *Guilt and Grace* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962).

guilt? While all do this to a certain extent, when it gets carried away, it is called neurotic guilt and can make it difficult to cope with everyday life.

True guilt

Now, that is not to say that there is no such thing as true, or deserved, guilt. Read 2 Sam. 11:1-7, 14-17. What had David done that is wrong? Should he have felt guilty? Did he? Is he still guilty? True guilt does not depend upon our subjective feelings or even upon our knowing that we have done something wrong. **We are truly guilty when we have violated a law of God.**

Read Ex. 20:1-17. What are some things in the **Ten Commandments** that God tells us are wrong?

Can you imagine what our world would be like without these commandments? We believe that God gave us these commandments as a "curb" to keep order in what would otherwise be a completely lawless world.

The substance of the Ten Commandments is not unique to Christianity or Bible-based religions. Archaeologists have found similar law codes from other ancient cultures. While some theologians have concluded that the Biblical Ten Commandments were borrowed from these other sources rather than given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai, Scriptures indicate (Rom. 2:14-15) that these laws were originally written upon our hearts. They had to be given again to Moses because this natural knowledge was blurred by our sin.⁵ The very fact that most cultures have a similar moral code points to a common creator.

The consciences God has given us tell us that there are times we truly are guilty. **This true guilt must be dealt with!**

COMMON WAYS OF DEALING WITH GUILT

Deny or hide

One way to get around guilt is to water down the law. Taken to the extreme, we could abolish all laws in our nation. Then we would no longer have criminals. Think of all the money we could save because we would no longer need any prisons. Do you think that would be a good idea? Obviously

⁵Luther wrote that the Ten Commandments are "inscribed in the hearts of all men." LC II, 67.

not. But yet we engage in a minor form of the same thing all the time. We are not afraid to go a few miles over the speed limit, because we are better than the average driver, and everyone knows that the police will always give you a little leeway. Going 57 mph in a 55 mph zone isn't really against the law, is it?

Sometimes we try to play games with God's laws. Such was the case with the people we call Pharisees in the New Testament. In many ways, they led exemplary lives, but they followed the letter rather than the spirit of the Law. Before the time of Christ, the Jewish leaders had taken these Ten Commandments and divided them into 613 sub-categories, so that every question could be answered. They were convinced that they could keep (their interpretation of) the Law perfectly. But consider what Jesus had to say about them:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. (Matt. 23:23-24)

Since the Law had said that they were to return ten percent of their income for the Lord's work, the Pharisees would actually count the seeds, so that they might not give too little (or too much). Look at the verses surrounding these. As we look to these verses, and also to the rest of this chapter, we get an idea as to why Jesus was not very popular among the "good" church people of the day. Note that it was the "sinful" people (greedy tax collectors, prostitutes, and the like) who were the most receptive to Jesus' offer of forgiveness.

But this tendency to narrow the Law of God is a continuing one. In a recent survey many people defined sin as "something someone would do to purposely hurt another person." With such a limited definition, most of us would fare pretty well. We, like the Pharisees, prefer to point out our good points as opposed to acknowledging our errors.

But look what Jesus does to our self-righteousness. Read Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28. What things does Jesus call sin? Do we usually think of such things as anger and lust as sin? Why do you think Jesus is making it so tough?

Look to the Ten Commandments (page 300 in *Lutheran Worship*). In the Small Catechism Martin Luther sought to summarize Jesus' teachings on

the Ten Commandments in the "What does this mean" sections. List several things that might be particularly difficult for people to follow consistently.

The initial way of reacting to true guilt is generally to **deny** that any wrong has been done. When we take the Ten Commandments seriously, as Jesus did, can we deny that we have done wrong?

Projecting the blame upon someone else

When it can no longer be denied that there has been a wrong, the next action often seems to be to project the blame upon someone or something else. Read Gen. 3:1-13 (especially 12-13). Whom did Adam blame? Whom did Eve blame?

If we can find a convenient scapegoat, we can divert attention away from our own shortcomings. A good example is the freeway, where "all the other drivers" are inept and discourteous.

Sometimes we might outwardly convince ourselves of our innocence, but the unconscious does strange things. John Drakeford cites the example of the man who was convinced that his wife was having an affair. She was innocent—he was the guilty one. He had projected his guilt upon her. Drakeford also says if a wife feels particularly aggressive towards her husband, annoyed and provoked by his behavior, she should perhaps ask herself if this is in reaction to something wrong that she has done toward him.⁶

Another way of doing much the same thing is to put the blame of one's behavior upon **some outside force**. Psychoanalysts look for something that went wrong in an earlier stage of one's life. Behaviorists may look to one's parents or society as the source of the problem. Some would look to heredity. One reason that "twelve step" groups have been so successful is that they allow one to look upon the affliction as a disease over which one has no control. While there is still a great deal of repentance and restitution, it does make it a little easier to deal with one's guilt if someone or something else can receive at least part of the blame.

The ultimate projection of blame is to say "**It is God's fault.**" This is as old as the Garden of Eden, and as contemporary as homosexuality or sexual abusers today, who maintain that God made them the way they are, with the implication that that makes their actions justifiable.

⁶John Drakeford, *Integrity Therapy* (Nashville: Broadmans, 1967), 37-38.

The results of unconfessed sin

Read Ps. 32:1-5. Verses one, two, and five speak of the blessings that come from acknowledging and confessing our sins. How did the writer feel before he confessed (verses three and four)? Consider these physical results of living with unconfessed sin:

- a. The body wastes away. Weight loss often accompanies depression. The opposite, excessive weight gain, can also happen.
- b. God's hand is heavy upon us. This is a sense of a huge weight upon one's shoulders or pressing on one's chest, another symptom of depression.
- c. Our vitality is drained. No energy. The severely depressed person seldom has energy to deal with even the basics, like getting up, getting dressed, or fixing something to eat.

At least some depression could be attributed to anger having been turned inward. It often results from guilt and refusal to deal with sin.⁷

God says that all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). In 1 John 1:8-10 we read:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

If we deny we have sinned, what are we saying about God? **Why is it so hard to admit we are wrong?** Do you think it is part of our sinful human nature that we will naturally try every other way of dealing with sin, before we simply own up to it?

Acknowledgment of our sinful condition

Sometimes we might acknowledge our wrong-doing and then look for **ways of restitution**. This seems logical, and sometimes it works. We pay a

⁷Norbert Oesch, *Invited by God: Basics of the Christian Faith* (Leader's Guide) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 20.

fine for violating a traffic law and the record is cleared. Most of the religions of the world are built around this premise. We must somehow **do something to atone for our sins**. This is a trap that Christians often fall into as well. Tragically, when we start thinking that way, we never know for sure if we have done enough. But God offers something much better: forgiveness with no strings attached.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

God's gracious invitation

Read Luke 15:11-32. What did the **prodigal son** expect of his father? Did the son deserve to be forgiven and restored as a son? What gave the son courage to return? What did he receive? Do you think the father ever considered doing anything else than what he did? How did the prodigal son know that he was forgiven?

Read again 1 John 1:9. What does God promise to those who confess? But, of course, it is difficult to acknowledge our sins and make confession. Consider this scenario. A child is careless and breaks a window. Is he more likely to confess to the stern parent who will instantly punish or to the fair but loving parent who is likely to forgive?

God is just; he does not simply ignore sin. But our loving heavenly Father sent his Son, Jesus, into our world that we might have forgiveness. Note that God sought out Adam and Eve rather than the other way around.

Look to the setting of our confession in Divine Service II on page 158. Note the use of these words from 1 John 1:8-9. God, **promising that he will forgive**, invites us to confess.

Confession

Look carefully at the words with which we confess in section two on page 158. To what kind of God are we confessing? What do you think it means when we say we are **"by nature sinful and unclean"**? The words **"thought, word, and deed"** remind us that God knows what is going on in all areas of our life. **"What we have done"** refers to sins we have actually done; whereas, **"what we have not done"** refers to those acts of kindness that we could have done but neglected to do. What might be some examples?

Note that our confession has vertical ("**not loved you**") and horizontal ("**not loved our neighbors**") elements. Jesus used these two dimensions of love to sum up the Ten Commandments, as we read in Mark 12:30-31:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Realizing that we have not done this, we acknowledge that we deserve nothing but **eternal punishment**.

Hermann Theiss writes that repentance in the full sense embraces three things: 1) honest confession of sins, 2) being confident of God's forgiveness in Christ, and 3) forsaking old sins and walking in a new Christlike way. "Christian repentance, as we shall later see, grows out of faith in Christ."⁸ How tragic it would be if someone only "confessed," or acknowledged, their sins, with no hope of forgiveness. That would only lead to despair.

Absolution (forgiveness)

Read John 20:19-23 What authority is Jesus giving here? Why do you think that **Jesus gave his followers the power to forgive sins on his behalf?**

Peter Brunner writes:

There the spoken Word of the Gospel is presented in a very concentrated form. Absolution is a condensation of the Gospel as Word, comparable only to the condensation of the Gospel in the reception of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.⁹

This gift of forgiveness is complete and final, for God promises to grant to the contrite sinner his absolute forgiveness.

To whom has he given this authority to forgive sins? Normally, only **the pastor speaks the words of forgiveness in the public worship service**, for he has been called by the congregation for this purpose. The minister represents Christ and acts under a commission given by the Lord. In a sense, the minister acts for God, as an ambassador might be authorized to speak for the president in a foreign country.

Since this power to forgive, which is called the **Office of the Keys** (page 304 in *Lutheran Worship*), belongs to the whole church, **any Christian**

⁸Hermann C. Theiss, *Life With God* (Seattle: Morse Press, 1982), 33.

⁹Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 133.

may assure another that he is forgiven. Can you think of some times that this might be helpful?

After the congregation has together confessed their sins, the hymnal suggests two options for the pastor (page 158-59). In the first, the pastor exercises the power given in the Office of the Keys and forgives on behalf of God. This form is most appropriate in private confession and small-group, confessional services.

In the second, the leader "reminds" us that God has promised to forgive. This "declaration of grace" was intended by John Calvin as a general or group confession for public worship.

Our altar book suggests using pastoral discernment. Which form do you prefer?

The confession and absolution are followed by the *Kyrie* (a prayer for mercy which as forgiven sinners we have the right and privilege of offering) and then a joyous hymn of praise.

INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

When most people hear the term "**private confession**," they think of the Roman Catholic Church. Did you realize that Lutherans can also do the same thing? Look to the special service provided for this purpose on pages 310-11 of *Lutheran Worship*. Note the open-ended sentence on the bottom of page 310. Would you feel comfortable doing that? Of what advantage would there be in using a service like this? The forgiveness is certainly not more valid, but it might be more convincing to us to hear that "yes, we are really forgiven." What if someone said that you "must confess" in this manner?

While confession is an essential for Christians, a particular form or manner is not. Confession was not a historic part of the service. It was assumed that confession would have been made privately before the Divine Service. **Luther maintained that individual confession was of great importance but should not be made a law.** Unfortunately, evangelical freedom has very often been interpreted in terms of what one does not have to do instead of in terms of what one may do.

People who were no longer "required" to confess seldom chose to do so voluntarily. Since people no longer confessed their sins before the Sabbath, John Calvin made confession a part of the worship service in Geneva in 1542. Most Lutherans have followed this custom.

WHEN SHOULD WE CONFESS?

It has been suggested that we should confess daily, since we sin daily. There are various ways which we use to confess. We might confess corporately as we do in church. We might confess directly to God (as we do in the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses). We might confess privately to the pastor. If we have sinned against another person, it is best if we personally confess to that person, as well as to God. (See also James 2:16; Matt. 5:23-24; Phil. 4:2-3; Eph. 4:1-3; Eph. 4:25-27)

While we cannot insist that we begin our worship services with confession, and we do not always do so, we believe that it is important that **we establish at the very beginning of our worship our relationship to our God.** Peter Brunner writes, "Because the congregation here stands before God's presence, it must also confess the [sinful] facts before the world and itself."¹⁰

BLESSINGS OF CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

What is the result of having been forgiven? In Rom. 8:1 we read, **"Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Forgiveness is absolutely complete. God chooses to forgive, even forget, our sins, for Jesus' sake. Read 1 John 2:1-2. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He speaks to the Father in our defense.

We proclaim Christ and his forgiveness again and again. How tragic it is that some people think of the church and religion as only a system of rules and regulations. If we proclaim the Law, it is primarily to help us to acknowledge that we need the forgiveness that can only come from Christ. We are guilty and bogged down by our human ways of dealing with guilt. It is only through the Gospel that we are truly free. Unfortunately, sometimes people are so permeated with guilt that they listen only to the Law and miss the sweet words of the Gospel.

Some believe that it would be better if the confession would come later in the service, for the beginning should be pure joy. While we are free to place the confession at any place in the service, if confession and absolution are not providing pure joy, perhaps we are not adequately proclaiming or hearing the Gospel message of forgiveness.

¹⁰Brunner, 205.

Confident of our Savior's promise to forgive, **we can rejoice even as we confess.** Peter Brunner writes:

The same word that signifies "to confess sin" in the Old Testament also, yes mainly, denotes "to thank, praise, and glorify God." In the New Testament *homologeîn* means: to confess sin, to profess faith, and to praise God. Referring to the same Old Testament text (Is. 45:23), the same word "to confess" is used to designate both the rendering of an account before the judgment seat of Christ and also the adoring profession which glorifies Jesus as Lord. (Rom. 14:10ff.; Phil. 2:10ff.)¹¹

When "Amazing Grace" was included in the hymn section of *Lutheran Worship*, the decision was made not to include the traditional second verse. Look at the words, and see if you can figure out why.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Grace does not in any way lead to fear. The Law leads to fear, and properly so. Grace relieves fears as correctly stated by the second line. Now while this may seem like nitpicking to some, Lutherans are very fussy when it comes to preserving the pure joy of that truly amazing grace of God.

Martin Luther maintained in "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" that the church had ruined penance as a sacrament by eliminating the divine promise and faith. Forgiveness became dependent upon contrition, satisfaction, and the whim of the confessor.¹² **Grace must be a free gift, given to us through Christ's work upon the cross. It is not and cannot be dependent upon any of our efforts.**

We read in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God, while the Law is to offer and present our goods to God . . . The greatest possible comfort comes down from this doctrine that the highest worship in the Gospel is the

¹¹Brunner, 207.

¹²LW, 36:81-91.

desire to receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness.¹³

Martin Luther wrote, "Therefore, when I urge you to go to confession, I am simply urging you to be a Christian."¹⁴

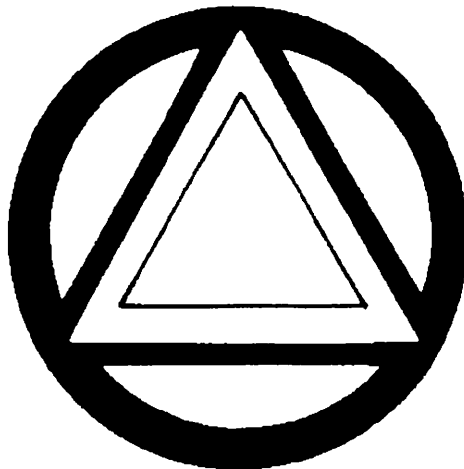
FOR DISCUSSION

1. A guilty conscience is the work of the devil.
2. The reason God forgives people is because they humbly confess their sins.
3. The most hopeless of all sins is self-righteousness.
4. When God calls people to repent, they are bound to do so.
5. The Lutheran church encourages its members to make a private confession of sins to the pastor.
6. The pastor only reminds of what Jesus has done when he forgives us.
7. Some believe that 75% of mental illness is directly related to unresolved guilt. Discuss the relationship of confession and absolution to mental health.
8. A Christian enjoys the freedom to fail.
9. In Christ, a person is completely free from condemnation.

¹³Apol IV:310.

¹⁴LC, A Brief Exhortation to Confession, 32.

SECTION TWO
THE GRACE-FULL GOD WE WORSHIP
(Apostles' Creed)



CHAPTER TWO

THE TRIUNE GOD

We are forgiven! That is the good news, the great news, that we hear in the absolution after we have confessed our sins. How fitting and proper that shortly thereafter we break forth in what is called the Hymn of Praise. But who is the God whom we praise?

Almost everyone in the world would acknowledge belief in some kind of God. Communists and others have worked hard to stamp out belief in a supreme being but, for the most part, have been unsuccessful. Some will say that a sunset, a majestic mountain landscape, or perhaps the birth of a child will remind people that indeed there has to be a god. We call this **natural knowledge** of God (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19, 20).

THE TRINITY

But such natural knowledge will tell us very few details about God, perhaps only that he is almighty and deserves our praise (and perhaps also our fear).

In Matt. 28:19 we read:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Nature would never lead us to believe that we have a God who expresses himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In fact, we cannot even understand it. We believe and teach this doctrine because God himself has revealed it in the Holy Scriptures.

As Lutherans we are in the mainstream of Christian tradition when we teach that there is one God (Deut. 6:4). (This was quite a radical belief in Biblical times.) Christians also agree that the true God is the Triune God. **We teach that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.**

We speak of God as being "**Triune**." Note the first syllable, "**tri**," meaning three, which we also find in triangle or tricycle. The second syllable, "**une**," refers to oneness or unity, as in union or universal. While the Bible does not use this specific term, it is a shorthand way of describing this central Christian doctrine.

Some examples may help us to describe this phenomenon, although they are all imperfect:

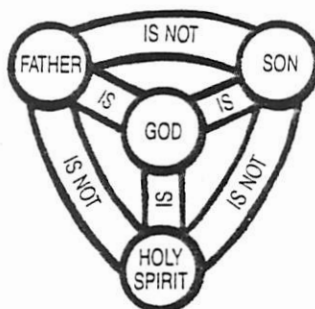
1. We speak of H₂O, which can be at various times vapor, water, or ice (but it is always one or another).
2. We think of fire, which has color, light, and heat (but it is in only one place).
3. An egg has a shell (which offers protection), a yolk (for reproduction), and white (for food).
4. An apple has skin for protection, seeds for reproduction, and flesh to eat.

But all of these examples are less than fully adequate. In the end we must leave the details to God, simply rejoicing that as Father, Son, and Spirit, he works grace in our lives. Just because we cannot understand all the details of the Trinity does not mean that it is untrue. It simply means that there are limitations to our human comprehension.

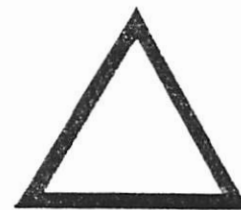
Some symbols may help us to describe what is certainly beyond our comprehension.



THE SHAMROCK. According to legend, St. Patrick used the shamrock to explain the mystery of the Trinity. Is the shamrock made of one leaf or three?



THE TRINITY SHIELD. This symbol has three curving lines of equal size. Three small circles of equal size represent *Pater* (Father), *Filius* (Son), and *Spiritus Sanctus* (Holy Spirit). The bands reveal both the equality (is) and the uniqueness (is not) of the members of the Trinity.



EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE. Each side of the equilateral triangle represents a "Person" of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Together the lines form one triangle, depicting unity.

WE WORSHIP THE TRIUNE GOD

We generally begin our services by calling upon the name of the Triune God in what is called the **Invocation** (pages 158 in *Lutheran Worship*). This is an appropriate way to begin our worship, for God has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Spirit, and it is by his authority that the minister proclaims the Gospel. It is an affirmation of faith and a prayer of profession. We ask God to bless and receive our worship. The pastor generally says these words facing the altar, for he is serving as the congregation's spokesman as we begin by affirming our faith in the Triune God. Later we will see that we also recall our baptisms as we hear these words.

The Invocation has been used since the time of the apostles and has been a part of formal worship rites since the second century. In some churches all the worshipers make the **sign of the cross** at this point. While in the Lutheran church this is usually done only by the pastor, it is certainly possible and appropriate that others would do the same, as long as it is seen as a voluntary rite reminding the worshiper that it is only by the victory of Christ over the cross that we have the right to approach God in worship.

Look to the **Pauline Benediction** (page 222):

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and love of God and the fellowship (communion) of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

While the more common Aaronic Benediction has three parts, which most certainly point ahead to a fuller revelation of the Trinity, this New Testament benediction (2 Cor. 13:14) is a clear reminder that we have worshiped in the name of the Triune God.

It is not essential that we begin or end in the name of the Triune God, but it is a good reminder to all of us who it is that we have come to worship.

It is easier to describe the work of each of the three persons of the Trinity than to understand the doctrine itself. We will be spending some time looking at how God has blessed, and continues to bless us, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

CREEDS

Read the Apostles' Creed (page 167). Note that this creed (statement of belief) is divided into three paragraphs, along the threefold pattern of the Trinity. While it was not written by the apostles themselves, in its earliest

forms it dates to the apostolic era, and it is seen as a summary of their teachings. The Apostles' Creed was most likely originally used as part of baptisms, in which those adults who wished to be baptized expressed their faith with these words. We continue to use it as part of the baptismal service and also in non-communion services. We will be spending considerable time with these words, but let us first look to the two other creeds which are also almost universally accepted by Christians.

Read the Nicene Creed (page 166). Note that this creed also has a threefold organization, but that the second paragraph is considerably expanded. This was written at a time when the divinity of Christ was being questioned by some. It was adopted by the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. It clearly emphasizes that Jesus is God in the flesh:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made;

Traditionally, the Nicene Creed has been used as a part of the service of Holy Communion.

Look at the Athanasian Creed (page 134). You are probably least familiar with this creed (perhaps because it is so long). Note that it speaks of the Trinity, again and again, in many different ways. It was written at a time (451 A.D.) when some in the church were questioning this doctrine.

The Athanasian Creed is not used as often as these other two creeds, but it is particularly appropriate for Trinity Sunday, and we often use it on that day in late Spring. While we will talk more about the church year later, it is interesting to note that **Trinity Sunday** is the only Sunday in which a doctrine is the prime focus.

Most of the world's Christians accept these **three "ecumenical" creeds**. It has been the custom in much of the Christian world since the 11th century to confess one of these creeds (generally the Nicene) as part of the worship service. Some Protestants accept these creeds but do not use them as part of their worship. Some of these same traditions place a greater emphasis upon **"testimony."** While testimony can be moving, and Lutherans could certainly include such an element in worship, we would rather keep the focus upon God and his workings than on our subjective response to them. We believe that, with all of the assaults upon correct doctrine to which we are exposed on a

daily basis, it is helpful to be reminded again and again of what the Scriptures teach concerning our God.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. The term *triune* is taken from the New Testament.
2. It is not reasonable to believe that there is but one God when there are three distinct persons in the Godhead.
3. We should always include at least one of the creeds in our worship.

CHAPTER THREE

WE WORSHIP GOD THE FATHER

OUR CREATOR

Look at Gen. 1:1 ff. It is by faith we believe that, before the beginning of time, only God existed. We obviously cannot precisely date the day of creation. The most obvious reading of the Bible would suggest a **fairly young earth**. If "carbon 14" dating and such suggest an older age, the question can be asked, "Did God not create any mature, even old, things?" An obvious example would be trees. Old rocks, too? Why not? **Evolution** "requires" a very old earth, in order for its theories of chance and random selection to be feasible. Christians are content to say, "**In the beginning.**"

Whenever the beginning was, **God was there**, and he was in control. God very carefully and specifically created Adam and Eve. While there are some teachings of evolution that are simply common sense (development of new hybrids, mutations, the extinction of some species), the Bible firmly insists that human beings were a specific and purposeful creation of God. If there are similarities between human beings and certain animals, it only serves to document the fact that we have a common creator.

God has not only created us, **he has created us wonderfully**. Read Ps. 139:13-16 A contemporary greeting card reads: "Merry Christmas to a wonderful human being." The inside continues: "My compliments to your creator!"¹⁵ We praise God for giving us bodies that scientists are still trying to duplicate and certainly never will.

In Ps. 118:1 we read: "**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.**" Sometimes these words are used as a table prayer. By saying grace at meals, we are daily reminded of the source of our blessings.

¹⁵Frank Starr, *Sharing the Christian Faith* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 13.

Read Luther's explanation of the First Article (page 301). Notice the personal, individual way in which Martin Luther speaks of the work of God as our creator.

As part of the service of Matins, we sing the *Te Deum laudamus* (number eight in the hymn section). Here, Martin Luther believed, was one place where the Christian's confession of faith and praise of God merged into one.

GOD CONTINUES TO SUSTAIN US

Some believe in a "watchmaker" God who created the world, wound it up, and then left. The *Star Wars* series spoke of an impersonal "force" that pervaded the universe. Those who successfully completed certain tasks could use its power for their own purposes. The "force would be with them." We believe that it is by grace, not our merit, that God continues to watch over us.

We believe in a personal God who not only created us, but who also **continues to love us and watch over us**. Read Matt. 6:25-34. God uses his holy **angels** to keep his children from harm and danger (Ps. 91:11-12). We often have live **plants** in the chancel, which remind of God's beautiful creation and his promise to continue to provide for us.

Is there really any need then for worry? It is when people think of themselves as independent of God and as having to take care of everything themselves that worry becomes essential.

Weekly reminders of God's providence

William Willimon writes of a woman he had met at a dinner party who remarked that their new pastor gave the "best benedictions." When asked to explain, she said that they had certainly heard the **benediction** many times before but had never paid much attention. But this new pastor, on his first Sunday, paused to say this before giving the benediction:

"Now I am going to bless you. I want you all to look at me and receive my blessing because you may really need it this next week." We all watched as he raised both hands high above his head, stretching out as if to embrace us, looking at each one of us, and almost like a father, blessing us in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. His benedictions

have become the highlight of every Sunday as far as I am concerned.¹⁶

Are those your thoughts as you hear the benediction, or is it simply the mark of the end of the service, as you casually check your watch? People took such blessings with the utmost seriousness in Biblical times. Consider the Aaronic benediction as printed on page 157 of *Lutheran Worship*:

**The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up his countenance on you
and give you peace.**

In Num. 6:22-27 we find the promise that God will bless his people if his name is put upon them. These words can and should be spoken with the certainty that originates with the Lord's own promise. We do not say "may" in the sense of pious hope, but we, having heard God's word and received his sacrament, believe that he will indeed be true to his promises and bless us.

In some traditions, the service ends on a note of Law, such as "Go and serve the Lord" or "Go and be fruitful for the Lord." We would much rather hear God's Gospel promise as a final word of blessing.

We have also heard expressions of blessing earlier in the service. What are your thoughts as the pastor speaks the **Salutation** (page 164), "**The Lord be with you**", and the congregation responds, "**And also with you**"? This was the greeting of the angel to Mary (Luke 1:28) and is equivalent to a special name for Jesus, "Immanuel." How would this greeting differ from "Good morning"?

After the sermon, the pastor may pronounce the words of Phil. 4:7 (page 143): "**The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**" None of these blessings are essential to worship, but they are weekly reminders of God's continued providence.

¹⁶William Willimon, *Worship As Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 210.

A JUST, YET MERCIFUL, FATHER

Read Jer. 23:23-29. God has told us what is right and wrong. As a just, or fair, God, **he must punish sin**. What would it be like if we only knew this quality of God?

Our Lord has no delight in punishing sin. Read Ps. 103:1-8. He loves us even when we have wandered astray. Consider the Lenten response on page 165, which is based upon Joel 2:13:

Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and abounding in steadfast love.

The season of Lent is a time for reflection and repentance. How good it is to know that God is merciful as well as just.

But how can God be perfectly just (which means that we would get what we deserve for our sins) and merciful at the same time?

THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

God showed his grace by sending his Son into the world to be our Savior. Through Christ, the **just punishment for sin is paid**, and the people of God are free through his forgiveness.

A family had a rule in which the children were required to eat all that they put on their plates. On occasion, one or the other found that their eyes were bigger than their stomach. But there was sometimes an out. The little sister, who was the best eater of all, would clean up her plate and then, willingly, those of her brother and sister as well.

We give thanks to God, who sent his son, Jesus, to die in our place!

FOR DISCUSSION

1. We worship God, not because of a world he created ages ago but because all our present blessings come from him.
2. Believing in God frees a person from all anxieties.
3. Faith in God assures us of success in all of our undertakings.
4. Since the Bible says the world is 6,000 years old, it is 6,000 years old!
5. A Christian is free to worry and be anxious.

CHAPTER FOUR

WE WORSHIP GOD THE SON

Who is Jesus? This is a question that is answered in a surprisingly great number of ways. Most everyone believes that Jesus lived, but they interpret the meaning of his life in many ways. Which of these would you consider to be good descriptions of Jesus?

1. "the best person who ever lived"
2. "a great teacher"
3. "a perfect example for us to follow"
4. "a great hero who died for what he believed in"¹⁷

All of these are certainly true statements, but all are also deficient if taken simply by themselves. To get an accurate picture of Jesus, we will want to look to what Jesus says about himself through the Scriptures.

THE GOSPELS

Look to the first four books in the New Testament. These books are called the Gospels, for in them we have recorded the details of the life of Jesus. They are not biographies in the strict sense of the term, for very little is said of the first thirty years of Jesus life, while the events surrounding his death and resurrection are spelled out in great detail.

John, the last of these writers, spells out clearly the purpose of his, and all the Gospels:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are 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 20:30-31)

¹⁷Strelan, 14.

These four books all have the same purpose and cover essentially the same material. In fact, you may notice that in some places the words themselves are almost identical. Yet, the Gospels are all different, for they were written for different audiences.

Matthew was most likely writing for Christians of a Jewish background. His readers would have been familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, the Old Testament. He cites the **Old Testament** some thirty-five times to show that Jesus was the **Messiah** who had been promised to God's people, Israel.

Mark seems to be writing to a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, perhaps those living in Rome. He omits Jesus' genealogy and explains Jewish words and customs. His Gospel is filled with **action**, stressing Jesus' **miracles** more so than his discourses.

Luke, the physician, is noted for meticulous attention to **detail** in his Gospel. He also was writing for a Gentile audience and placed a strong emphasis upon **Jesus as Savior for all people**. These first three Gospels are similar in many ways, and are often called the "synoptic" Gospels.

John, the fourth Gospel, was written later in the first century. His readers already had access to at least one of the other three Gospels. John's emphasis is more upon **theological** questions. What does it all mean that Christ came into the world? He includes many details which were not mentioned in the three earlier Gospels.

THE GOSPEL

To learn of Jesus, we look to the Gospels. The reading of the Gospel has historically been a **high point of the church's worship**. In the early church, two acolytes stood on either side of the Gospel lectern, each holding a candle. The mood was one of awe and expectation. Then the entire congregation stood up to hear the words of Jesus. Tradition tells us that soldiers would lay down their weapons and the king would remove his crown out of respect for the King of kings.

Look to the setting of the Gospel reading on page 165 in *Lutheran Worship*. Note that it is the final, or **climactic reading**, for here we hear directly of the life of our Lord Jesus. The words are read solemnly, as befits their important subject matter. Note also the direction to **stand**. Throughout the history of the Christian church, people have stood to hear the Gospel. Standing is the posture of honor and respect. Note the **special responses** before and after the Gospel reading which affirm that Jesus is Lord and Christ.

We don't have to use these, and do not always, but this is another way in which we are saying that these words are of great importance.

Sometimes, on special occasions, we follow an old custom in which the **pastor processes into the midst of the people** to read the Gospel. While it is not our local custom, some Lutherans use **incense** to highlight this reading. If that is done, it would need to be done for the sake of a witness to the importance of the Gospel, not as something that must be done.

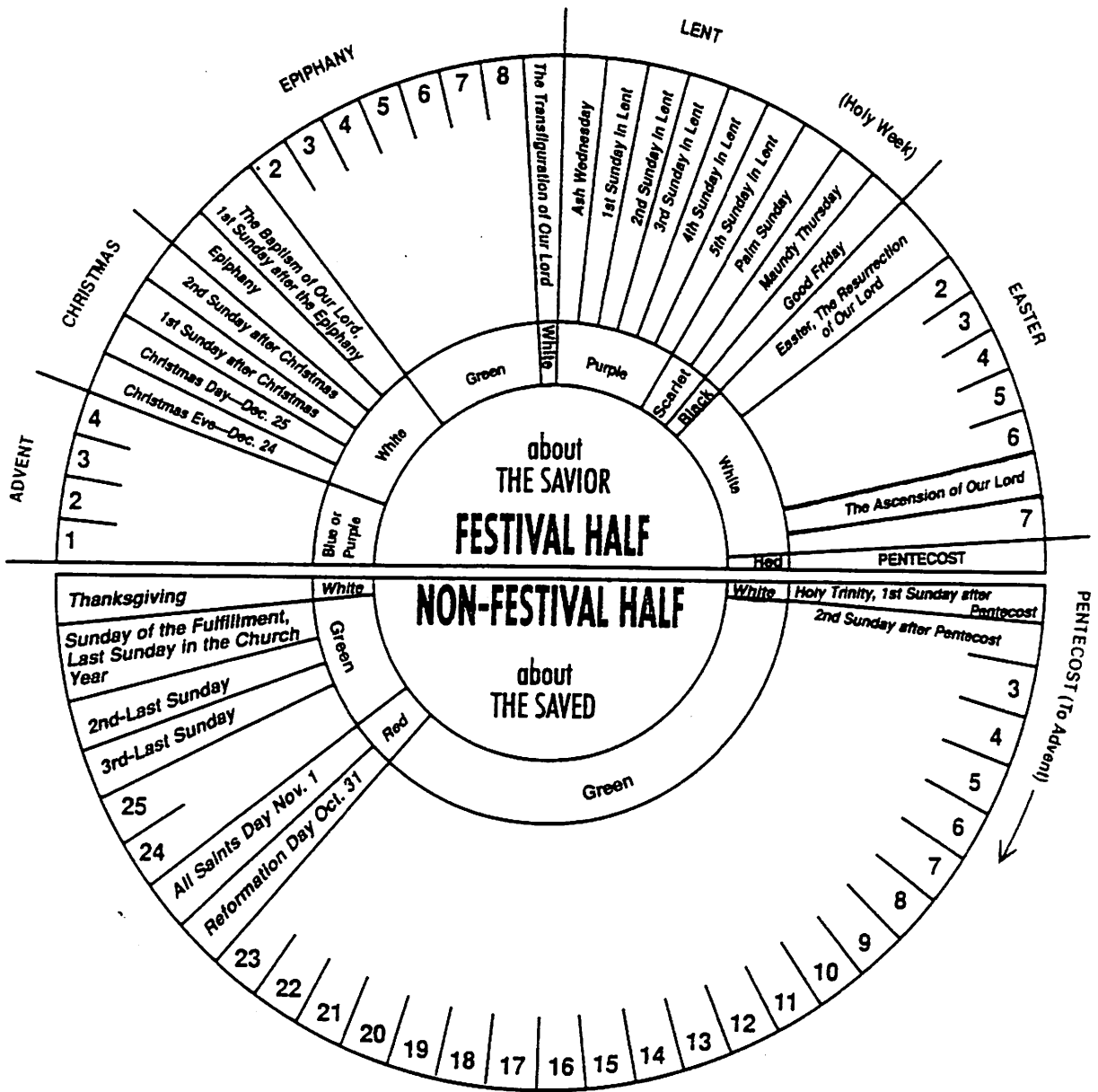
Who decides which selections will be read from the Gospel on a given Sunday? One possibility would be to simply start at the beginning, read through the first Gospel, then go on the second, and so on. Another would be to have the pastor pick appropriate readings. It is our custom to follow the readings suggested by what we call the church year.

THE CHURCH YEAR

Look to page eight in the front of the hymnal. The Sundays of the church year are arranged not by days and months, but by seasons. There are **readings suggested for each Sunday of the year**. Included are a one-year series, in which the same readings are read each year on a given Sunday, and also a three-year series, in which the lessons are unique for each of three years, after which the series starts over again. The three-year series was first introduced in the new Roman Missal in 1969. Lutherans and many other Protestants have adapted this series, with the revisions each has deemed necessary.

Look at the diagram of the church year. You will note that the first half of the year is called the "festival" half and we look at the life of Jesus. In the second half, which begins in early summer, we hear more about the teachings of Jesus. At this point, we are going to be looking at selected lessons from the church year to tell us more about Jesus, the second person of the Trinity.

THE CHURCH YEAR



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¹⁸Walter M. Schoedel and David W. Christian, *Worship Is: Celebrating as Lutherans* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), inside front cover.

FESTIVAL HALF (about our Savior)

ADVENT

Advent is a time of **preparation for Christmas**. And that doesn't mean simply buying and wrapping presents, decorating the house, and so on. We **prepare our hearts** by being reminded that ever since the fall into sin God had been promising to send a Messiah, or Savior, into the world. Look to Isaiah 52:13--53:12 as one of the most beautiful and clear of the Messianic prophecies. Some seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote of the one who would be despised and rejected by men, who would take our infirmities and be pierced for our transgressions. This suffering servant would not open his mouth to defend himself as he would be led like a lamb to the slaughter.

Fourth Sunday in Advent (B) Luke 1:26-38

On this day, which is the Sunday immediately before Christmas Day, we are reminded that Jesus' birth was not an ordinary happening but was according to the definite plan of God. Jesus was not to be born in the ordinary way, with a natural mother and father, but to a young woman who was truly a **virgin**. How this could happen is beyond our understanding. It is a miracle, showing that God is here at work in a special way.

What is the **Lutheran view of Mary**? Why not let Mary speak for herself? Look to the words which follow shortly after our text, Luke 1:46-55. (These words are the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday in Advent during year C.) Now look to page 255 in the hymnal. This service is called "Evening Prayer." We often use it during Lent. Here we have what is called the "Magnificat." These words are from Luke 1:46-55 and indicate Mary's reaction to her being chosen as the mother of the Christ-child.

Note that Mary considers herself a lowly servant who has been chosen by the grace of God for this special task. She recognizes that all generations will call her blessed, and so do we. **We give Mary honor and respect**, but we do not worship her or pray to her. We believe she was a virgin when she miraculously gave birth to Jesus, but that she and Joseph later had a normal marriage and probably other children in the traditional way. (Matt. 13:55-56 speaks of the Jesus' brothers and sisters.)

CHRISTMAS

Christmas Day (All) Luke 2:1-20

Note that these familiar words serve as the Gospel lesson for Christmas each year. Can you imagine hearing any other words at Christmas time? However, the Gospel for the Second Sunday after Christmas, John 1:1-18, adds an interesting perspective. The "Word" is another name for the second person of the Holy Trinity. The Son of God did not come into existence when he was born as a babe in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago. The Son has always been, along with the Father and the Spirit. He merely **took on human form** when he was born of Mary.

It is this "becoming one of us" that we celebrate, not only at Christmas, but throughout the year. In the *Gloria in Excelsis*, on page 160, we join with the angels in giving praise and glory to the one who was born into our world to be our Savior. This is one of the oldest hymns of the church, dating from the fourth century. It was originally sung only at the midnight mass on Christmas Eve. By about the year 500 A. D., it was commonly used every Sunday. At one time it was chanted, first in Greek and then repeated in Latin. Notice that it gives praise to all three persons of the Trinity. Luther said the Gloria "did not grow nor was it made on earth, but it came down from heaven." How appropriate that we sing these words shortly after we have heard the words of absolution. The peace that the angels sing of in Luke 2:14, and which we echo in this hymn of praise, can only come from having a right relationship with God.

EPIPHANY

The Epiphany of our Lord (All) Matt. 2:1-12

Epiphany means showing forth. During this season, which begins on January 6, we see the different ways in which Christ revealed himself to the world. The coming of the **wise men from the east** is more than just a nice Christmas story, it reveals that Christ had come to be a Savior for all nations.

The Baptism of our Lord (A) Matt. 3:13-17 (The First Sunday after the Epiphany)

Note how quickly the Christ-child has grown to manhood in the Scriptures. We are told very little about the thirty years after Jesus' birth. We can only conclude that he had a fairly normal childhood and young adult life,

but the details are not necessary for our salvation (remember the purpose of the Scriptures).

In these verses the thirty-year-old Jesus comes to the Jordan River to be **baptized by John the Baptizer**. Jesus did not need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, but he was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. Note that all three persons of the Trinity are clearly present at Jesus baptism.

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany (C) John 2:1-11

Here we find recorded the first of Jesus' **miracles**. The evangelist John refers to the miracles as "signs," or "distinguishing marks," which help us to see who Jesus really is. Jesus did not do miracles to show off or to seek attention. On this occasion he had compassion for those with a special need. At other times he healed those with various afflictions who came to him. He did not heal all those around him or solve all the problems of the world. That was not his purpose.

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany (B) Mark 1:14-20

Here Jesus calls Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John to be among his special followers. He would eventually choose twelve such men to be his disciples. Jesus sought to spend as much time with these men as he could, that they might be ready to proclaim the Gospel after his death, resurrection, and ascension. Note the call, "**Follow me.**" Are we as willing to heed that call?

The Transfiguration of Our Lord (C) Luke 9:28-36 (The Last Sunday after the Epiphany)

Here the disciples receive a **glimpse of the glory of Jesus**. It is time for Jesus to turn towards Jerusalem and the cross. He climbs a high mountain and is encouraged by the great Old Testament figures, Moses and Elijah. The three disciples who witnessed the event would never forget their glimpse of the glorified Christ (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

LENT

The **forty days** of Lent were originally a time of intense preparation for those new converts who would be baptized at Easter. While the purpose has changed somewhat, Lent continues to be a time for **reflection upon our own lives** as we consider Christ's work of redemption for the world. It is a **sober time**. Flowers are not used and the "alleluias" are not sung. But, even as we

do not really appreciate the absolution unless we have taken confession seriously, our Easter is more joyful if we have paid proper attention to Lent.

The First Sunday in Lent (C) Luke 4:1-13

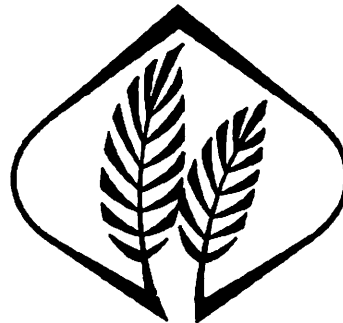
Jesus was tempted by Satan for forty days in the wilderness. This was not the first time, and it would not be the last, but it was a difficult test for Jesus. He passed. Indeed, he never sinned. During the season of Lent we are reminded of the temptations that we encounter and the times we frequently fail. If Jesus had failed this or any other test, he would have had to die on the cross for his own sins instead of ours.

The Second Sunday in Lent (B) Mark 8:31-38

Here we find spelled out the central theme of the Lenten season: **Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die on the cross** for the sins of the world. He makes known his intentions as clearly as anyone could. At this point, his disciples tried to discourage him from carrying out his mission. They couldn't understand what a Messiah and a cross could have in common. That is still a stumbling block for most of the world.

Palm Sunday (A) Matt. 21:1-11

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus had tried to mute the attention that he was receiving, as it was not yet time for him to die. But now the time was right. He allowed, even encouraged, his followers to greet him in such a way that was bound to attract the attention, and the opposition, of the Jewish religious leaders. As we sing the *Sanctus* (page 170) in preparation for the reception of the Lord's Supper, we recall the "hosannas" of the Palm Sunday procession.



Maundy Thursday (B) Mark 14:12-26

During the next days of what we call "holy week," Jesus taught openly among the people. **Plans were made to arrest him.** Because of his popularity among the people, the officials even involved **Judas**, one of Jesus' disciples, that Jesus might be taken at an opportune time.

For over a thousand years the Jewish people had observed an annual **Passover** celebration (reminding them of how God had delivered them out of bondage in Egypt). It was at this meal that Jesus must have shocked his

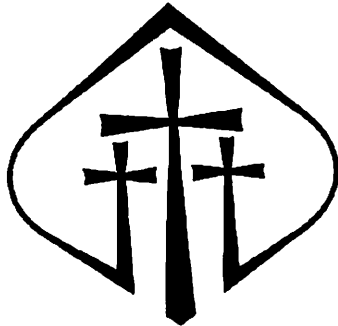
followers when he told them that the traditional bread and wine were now his body and blood, and they were to continue this custom in remembrance of him.

Good Friday (All) John 18:19--19:42

We are here reminded of the events of late Thursday and the day we call Good Friday. Jesus and his disciples left the upper room and went to a park-like place called the **Garden of Gethsemane**. It would be a quiet place for Jesus to pray. But he was soon disturbed by a band of soldiers, led by the traitor Judas and sent from the religious leaders. Peter sought to prevent them through use of his sword, but Jesus stopped Peter, for these events were necessary parts of God's plan of salvation.

Then follows a succession of **trials**, of a sort. For the whole picture we have to look at all of the Gospels, but here is described an initial hearing before Annas, the high priest emeritus, and then the secular hearing before Pontius Pilate. While the Jewish people hated the Roman officials, at the same time they understood that only the Romans had the power to execute. Here we find the **disciples fleeing**. Even Peter, who was so quick to speak, denied knowing Jesus when it appeared that his own life could be in danger.

Pilate readily perceived that Jesus had done nothing deserving of death and sought to appease the people through other tactics. When Pilate realized that nothing less than crucifixion would please the people, he gave in, for that was the easiest route for him.

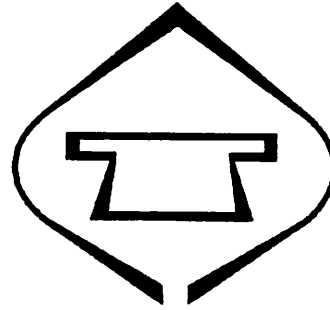


They led Jesus to a place called "**Golgotha**," or "the place of the skull." Here they crucified the worst criminals, alongside a main road that all might see the agony of their death and be warned not to end up in the same place. Jesus not only died for us, but he died the **miserable death of a criminal**. But Jesus' suffering was worse than the physical pain that a crucified criminal would experience, as revealed by Jesus' words from the cross in Matt. 27:46: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In experiencing this separation from his Father, Jesus experienced nothing less than hell upon the cross.

The reading from John closes with Jesus being hastily laid in a new tomb, since the Sabbath (no work day) was fast approaching.

You will note that this is a very long reading (but not half so long as the events of Good Friday must have seemed to Jesus). Since these verses have been read during the Wednesday Lenten services and many of them also on the previous Sunday, we do not normally read them all on Good Friday. We often follow an ancient service called **Tenebrae**, in which the chancel candles are gradually extinguished as the seven last words (phrases) from the cross are read.

The **altar** is a constant reminder of the Good Friday message. In the Old Testament, the Israelites used the altar in a very functional way. They burned grain and animal sacrifices upon it. This was to show their love for God and to atone (make amends) for their sins. But what they did there was limited. The priest making the offering on behalf of the people was himself sinful. These sacrifices, which had to be made again and again, pointed in a prophetic way to the great sacrifice referred to in the New Testament book of Hebrews. Christ, as a lamb without blemish, was sacrificed for our sins--once and for all. **It is the altar that reminds us of the sacrifice which Christ made through his death on the cross.**



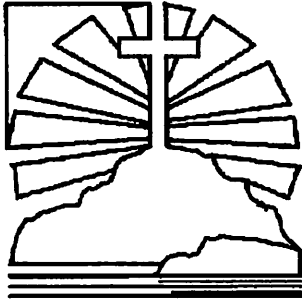
In our churches the altar always occupies the **most prominent spot in the church building**. This is in contrast to some denominations in which the altar is seemingly nothing more than a convenient table placed below the more important symbol--the pulpit. Paul H. D. Lang writes:

...the altar is the symbol of God's presence. It symbolizes the place where God and his people meet. Our Lord Himself refers to the altar as a symbol of God in Matt. 5:23 and 23:18-20. **The altar stands for God as our flag stands for our country.** That is why we direct our worship to the altar and reverence it by bowing, genuflecting, and kneeling. That is also the reason why the altar itself, and not any of its surroundings or ornaments, such as crucifix, reredos, pulpit, or any other object, is in matter of location and all other considerations the focal point and center of the church's worship and the church building.¹⁹

¹⁹Paul H. D. Lang, *Ceremony and Celebration* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 26.

EASTER

Easter Sunday (C) Luke 24:1-11



It all seems so simple. After all the busy, complicated events of Holy Week, the **tomb was empty on Sunday morning**. Jesus had risen from the grave. This is our proof that his sacrifice was acceptable for our sins. But notice the final verse. When the apostles first heard these words from the women, they thought it was an idle tale. They did not believe them. That has been the challenge ever since. The Gospel seems too good to be true. We adulterate the pure grace of God with our own "common sense" interpretations.

An important symbol of Easter in Christian churches is the **cross**. Where some churches display a **crucifix** (a cross with a representation of the crucified Christ upon it), others feature a plain cross, as a reminder that we worship the resurrected Christ. The crucifix dates from about the sixth century. Until the 11th century such crucifixes featured the figure of the victorious Christ rather than the anguished Christ of the Middle Ages.²⁰

Some reformers felt compelled to do away with all images which Roman Catholics had customarily placed in their churches. For Luther this was a matter of personal choice. Images were wrong only if used in the wrong way, as would be the case if they led to idolatrous worship.²¹

Have you noticed that the cross in our sanctuary is different from most? Upon it we have an image of Christ the King, which is reminder that Christ conquered the cross for us. In Christian freedom, we can use any of these forms of the cross. Which do you prefer?

One day a year is not enough to celebrate the great news of the resurrection. Note that the Easter season actually lasts seven weeks. We have the second Sunday "of" (not "after") Easter, and so forth. This is a special season of joy in the church. Indeed, **every Sunday is designed to be a mini-celebration of Easter**. Look to the words which the pastor speaks at the

²⁰Norma and Burton Everist, "Since You Asked" *The Lutheran* (May 1992), 60.

²¹LW, 40:84.

beginning of the communion liturgy on pages 145-46 in *Lutheran Worship*. This "common preface" (note also the "proper" prefaces for specific seasons) reads: **"...through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who on this day overcame death and the grave and by his glorious resurrection opened to us the way of eternal life."**

The Ascension of Our Lord (All) Luke 24:50-53

During the forty days after his resurrection, Jesus appeared frequently to his disciples, and to hundreds of others. Undoubtedly, he wanted his followers to realize that he really was alive. This was not a fanciful story or the hallucination of a few. Then, ascending into heaven, he left them. The text states that they were joyful. Do you think they might have been a bit anxious as well? Why do you think Jesus ascended into heaven, rather than staying and directing the Gospel mission?

Read the second paragraph of the Apostles' Creed (page 167). Note that this pretty well summarizes the lessons we have been reviewing. We did not say anything about the descent into hell, for this is not dealt with extensively in the Holy Scriptures. But we do want to say this much: Christ did not go there to suffer, but to proclaim his victory over Satan. The last two references (sitting on the right hand of the Father, and coming to judge the living and the dead) are themes that are picked up in the last portion of the church year, which we will look at next.

NON-FESTIVAL HALF OF THE CHURCH YEAR (About the saved)

The lessons we have already looked at have given us a survey of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, but we are only half way through the year. The Gospels in the second, or non-festival, half of the year look at the miracles, parables, and teachings of Jesus. This half of the year begins around the first of June and lasts until the beginning of Advent, about the first of December. Look at some representative Gospel lessons from this part of the year.

The Third Sunday after Pentecost (C) Luke 7:11-17

Jesus shows his power over death itself in raising the widow's son from the dead.

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (A) Matt. 16:13-20

Jesus asks his disciples if they know who he really is. Peter responds in faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (B) Mark 12:41-44

Jesus points to the poor widow as a beautiful example of giving.

Third-last Sunday in the Church Year (A) Matt. 24:15-28

The last Sundays in the church year look at Christ's teachings concerning the end of the world and his second coming.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. It is possible for people to believe in Christ as their Savior without believing him to be God.
2. Jesus was like every other human being except that he was sinless.
3. A Christian is a person who believes that Jesus was the perfect human being they must imitate.
4. Jesus grew up like any other child.
5. Jesus saved us by living a sinless life.
6. The Jews were responsible for Jesus' death.
7. Jesus would have escaped if it hadn't been for Judas.
8. Jesus could have saved himself by coming down from the cross.
9. The devil does not believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world.
10. While Easter is one of the best attended services of the year, attendance on Good Friday is not nearly so high. Why do you think that is?

CHAPTER FIVE

WE WORSHIP GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

WHO IS THE SPIRIT?

Although it may be inaccurate, most of us have some kind of picture in our mind of God the Father. It is even easier for us to picture God the Son, Jesus. Though there were not cameras in the first century and we do not have any paintings of him from that era, we know that Jesus looked "something" like we do. He was probably a little shorter than men today, with dark hair and eyes. His complexion would most likely have the olive cast typical of people of Mediterranean areas. Our specific pictures are only artists' renditions, but they probably are not too far off.

Now picture in your mind God the Holy Spirit. Is that tougher? What is a spirit anyway? **A spirit is a being without a body.** At first that may seem limiting, but when you think about it, it is the other way around. Our bodies give us aches and pains. Our bodies wear out with use and age. As physical beings we can be in only one place at a time. The Spirit has none of these limitations.

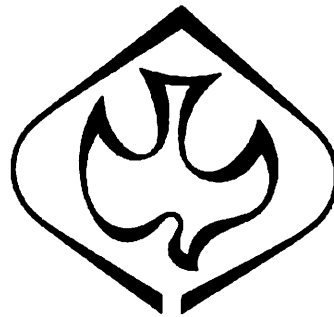
Do you know the difference between the **Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit**? Of course, there is none. We more often say "Spirit" today because of some rather odd connotations that have attached themselves to the term "ghost." We think of white sheets. We think of being haunted. We think of Casper, or perhaps Ghostbusters. The word still means a being without a physical body but, because of all these odd associations, Christians have gradually come to use "spirit" more often. The word means the same thing, but does not have all the extra baggage.

THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT

Look to Acts 2:1-12. This is a description of the magnificent events of the first **Pentecost**. After the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples were sad and afraid. After his resurrection and ascension, they were joyful, but still somewhat confused and afraid. They waited in Jerusalem for the power that would come to them through the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised.

The disciples knew that the Spirit was present and working on the day of Pentecost. They heard a sound "like" the blowing of a violent wind. (It does not say there was wind.) The term which we translate spirit, or ghost, means literally wind or breath. What "seemed to be" tongues of fire came to rest on each of them. From this image, fire is often used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. And then the disciples began to preach in languages they had never learned, with the result that visitors from foreign lands could understand what they were saying about Jesus. Note that we know the **Spirit was present through certain outward signs**, not through the coming of a physical person.

This of course was not the first appearance of the Spirit. Look to Genesis 1:1-2. The Spirit, as an intrinsic part of the Triune God, was **present at creation**. In Matt. 3:16 we find that the Spirit descends in the form of a dove at the **baptism of Jesus**. Hence another popular symbol for the Spirit, that of the **dove**. When we "picture" the Spirit, we must think in terms of the Spirit, for the Spirit is just that, a spirit.



THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

We are going to spend more time on the work of the Spirit, which is the most important thing for us. Look to the **Third Article** of the Apostle's Creed on page 301. (This is the older rendering of the creed, in which we still say "Ghost.") The meaning describes the Spirit in terms of his work: "**even as He calls, gathers, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.**" We will now look in detail at each of these phrases.

The Holy Spirit calls us to faith

In 1 Cor. 12:3 we read, "**No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.**" As Lutherans we take these words seriously. We give all glory to God. It is God the Father who created us. God the Son died on the cross for our forgiveness. Now God the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to convince us to put our faith in Jesus as our Savior. We believe that "**I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, . . .**" We will shortly be looking at this in more detail and seeing that the Spirit calls through the Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

Although the Spirit calls, he does not force us to believe. Consider an illustration from choosing sides for a ball game:

One of the captains calls your name. You, of course, can say no. You then suffer the consequences of not playing. Or, you can simply respond to his choosing. Then you are on his side. "I've been chosen," you say as you line up with your captain.²²

Lutherans do not generally speak of making a "**decision**" for Christ. That gives too much credit to ourselves. It is God the Holy Spirit who calls us through the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Because of our sinful human nature, we do not believe that we could even respond in a positive way--except by the Holy Spirit.

It is for this reason that Lutherans traditionally do not have "**altar calls**." While it could be argued that people only respond because the Holy Spirit has led them to do so, the tradition of altar calls has been so permeated with what can be called "decision theology," that we generally avoid the practice. Too often, the response is at least partially due to the emotion which has been manipulated by many human factors (e.g., music, others responding, human urging, and the like). All credit must go to God the Holy Spirit for enabling us to say "yes" to his calling.

The Holy Spirit gathers us together with other Christians

While God in the Old Testament set aside a special Sabbath day for the purpose of rest and worship, he has not done so in the New Testament. The command is simply to **worship**, which it is hoped we do through every act and thought of our lives.

But God also knows that we need the support and encouragement of fellow Christians, hence the caution "**not to give up meeting together**," as apparently some were already in the habit of doing (Heb. 10:25). We worship not because we are doing God a favor or because he requires it, but because we know what Christ has done for us. The German word for worship is *Gottesdienst*, which is rendered in English as "**Divine Service**." We come to worship to receive the gifts God offers to us. How have you been blessed through the divine service?

²²Norbert Oesch, *Invited by God: Basics of the Christian Faith--Teachers Guide* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 15.

The Holy Spirit enlightens us with his gifts

In many ways, the Bible is a very easy book to understand. We read John 3:16 or Eph. 2:8-9, and the story of our salvation is spelled out for us in a few words. Little children know that Jesus loved them so much he died on the cross that they might go to heaven. But as adults, we have a yearning to grow in our faith, to learn more about our Lord. As we dig into the Scriptures, we pray that the Spirit will help us to understand what we read.

The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed reminds us that God the Holy Spirit carries on his work within "the holy Christian church, the communion²³ of saints," where the Gospel is proclaimed. Martin Luther writes of the importance of the church:

In the first place, he [the Holy Spirit] has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it he illumines and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.²⁴

The pastor of the church has the opportunity and privilege to spend time in a seminary to study the Word of God. Not everyone has the opportunity to do so. That is why the Lord calls upon pastors to help others in their understanding and growth. In Luke 10:16 we find the words of the Lord to the seventy-two disciples he was sending out to proclaim the Gospel: "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." **The Holy Spirit works through pastors and other teachers to help us to understand the Scriptures.**

The Scriptures speak of certain **gifts of the Spirit** which are given to individual Christians to build up the body of Christ, his church. Read Rom. 12:6-8 and 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28-30. Note that it says that different gifts are given to different people. The Spirit has given you a gift or gifts that he would have you identify and use for the glory of God. Notice that some of these are familiar gifts, such as teaching, serving, leadership, and the like; but others are

²³Luther suggests that this could best be understood as "community of saints," meaning the coming together of forgiven sinners. He writes: "It is nothing but a comment or interpretation by which someone wished to explain what the Christian church is." LC, Creed, 49.

²⁴LC, Creed, 42.

perhaps less familiar: working miracles, healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and interpreting these tongues.

In some places these latter gifts have brought about a great deal of controversy. This has happened most especially when these gifts have been used in the wrong way or been held up as more important than other gifts (or even as the mark of a true Christian). The Holy Spirit has given you a special gift or gifts (most likely one of the more "ordinary" ones). **Use the gifts he has given you!**

The Holy Spirit sanctifies Christians

"Sanctify" is a word that means "**make holy.**" Most of us do not think of ourselves as very holy, but remember, we are **forgiven through the blood of Christ.** Now the Holy Spirit helps us to live a life which is more in keeping with our new status as "sons and daughters of the King." Having heard the Word of God proclaimed in the worship service, we respond with our offerings and also our whole life, as we rise to sing in what is called the **offertory** (page 143 in *Lutheran Worship*):

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit.

Recall that these were the words of King David, which have come down to us in Psalm 51. He was asking for the strength to live a life more pleasing to our Lord. We too have such a desire. And it is the Holy Spirit who helps us in this endeavor. Read Gal. 5:22-23. These qualities are called **fruits of the Spirit**, in the sense that they are natural things that come forth from one who has experienced the love and forgiveness of our Lord. Because of sin, we manifest these qualities imperfectly at this time. Won't heaven be wonderful!

The Holy Spirit keeps us in the faith

Some religions believe "**once saved, always saved.**" They believe that if a person professes Christ and is baptized, he cannot fall from the faith. When asked about examples of certain people where that apparently was not the case, they will simply reply that theirs must not have been a sincere conversion. While that may be true in some cases, as Lutherans we believe that **anyone can be lost.** This is certainly not God's will. He desires that all

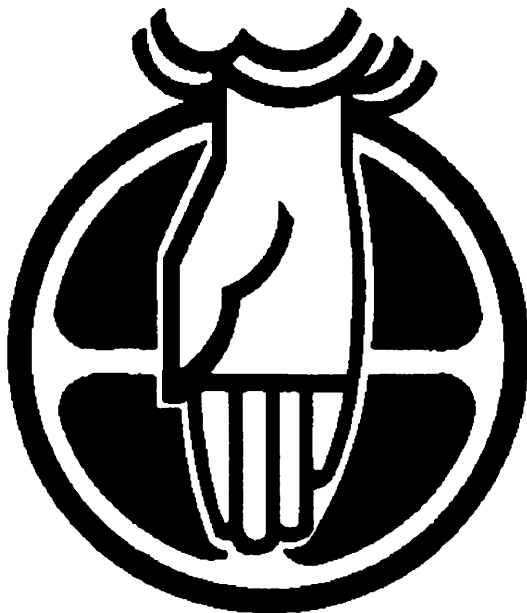
would be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). But God does not force this. While he sends the Spirit to call us to faith, some resist the calling (Acts 7:51), either before or after Baptism. Read Matt. 24:10. Many will fall away in times of tribulation. We need the Holy Spirit to help us to continue to believe.

In the next unit, we will be looking more specifically at how the Holy Spirit works in our lives, through the Word and Sacraments, to keep us in faith. For now we are content to give worship and praise to our grace-full God who comes to us as Father, Son, and Spirit. Perhaps this can be summed up by the word "**Hallelujah,**" or "**Alleluia,**" which is found in many places in our worship. It is from the Hebrew, and simply means "praise the Lord." In some traditions hallelujahs are shouted out spontaneously during the worship service. As Lutherans, we are a bit more reserved than that, but no less enthusiastic about giving praise to our God, who comes to us as Father, Son, and Spirit.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Some accuse God of being cruel because "He will send some people to hell." In the light of God being both just and merciful, discuss this accusation.
2. Believing that God loves them is no great problem for people.
3. Jesus also paid for the sins of those who go to hell.
4. To believe in Jesus Christ simply means to accept as true everything the Bible says about him.
5. Believers do good works to show they deserve eternal life.
6. If I trust in Jesus as my Savior and desire to follow him as my Lord, then I can know that I have been converted.

SECTION THREE
THE MEANS OF GOD'S GRACE
(Baptism, Holy Communion)



CHAPTER SIX

THE WORD OF GOD

In this section, we continue to consider how the Holy Spirit offers us the blessings of Christ and works faith in our hearts. While we readily concede that the Holy Spirit can and does work in any way he wishes, we have also observed that he has consistently **worked through the (written and spoken) Word and the Sacraments**. He does not seem to give people special revelations apart from his Word. We do not hear of people from heathen nations all of a sudden becoming believers in Christ, with no previous contact with his Word.

Martin Luther writes:

We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it was achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once and for all on the cross. But the **distribution takes place continuously**, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world.²⁵

In this unit we will be looking at those means, or ways, in which the Holy Spirit brings God's grace to us--the Word and Sacraments.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

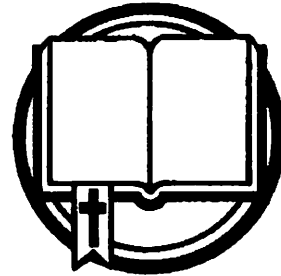
It was Jesus' custom to attend services in the synagogue. There he would hear the (Old Testament) Law and Prophets read and expounded upon. In Luke 4:16-21 we find that he is the one doing this. The books of the **Old**

²⁵LW 40:213-14.

Testament had been written in the Hebrew language over some one thousand years. They told the story of God working among his people.

In John 1 we find Jesus identified as "the Word." Indeed, as God took on human flesh, this revelation was far more valuable than any written word. Jesus taught some new things and clarified others. We can assume there were few notes taken at first. If his followers would later wonder about something he had said, they could always ask for clarification. Even after his death, there would be plenty of followers who would be able to recall the actual teachings of Jesus. But as time went on, memories sometimes faded, and so it became necessary to write down words about the Word (Jesus). In Luke 1 we read that Luke carefully investigated all the accounts of Jesus, that others might have an orderly account. Much of the **New Testament** is made up of epistles, or letters, written by the early apostles (in the Greek language).

We believe that the Bible is a book different from any other ever written. We believe that since it was **inspired by God** (2 Tim. 3:16) it is **true** (John 17:17) and **without error**. That does not mean that we have interpreted everything correctly or that there might not have been errors over the years in copying or translation (which we believe to be very minimal), but that the Scriptures as originally given were without error. While this belief used to be universal among Christians, that is no longer the case. Many pick and choose from those sections of Scriptures that seem to be most to their liking, discounting other sections as pious fabrications. When we start doing that, we have lost the Bible as an authoritative base for our beliefs.



THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN WORSHIP

Because we have a high view of Scripture, we give it a place of prominence in our worship services. We have already discussed the place of the Gospel lesson. We also include a reading from the Old Testament, which is taken from the lectionary (system of readings) we are following. The **Old Testament lessons** are chosen to complement the Gospel readings. The second lesson read is the **Epistle lesson**, drawn from one of the New Testament letters. These writings explain what the historical events of the Gospels mean. During certain seasons (such as Advent, Lent, and Easter), and also on special festival days, they are chosen to complement the Gospel and Epistle; however, during most of the year, the Epistle readings are taken consecutively from certain books, that their continuity might be maintained.

Already by the year 150 A.D., a complete system of Epistles and Gospels was in use. While the selections can, and do, change over the years, the Word must be proclaimed! Sometimes it has been assumed that the reading of the Scripture could be minimized, for everyone knew the message. It was in those times and places that the church was caught up in one heresy after another.

In addition to those parts of the service in which the actual texts of the Scripture are used (the lessons, psalms, and canticles), the service is sprinkled with Biblical words and expressions. We say **amen** to register our assent to the word being proclaimed. We sing **alleluia** to our Lord, as well as **holy, holy, holy**. Indeed, many words and phrases in the liturgy of the Church are taken from the Bible. Note these examples from Divine Service I (in many cases, the Biblical translation will vary):

Matt. 28:19 **"...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"** (page 136)

Ps. 32:5 **"I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin."** (page 136)

Luke 2:14 **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."** (page 138)

Phil. 4:7 **"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** (page 143)

Ps. 51:10-12 **"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore me to the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."** (page 143)

Matt. 15:22 **"...have mercy on me!"** (page 144)

1 Cor.
11:23-25 **"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink of it in remembrance of me.'"** (page 150)

- John 1:29** "Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (page 151)
- Luke 2:29-32** "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (page 152)
- Ps. 136:1** "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good." (page 153)
- Num. 6:24-26** "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." (page 155)

Divine Service II also contains most of these references, as well as additional references:

- 1 John 1:8-9** "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins." (page 158)
- John 6:68** "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (page 164)
- Ps. 145:8** "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love." (page 165)

In addition to these examples which take the words of Scripture almost verbatim (excluding translation differences), most of the rest of the liturgy uses the language, imagery, and thought patterns of Scripture.

THE SERMON

It is through the sermon that the pastor, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, applies the Word of God to the contemporary situation. Martin Luther wrote:

A Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God's Word and prayer, no matter how briefly, as Psalm 102 says, "When the kings and the people assemble to serve the Lord, they shall declare the name and praise of God." And Paul in 1 Cor. 14[:26-31] says that when they came together, there should be prophesying, teaching, and

admonition. Therefore, when God's Word is not preached, one had better neither sing, nor read, or even come together.²⁶

How do you think the **pastor goes about writing a sermon**? The first step is **prayer**, that the Holy Spirit might guide and direct. Then the pastor will **study the Scripture lessons** appointed for the day, ideally in the original languages. As he does this, he will keep in mind the **needs of the congregation**, community, and world, and seek to **apply God's Word** to the contemporary situation. But, note that the beginning point is the Word. If that were not so, a pastor's sermons could easily degenerate into a series based on his pet peeves or opinions on certain favorite issues. But let's not put all the responsibility upon the pastor. Not every pastor is going to be able to speak like Billy Graham. It is easy to criticize. Better for the person in the congregation to be actively listening, interacting, and seeking to apply the words to his or her own life.

Note that the sermon traditionally begins with the familiar greeting of St. Paul, "**Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.**" It closes with the words from Phil. 4:7, "**The peace of God which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**" According to Luther, the sermon is more than talking about the acts of God; it is God's revelatory activity.

READING SCRIPTURE AS LAW AND GOSPEL

In the Lutheran confessional writings we read:

All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises [Gospel]. In some places it presents the law. In others the promise of Christ; this it does either when it promises that the Messiah will come and promises forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life. By "law" in this discussion we mean the commandments of the Decalogue, wherever they appear in the Scriptures.²⁷

Of these two, Law and Gospel, the Law is the easier to comprehend. God tells us what to do and what not to do. It is much harder to actually follow the Law, as we have seen earlier. We would prefer to make excuses or to put the blame upon someone else. But through the Law, the Holy Spirit

²⁶LW 53:11.

²⁷Apology IV, 5.

shows us our sins and our need for God's forgiveness. As we are convicted by the Law, we find it is no longer possible to trust in our own goodness for salvation.

While the Law teaches what we are to do and not to do, the Gospel teaches what God has done, and still does, for our salvation. Read Phil. 2:5-11 (the Epistle for Palm Sunday) as a beautiful reminder of how God came into our world to win salvation for us. Would Jesus' action be something like this illustration?

Imagine yourself having pity on slugs and having the power to become one of them. Because of your love and pity, you would not use your power as a human being as you become a slug just to help them. Then imagine that, after doing so, the slugs reject you, even kill you--and before you determined to take on their nature you knew very well that that might happen!²⁸

Sometimes it is easy to confuse Law and Gospel, by mixing together our actions and God's actions. Would you consider the following to be Law or Gospel statements?

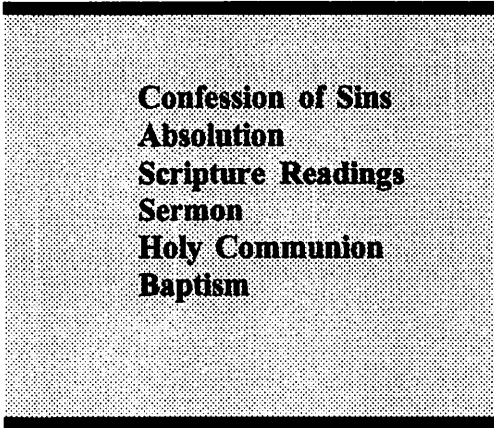
1. You should show your love for Jesus by giving a tenth of your income as an offering.
2. Jesus died on the cross for our forgiveness.
3. I cannot believe that he calls himself a Christian.
4. Remember, you better be good children. Jesus is watching while I'm gone.
5. Jesus loves me, this I know.
6. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
7. Because God is the all-powerful, almighty creator of all things in heaven and on earth, we ought to listen to his Word and do whatever he tells us to do.
8. Jesus won't love you if you don't say you are sorry.

²⁸Oesch, 10.

9. Heaven is a gift of God.

When we speak of what we are to do, no matter how loving it may sound, we are speaking in Law terms. Law and Gospel are each gifts of God. While designed to complement each other, they dare not be confused.

Both Law and Gospel are proclaimed in the worship service. Which do you think would predominate in these segments of the service?



Confession of Sins
Absolution
Scripture Readings
Sermon
Holy Communion
Baptism

As a summary of the important place of the Word of God in the worship service and in our lives, look to the **Collect for the Word** from Divine Service I (page 156):

Blessed Lord, since you have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn and take them to heart that by the patience and comfort of your holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

SPENDING TIME IN THE SCRIPTURES

Do you eat only once a week? What happens when we receive only a portion of God's Word in church on Sunday mornings? Consider these suggestions for daily Bible study:

1. **Use a fitting translation.** We can rejoice that we have many good translations available today. The *New International Version* is one that many prefer, because it is accurate and very readable. Use the translation that is most helpful to you.

2. **Set aside a definite place and time each day for study and prayer.** We are creatures of habit, why not develop some good ones?
3. **Begin with prayer for the Holy Spirit and understanding.** The Holy Spirit wants to help.
4. **Use a system that works for you.** Many use a guide, like *Portals of Prayer*, while others choose to read through a book at a time.
5. **Consciously focus on each word and seek understanding.** Ask questions as you go along. Try to picture the events in your mind. Mark key verses in your Bible.
6. **Meditate on God's Word throughout the day.** Consider how his Word applies to your daily life.²⁹

FOR DISCUSSION

1. No word spoken or written by people should be called the Word of God.
2. "The Bible says" should clinch every argument.
3. Christians believe in Jesus because they believe that the Bible is true.
4. Understanding the Bible is not a problem for educated people.

²⁹Adapted from Forest L. Bivens and David J. Valleskey, *New Life in Christ* (Milwaukee: Board for Parish Education, Wisconsin Evangelical Synod, 1986), 53.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BAPTISM

BAPTISM IS A SACRAMENT

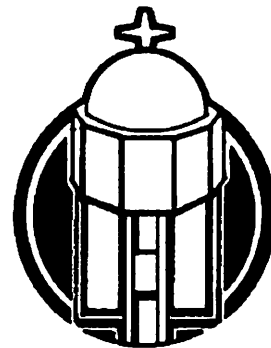
Having seen that the Holy Spirit brings grace to us through the Word, we will now consider how he does the same through the Sacraments. The literal meaning of sacrament is simply "sacred act." The term comes to us from the Latin Bible where it is used to translate the word for "mystery."

Since the Council of Florence in 1439, the Roman Catholic Church has taught that grace is given through seven sacraments: 1) Baptism, 2) Holy Communion, 3) absolution, 4) marriage, 5) confirmation, 6) ordination, and 7) last rites. Martin Luther objected that some of these things are not even mentioned in the Scriptures, much less with any promise of grace.

Lutherans have traditionally defined sacraments as those things that:

- 1) have been **instituted by God**,
- 2) in which God himself has joined his Word of promise to a **visible element**, and
- 3) by which God offers, gives, and seals the **forgiveness** of sins earned by Christ.

Since the definition itself is an arbitrary one, the Lutheran Church has left the question of the number of sacraments open. However, we usually speak of two sacred acts which meet this criteria: Baptism and Holy Communion. If we drop the requirement for a visible element, confession and absolution could (and sometimes has) be considered a sacrament as well. We have already considered the blessings of confession and absolution. In this unit we will consider how the Spirit works through Baptism.



INSTITUTION OF BAPTISM

Look to the order for Holy Baptism on page 199 in *Lutheran Worship*. As we look at section two, we are reminded that our Lord commanded Baptism in what we call the Great Commission:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore **go and 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 obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matt. 28:18-20

Some believe that the real institution of Baptism came not with this command, but came when **Jesus allowed himself to be baptized** by John. Read Matt. 3:13-17: The baptism of John was similar to the standard practice of baptizing Gentiles who converted to the Jewish faith. They believed that to become a true Israelite, it was necessary to repent of one's sin and make radical changes in ones life. Jesus had no need to repent, but was baptized that he might accomplish everything that we were to have done, "to fulfill all righteousness," as Matthew puts it.

But Christian baptism would be much more than this Jewish custom. Even John could only point ahead to the one who would bring forgiveness. Those who had only received John's baptism would later be baptized with baptism in the name of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 19:1-5).

FORGIVENESS THROUGH BAPTISM

Note the last four words of the first paragraph in section two (page 199): "**Baptism now saves you.**" We rejoice that in Baptism, God creates saving faith. However, these words are offensive to many, who would argue that only faith, not baptism can save. But the words are Scriptural, drawn from 1 Peter 3:21. To be sure, salvation comes from the resurrection of Christ (and that is all spelled out in the next paragraph), but Baptism is one of those means whereby that grace comes to us. This is in contrast to the belief of many Protestants which would see Baptism as merely a sign of the grace of God. As Lutherans we believe that God's grace literally comes to us in the sacrament of Baptism. Read also Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, and Titus 3:5.

The blessings that are ours are summed up in part II of Luther's explanation of Baptism in the Small Catechism:

It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

These blessings are symbolized by the white napkin given to the newly baptized. We read on page 203 of *Lutheran Worship*: "Receive this **white garment** to show that Christ has taken away and borne your sin and put upon you his perfect righteousness." This image is drawn from Gal. 3:27, in which the baptized are referred to as those who have clothed themselves with Christ. The presentation of such a garment has long tradition in the Western church. At one time, and still in some places, a poncho-like garment was put on the newly baptized.

Since Jesus said, "Baptize," we baptize. It is not optional! We read in Mark 16:16, "**Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.**" While we can think of situations in which it is not possible to baptize (the thief on the cross, a still-born child, and the like), these are exceptional circumstances. In normal cases we believe that baptism is an essential part of our salvation.

Minimizing God's grace

As always with the pure Gospel, there are attempts to add human elements. The "Enlightenment" view of the sacraments led some to look upon them as human actions which we perform in order to help us to remember God's actions in the past. Then the primary focus is placed upon "me," in the sense of my worthiness, my understanding, my commitments, and my experiences. Calling Baptism an "**ordinance**" can reinforce this view. An ordinance is a law, pointing out what we must do.

Lutherans never use the term ordinance, preferring sacrament, which points to the grace of God. That is not to say that those who call Baptism an ordinance do not believe in the grace of God, but they do not believe that it comes through Baptism. Baptism is sometimes thought of as the way in which the believer confirms his previous decision to accept Jesus. Then Baptism is seen as an illustration of God's work, rather than as God in action.

When one talks about the necessity of a prior faith on the part of the one to be baptized, one is again lifting up a human element, rather than simply rejoicing in the faith that God works through baptism.

Others speak of Baptism in a way that can easily minimize its power and importance. Calling it a "**dedication**" or "**christening**" could have such

an effect. Dedicating the child to the glory of God is a good thing to do, and we certainly want to give the child a name (we even do that for ships). But we need to be careful that such terms do not reduce Baptism to a nice ceremony merely reminding parents of their responsibilities. With such thinking, Baptism becomes little more than a ritual, with the real work to be done later in confirmation class or through an adult conversion experience.

In another tradition, the faith of the church is seen as taking the place of the faith of the child being baptized. While we as Lutherans also involve the entire congregation and have them speak the words of the Apostles' Creed, this in no way bestows faith upon the child. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Normally, the called pastor of the congregation does the baptizing. This is for good order and that accurate records might be maintained. When that is not possible, any Christian may baptize. Note the form for emergency Baptism on page 312 in *Lutheran Worship*. Notice how short it is. Actually, the applying water in the name of the Triune God in section two is the only essential part. Everything else in this form, and in the longer normal form, is for our edification. Note section four. Such a Baptism should be immediately reported to the pastor, that it might be properly recorded.

The New Testament really says very little about how we are to go about Baptism. It does say a great deal about what God works in Baptism: forgiveness of sins, rebirth, cleansing, death, refreshment, resurrection, adoption, light, and the like.

WATER AND THE WORD

But how can water do such great things? Note Luther's answer in the Small Catechism (part III of Baptism):

It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost...

Martin Luther also wrote:

In all of his promises, moreover, in addition to the word, God has usually given a sign, for the greater assurance and strengthening of our faith. Thus he gave Noah the sign of the rainbow [Gen. 9:12-17]. To Abraham he gave circumcision as

a sign [Gen. 17:11]. To Gideon he gave the rain on the ground and the fleece [Judg. 6:36–40]. So we constantly find in the Scriptures many of these signs, given along with the promises. For in this way also worldly testaments are made; not only are the words written down, but seals and the marks of notaries are affixed, so that it may always be binding and authentic.³⁰

We use water in Baptism because God commanded it as a **help for our faith**. But at the same time we recognize that the Word is of greater importance. The Word would have just as much power without the water, but the water would be, and is, simple ordinary water without the Word. That does not mean that the water is unimportant or optional, for God has commanded its use in the Sacrament.

It is unfortunate that we, as human beings, sometimes give undue time and attention to less important matters. Such is the case when we spend a great deal of time on the subject of **how the water is to be applied** in baptism. The word we translate "baptism" is used in the Greek New Testament to refer to special religious washings, but it is also used to describe the use of water for other purposes. In Mark 7:4 the same word is used to refer to the washing of cups, utensils, and bronze vessels. We are told in Luke 11:38 that the Pharisees complained because Jesus did not wash (baptize) before dinner. The term baptism simply means to wash by applying water.

When Jesus was baptized he was most likely immersed, following the pattern of the Jewish religious washings. Most in the early church were adult converts and were likely also baptized by **immersion**. It was, as the pattern became more and more that of infant Baptism, that the norm became sprinkling or pouring. Such was especially the case in cold, drafty, medieval cathedrals—the infant mortality rate was high enough the way it was.

While Luther personally preferred total immersion for its symbolic value, most Lutherans have practiced sprinkling or pouring as opposed to immersion. This is in contrast to the Eastern Church which continued to immerse, looking to Rom. 6:4 (being buried with Christ) as a key verse. Lutherans are not opposed to Baptism by immersion, but they give priority to the Word and promises of God which we receive with that water.

Holy water was designed to be, and can be, a reminder of our Baptisms. Lutherans do not use it because too often it became an end in and

³⁰LW 35:86.

of itself, rather than something which pointed to the Word and promises of God.

WE BECOME PART OF GOD'S FAMILY THROUGH BAPTISM

From first to last, Baptism is God's gift. Note how we begin the order for Baptism on page 199 in *Lutheran Worship*: "**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**" In ancient times "into the name" referred to an entry made into an individual's account. The person baptized thus becomes God's property and has the promise of his protection. In old rabbinical writings, the same phrase referred to the one who brought about the event. It is the Triune God who brings about the blessings of Baptism. As we hear these words at the beginning of other worship services, we are reminded of the blessings which are ours through Baptism.

While some would seem to feel that God owes them this or that, because of mankind's fall into sin, none of us has any right to a relationship with God. God owes us nothing. We are not part of God's family by virtue of our birth. It was out of pure grace that God came into our world to die on the cross, that the family might be restored. It is through Baptism that we are adopted into God's family.

Norbert Oesch centers his entire adult instruction course around this theme of **adoption**. He looks at certain similarities between adopting a child and our adoption by God through Baptism:

1) A fee must be paid. For adoptive parents this may include hospital, agency, and attorney fees. God paid dearly to adopt us, as Luther wrote in the Second Article: "not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death."

2) Documents must be signed, and with that signing the adoptee takes on the name of the family. Little John Doe becomes Jonathan Smith, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Smith. In Baptism we receive the name *Christian*. God's signature is the water applied in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3) The rights of the child are also established. A human adoption establishes the right of the child to be cared for, corrected and disciplined in love. The child also becomes the heir of his parents' estate. Most Christian churches use the

Lord's Prayer in conjunction with the sacrament of Baptism. We could not dare to pray that prayer, except that the Father has become just that to us through Baptism. God promises to care for us (Matt. 6), discipline us in love (Heb. 12), and to provide us with the inheritance of everlasting life (John 11).³¹

The early church theologian Tertullian wrote, "Christians are made, not born." Our identity as Christians is not a matter of birthright. It is by grace through our adoption in Baptism. At one time in the history of the Christian church, new converts were baptized outside the church proper, after which the newly baptized came into their Father's house. **Baptismal fonts were placed at the entrance to the church, as a weekly reminder of their initiation into God's family.** We also see our font as we enter to worship. Let it remind us of our adoption as children of God.

But we are not an "only child" in God's family. We rejoice that we have many brothers and sisters in the Christian church, who are also God's children by virtue of their Baptisms. Here, we speak not of a particular denomination, but of what we call the universal, or catholic, or Christian church. This is the family into which the new Christian is welcomed as the congregation responds, "**We welcome you into the Lord's family**" (page 204 in *Lutheran Worship*).

Our church **accepts all Baptisms** done with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While we may disagree with what some other Christians teach about the meaning of Baptism, we believe that it is God, not any human being, who works through the sacrament of Baptism. We do not rebaptize those who have been baptized in other Christian churches. It would seem to be an insult to God to do so, since he is the one who works in Baptism.

The Nicene Creed summarizes it well:

**And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.**

THE COMMAND TO BAPTIZE

Our marching orders are in Matt. 28:18-20. Jesus died on the cross. He rose again in victory over death, that we might be forgiven. Now he just

³¹Oesch, 51.

asks us to share the news, to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. There are approximately **four billion unbaptized people** in the world today. While the Mormon Church will baptize dead people by proxy, we only baptize living people. How many of those unbaptized are dying each day?

Questions can be asked: "How about those who die without ever hearing about Christ?" "How about a baby that dies before the parents get around to having it baptized?" "How about the millions of lives ended by abortion each year?" We could spend hours, days, even years debating such questions, and accomplish little. Better to be people of action: telling the unchurched about Christ, not delaying in baptizing our children, speaking out against the tragedy of abortion. "Baptize!" is the command.

Because we take this command to baptize seriously, our church places a strong emphasis upon **missions**. Through **The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod**, we support 131 missionaries in countries around the world. We also help to support another 4,455 native missionaries in our "partner" churches on the mission field.

Through our **Minnesota South District** we support special missions to various ethnic groups, college and hospital chaplains, and those starting new congregations.

Each week our members indicate what portion of their offerings is to be used for missions through our District and Synod. While it might be easy to cut back on our mission commitment when there are local bills to be paid, we do not believe that that is God's way. Each month, our treasurer remits our mission monies before any other bills are paid. Our Lord has always provided for the other needs as well.

WE BAPTIZE ALL AGES

Most baptisms in the New Testament era were of adults. For Baptism as a sacrament was something new, a special gift of God for our salvation. We also baptize any adults (or older children) who have not been baptized as infants. In such cases, we first teach about Baptism, gearing the instruction to the age and ability of the person.

The apostles baptized entire households (Acts 16:15), which in that day and age would almost always have included infants. As time went on and Christianity became more widespread, fewer and fewer adults were baptized--since most had already been baptized as infants. Infant Baptism became the norm. Such is also the case in our church. But throughout history, some

Christians have sincerely protested that this should not be. It is good to consider why we do baptize all ages, including infants.

1. Scriptures say that all are to be baptized. In Matt. 28:18-20 we have already read that the command was to baptize **all nations**. Read Acts 2:38-39. No, it does not specifically say "baptize babies," but never are infants or any other group excluded from the command to baptize everyone.

This was one question that apparently was not debated in the New Testament era. No one seems to have protested when Paul baptized entire households while on his missionary journeys. The new sacrament of Baptism replaced the old rite of circumcision which had been part of infancy for centuries. It would seem that the burden of proof would be upon those who would argue for a change.

2. Faith is a gift. It is not something we deserve or can earn. It is so easy to forget that faith is not an intellectual accomplishment, but is a gift of the Holy Spirit which brings about a right relationship with God. As we read in 1 Cor. 12:3, "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." Adults find all kinds of reasons not to believe, resisting the work of the Spirit.

Jesus actually lifted up childlike faith as a beautiful example for all of us. Read Luke 18:15-17. Martin Luther said that he would not baptize babies unless he was convinced that they could have faith. He believed that they could--by the power of the Holy Spirit--and we continue to believe the same.

The sacrament of Baptism is a miracle, as much so as raising someone from the dead or parting the Red Sea. We cannot comprehend miracles; we simply rejoice in God's promises.

3. Baptism is the only way of salvation that God has revealed to us for infants. Look to the second paragraph in section two in the Baptismal service (page 199 in *Lutheran Worship*). These words, which echo Ps. 51:5, remind us that all are sinful and need forgiveness. We believe that "all" means all.

Some speak of an **age of accountability**, before which little children are not responsible for their sins, because they don't know any better. In many ways that makes sense, except that Scriptures never speak of such a concept--"**sinful at birth**" is what we read in Ps 51:5. This **original sin** has been with us since our first parents disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Even as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:6, "**flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit,**" we believe that sinful parents give birth to sinful

children. While this may not seem "fair" to our human way of thinking, we read in Romans 5 that even as all were made sinners through the disobedience of one man, salvation comes to us through the one man, Christ Jesus. Rather than denying the reality of our condition, we rejoice in God's generous solution to our problem.

If Baptism is nothing more than an outward witness to a previous intellectual faith decision, the logical end is to limit such a Baptism to those adults who can consciously make such a decision. Those who believe that forgiveness is offered through Baptism are reluctant to exclude any who are in need of such forgiveness.

God's helpers

Our church has the custom of involving **sponsors**, or **godparents**, in the Baptism of children. Since this is a custom, not a divine command, we cannot be legalistic as to the use or details of this practice. Look at what we ask sponsors to do in section six of the Baptismal service (page 200 in *Lutheran Worship*). What kind of people do you think would make good sponsors? How about a member of another church? How about someone not yet confirmed? How about a brother or sister who seldom goes to church?

We do not baptize children without the consent of the **parents**. Before adults submit to surgery, they must sign a consent form. If a child is too young to understand, the doctors do not wait until the child is old enough to understand and consent, but the parents give the necessary consent. A child born in sin has an urgent need for forgiveness. Parents respond to this need by bringing their children for Baptism, as soon as reasonably possible. Note that in section eleven of the Baptismal service (page 202) the parents give public witness to their consent.

But the parents' responsibilities have only begun with the Baptismal ceremony. Read Matt. 28:18-20 once more. In making disciples, what do we do along with baptizing? If parents only bring their children to the church "to be done" (to please grandparents or because of tradition), what kind of teaching do you think they will do in the future?

Our church has the custom of lighting a small **baptismal candle** from the Paschal candle as part of the Baptismal service. What is the symbolism of this action according to section sixteen (page 203)? The light can also represent the spark of faith worked by the Holy Spirit in the miracle of Baptism. Parents are encouraged to light these candles each year, on the child's **Baptismal birthday**. What kinds of things do you think would be good to tell the children about their Baptisms on these special days?

Note the ways the **congregation** is involved in the Baptismal service. Along with the parents and sponsors, they give witness to the Christian faith through the Apostle's Creed, which has been the historic Baptismal creed of the church. In section nineteen (pages 203-204) the child is welcomed as a fellow member of the body of Christ. How do you think the congregation might later be involved in the spiritual life of the child?

While it is not essential that Baptisms be done in the context of the worship service (and in many centuries they were not), we are glad to have the whole congregation rejoice in the sacrament and are grateful for the role they will play in the future spiritual growth of the child.

BAPTISM—FOR OUR ENTIRE LIVES

"I am baptized" says so much more than **"I was baptized."** For Baptism is not merely a past event, but is an act that has lasting consequences. In section four of the Baptism portion of the Small Catechism, we read:

...the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Everyday of our lives we will want to remember our Baptisms, putting to death the "old Adam" (sinful way of life) and rejoicing in our baptismal forgiveness.

As we worship on Sunday mornings, we are reminded of our Baptisms when we see the baptismal font, when we see the sign of the cross, and when we hear the words of invocation. Note the reference to Baptism in the declaration of grace in Divine Service I (page 137). While the proclamation of the Gospel in worship sustains our baptismal faith, worship cannot and will not add anything to the salvation that is ours through Baptism. We do recognize that salvation can be lost by those who reject the Spirit. As the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered, the Spirit works to increase our faith.



Confirmation is a custom of our church which is neither commanded nor forbidden by God. If it is given more importance than Baptism or seen as a completion or renewal of Baptism, then it is misunderstood. For confirmation is a human rite that can never replace the divine. Our Baptism does not wear out; it needs no renewal. Confirmation only has value to the degree that it reminds us of the blessings that are already ours through baptism.

Look to the order for confirmation on page 205 in *Lutheran Worship*. Notice the several references to Baptism in the opening paragraphs. The pastor, in addressing the confirmands, asks them if they are ready to acknowledge the gifts that God has given them in Baptism. The confirmation process is a time for young men and young women to learn more about their baptismal faith. **The day of confirmation provides opportunity for young Christians to give public witness to their faith.** This can and it is hoped will be done publicly at other times in their lives as well, in addition to daily private remembrance.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Baptized people are no better than those who have not been baptized.
2. It is important that all family members be present for the Baptism.
3. Baptism makes a person a member of a church denomination.
4. The Baptism of infants is not valid without sponsors.
5. Only people who attend church should be chosen as sponsors.
6. It is possible to lose saving faith that is given in Baptism.
7. One who is baptized but then falls away should be rebaptized if he comes back.
8. Saving faith in Jesus is not the same as mental understanding about Jesus.
9. Without Baptism no one can be saved.
10. We lose the blessings of Baptism when we don't act like Christians.
11. Being baptized with water is not important; having the Holy Spirit take control of you is important.
12. Baptism is something you do to show that you belong.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOLY COMMUNION

INSTITUTED BY GOD

St. Paul called this sacrament the **Lord's Supper**. This title reminds us of the authority for the sacrament. Jesus instituted this special meal, and he continues as the host. He is the one who offers life and forgiveness through the sacrament.

At one time and place a group of Christians wanted to celebrate communion in a new way. They gathered around the table, leaving an empty chair as a reminder that they wanted Jesus to be their guest. They certainly meant well, and that might be helpful for an ordinary meal, but at our Lord's Supper, Jesus is our host, not one of the guests.

Old Testament background

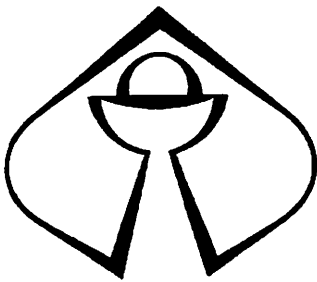
Our Lord chose to give us the gift of Holy Communion at **Passover** time. The annual Passover festival recounted how God had delivered his people from the vengeful Pharaoh in Egypt some fourteen hundred years earlier. In preparation for the tenth plague, God told his people, through Moses, to sacrifice a lamb. As a sign of their faith, they were to put some of the blood of the lamb upon their doorposts. This was the signal to the angel of death, who was to kill all the first-born sons in Egypt, to "pass over" them. This was the event which finally convinced the Pharaoh to permit the Israelites to leave the slavery of Egypt. For the whole story, read Exodus 11 and 12.

It was God's command that this special deliverance be remembered each year with a special Passover meal. Besides the sacrificial lamb, the meal was to include unleavened bread (as a reminder that it had to be quickly baked), bitter herbs (as a reminder of the bitterness of their slavery), and *harosheth* (a special mixture of fruit and nuts reminding them of the mortar they used for bricks). A cup of wine (the normal drink of the day) was passed at specified points during the meal.

The upper room

Many Jewish people came to Jerusalem to observe the Passover each year. In Luke 22:7-12 we read how Jesus appointed Peter and John to make preparations for the meal. Note the unusual aspects of the preparation. It is in this upper room, on the eve of his crucifixion, that Jesus gives his disciples an unforgettable example of humble service as he washes their feet (John 13:1-17). He also reveals that one disciple will betray him (John 13:18-30) and that another will deny him three times (John 13:36-38).

But his most startling revelation is reserved for the meal itself. Read Luke 22:14-20. Jesus calls the bread, "body," and the wine, "blood." How could Jesus dare to make such changes in the ancient and God-given prescription for the Passover?



As Christians, we recall the events of this night on **Maundy Thursday**, the day before Good Friday. "Maundy" is a term that refers to the new command that Jesus had given, that they were to love one another as he had loved them. A Maundy Thursday service may include elements of the Passover as a reminder of the historical background of the day or, perhaps, even a foot-washing as a reminder of Jesus' act of humility. But the service will always include Holy Communion.

The historic communion service

Christians have taken seriously Jesus' words, "**Do this in remembrance of me.**" Read Acts 2:46-47. Describe the life of the early Christians. Read 1 Cor. 11:17-26. In these verses the Christians of Corinth are obviously having some misunderstanding as to the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper. Look especially at Paul's directions to them in verses 23-26. Many believe that these "words of institution" of our Lord were already in common usage as part of their worship services. Paul was not telling them anything new but was directing them to their own foundation. Compare these words to the words we hear as part of the Communion liturgy on page 171 of *Lutheran Worship*. What value do you see in retaining these words in their original (excluding translation differences) form?

Amazingly, the entire communion liturgy has changed very little since the first centuries of the church. Peter Brunner writes:

To be sure, the history of worship displays instances of decay, of heretical malformations, and of flinty incrustations. And yet there is perhaps no creation in the cultural realm which has shown such a puzzling constancy to date as the worship of the Christian church. This is true especially of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.³²

Changes in the historic communion liturgy were one of the reasons for the Protestant Reformation. The reformers believed that many questionable words and prayers had been added through the years. Those words which were central, our Lord's words of institution, were said quietly by the priest with his back to the people.

Our Lord's words of institution are an essential part of every service of Holy Communion. They are spoken loudly and clearly. We don't tamper with the rest of the communion service either. Lawyers know how carefully a person's last will and testament must be prepared. Ambiguous words can easily be challenged in court. Who are we to change our Lord's last will and testament, which was sealed by blood only hours after first spoken?

VISIBLE MEANS—BREAD AND WINE

Holy Communion, perhaps the most common name for this sacrament among Lutherans, is a simpler term than many make it out to be. The root of "communion" would refer to sharing or having things in common. We think of community, communal, or commune. In Holy Communion, we consider how bread and body, wine and blood come together in the sacrament in a special, holy way.

Breaking of bread, as we read in Acts 2:46, is perhaps the simplest and most descriptive name for the sacrament. But, in what sense is the bread, body, and what is the relationship of the wine and the blood? These are questions Christians have struggled with for centuries.

Lutherans believe: *"We receive the true body and blood of Christ along with the bread and wine."*

This is the belief of the Lutheran church. We proclaim what Christ said as we proclaim his words of institution, "this is my body . . . this is my

³²Brunner, 229.

blood," as a reminder to us and as a witness to the world. Note the two distribution options offered to the pastor on page 172 of *Lutheran Worship*. We say either "true" or "very" body and blood. Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism, **"It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and drink, instituted by Christ himself."** Sometimes we say in the pattern of Luther, **"in, with, and under."**

But how? That is a normal and natural question. **How can what looks, tastes, and smells like bread and wine be considered body and blood?** We don't know. We believe it is so, simply because Jesus said it is so. Neither can we really understand the incarnation, forgiveness, or the resurrection itself, but we profess faith in all of these. The institution of the Lord's Supper is not a parable, but a **miracle** of Jesus. It is not the task of theology to explain miracles, but to state them and to consider their meaning in the light of the entire message of Scripture. We are content to believe and proclaim that **we receive the real and true body and blood of Christ along with the bread and wine** in Holy Communion.

But the normal tendency is still to ask questions. "What kind of bread is to be used?" We use **unleavened bread**, because Christ most certainly used the unleavened bread of the Passover in his institution. Scripture is silent as to the size or shape of the portion, and it does not say if it should be baked from the flour of wheat, rye, barley, or other grains. If we worry too much about details which we are to accomplish, we make the sacrament into our work and risk missing the pure grace of God.

Neither do we worry about the type and manner of distribution of the wine. The color matters not, but **we do use wine** (as opposed to grape juice), for Christ used wine. He also passed a **common cup**, which would seem to be the most desirable custom today. **Individual cups** are a concession to germ-conscious America. We are glad that the promises of the sacrament depend upon Christ's word of promise and not on our actions.

What of the leftover bread and wine? Is it still body and blood? We believe that the bread and wine, apart from the Word, are simple bread and wine. Since these elements have been used for a sacred purpose, we dispose of them reverently, not frivolously.

While we all have a natural tendency to ask questions, to want to know all the details, we have to be careful when it comes to matters that are beyond our comprehension. It is more important to rejoice in the blessings that come from the body and the blood than to know all the mechanical details. We are

thankful that our Lord has given us visible elements to help our faith, as Luther wrote:

For there is no more intimate, deep, and indivisible union than the union of the food with him who is fed. For the food enters into and is assimilated by his very nature, and becomes one substance with the person who is fed.³³

The teachers of old have pointed out that he wished to give us his body and blood under the form of things which are of such a nature that they are themselves constituted by the fusing together of many individual things into one; just as a loaf is constituted by many kernels out of which one makes a simple lump of dough . . . each grain loses its form and takes on a common form with the others . . . grapes pressed together . . .³⁴

Some believe: "*The bread and wine turn into body and blood.*"

This is a simple statement of Roman Catholic belief concerning the elements of the sacrament. It is called **transubstantiation**. By the time of the Middle Ages, theologians, drawing from the philosophical terminology of Aristotle, had explained how the bread and wine could really be body and blood, while continuing to look and taste like bread and wine. Luther judged that their arguments were far too difficult for the average person to understand and that harm was being done by claiming that the bread and wine were no longer present, having been wholly turned into the body and blood.

The people of the middle ages stood in **awe (and fear) of the body and blood**. It was out of fear of spilling some of Christ's blood that the laity asked if it was really necessary for them to receive both the body and the blood. The church responded that, since there was blood in all flesh, the bread would do.

In many places the consecration came to be seen as a magical performance. People would stare in awe as the consecrated host, the body, was held high for all to see. In fact, it was the high point of the service, for by this time very few people actually received the elements on a given Sunday. **Adoration** had replaced reception.

³³LW 35:59.

³⁴LW 36:352-53.

At about the same time, it became law that the host be placed into the **mouth of the communicant**, for apparently some had been palming the wafer and carrying it with them as a good luck charm of sorts. Luther said "enough," pointing out 1 Cor. 10:16, 11:28, and other places where it speaks of eating the bread. The bread and wine remained just that, giving neither good luck nor bad. Better to simply rejoice in the promise of God that in, with, and under the bread and wine, the believer miraculously also received the very body and blood of Christ.

Some believe: "*The bread and wine represents the body and blood.*"

This is the teaching of the Reformed branch of the Reformation which Luther viewed with far greater alarm than the teaching of transubstantiation. These reformers reacted violently to the teachings of Roman Catholicism, taking the exact opposite position on nearly every subject in question.

In saying that the bread and wine merely represent or symbolize the body and blood, they have offered an explanation that is **extremely easy to understand**. Saying that we spiritually receive the body and blood in the sacrament can sound very much like the Lutheran belief. But when all is said and done, only bread and wine are actually received. This explanation solves the mystery of the sacrament, but it also removes the real presence of Christ.

This diagram is a simple summary of the three positions:

	Before Consecration	After Consecration the participant receives	Concept	Forgiveness
Lutheran Doctrine says:	Bread Wine	Body with the Bread Blood with the Wine	Real Presence	Through body and blood
Roman Catholic Doctrine says:	Bread Wine	--->Body --->Blood	Transubstantiation (changes into)	Through what we do
Reformed Doctrine says:	Bread Wine	Bread Wine	Symbol	Reminds of

If any of these three positions could be "proven," we would not continue to have discussions. As it is, Lutherans seek to do the least explaining, simply believing the true body and blood of Christ are present because Christ said it is so. Most important is the fourth column (what we

believe concerning the blessings received in the sacrament), which will now be considered.

FORGIVENESS THROUGH THE SACRAMENT

Holy Communion is sometimes called the **sacrament of the altar**, in reference to the place where it is received. The altar is the symbol of Christ's sacrifice for us. How good it is to come forward and receive his body and blood for our forgiveness. While distribution is normally in church, Holy Communion is also offered in homes or hospitals to those who are unable to come to God's house.

Lutherans believe: "*We receive forgiveness through the sacrament.*"

In Matt. 26:28, as part of the institution of the Lord's Supper, we read, **"This is my blood which is poured out for you for many for the forgiveness of sins."** Look to the third section under Holy Communion in the Small Catechism (page 304 in *Lutheran Worship*). We are directed to the words **"given and shed for you for the remission of sins."** In his service, the *Formula Missae*, Luther directed that the Words of Institution were to be chanted to the same psalm tone as the Gospel, for the body and blood are the Gospel. Some believed that Luther was stubborn and obstinate as he struggled with Reformed theologians over the meaning of this sacrament, but to him it meant he was struggling for the Gospel itself. Such is the importance that we as Lutherans attribute to Holy Communion.

For Luther, the forgiveness offered in Holy Communion was no more valid than that received through the absolution or through the hearing of the Word, but he believed it was more **personal**.

When I preach his death, it is in a public sermon in the congregation, in which I am addressing myself to no one individually; whoever grasps it, grasps it. But when I distribute the sacrament, I designate it for the individual who is receiving it; I give him Christ's body and blood that he may have forgiveness of sins.³⁵

Luther liked to use the analogy of **"last will and testament"** to explain the offer of **"the new testament in my blood."** For a testament to be valid it must contain these elements:

³⁵LW 36:348-49.

1. The **testator**, who prepared for his death and sets up his will (Christ).
2. The testament proper, the will, in which the **inheritance** is assigned (Words of Institution, the body and blood, forgiveness).
3. The **heirs**, to whom the estate is bequeathed (for all those who believe and receive).

For the last will and testament to be effective, the testator must die, and so Christ did. How tragic that any of the heirs would not rejoice in their inheritance. Consider now how this term is used when we speak of the "**New Testament**" portion of Scripture.

Having heard the Words of Institution, we prepare to come forward to receive the sacrament as we sing the *Agnus Dei* (page 172 in *Lutheran Worship*):

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us peace.

We come offering nothing, anticipating the great blessings our Lord offers in the sacrament.

Another analogy of the grace offered in the sacrament is that of a **dinner invitation**. When invited for dinner, some feel compelled to bring a gift and others will feel obligated to reciprocate. Yet, when it comes to our Lord's invitation to his supper, there is nothing we can or need to do except rejoice in his gifts. In this context, Iris Cully writes, "Westerners would rather be the initiators, active, doing. They are uncomfortable in having another do something for them."³⁶ Do you agree? Is that why it is so hard to simply accept the grace our Lord offers in the sacrament?

It is easy to get wrapped up in asking questions about the proper order of the Communion liturgy or the details of the distribution. How are the people to be ushered forward? Which prayers are essential? For Luther, the distinctive feature of the Lord's Supper is its **simplicity**. Only a few simple words of Jesus are recorded, as he distributed bread and wine to his disciples.

³⁶Iris V. Cully, *Christian Worship and Christian Education* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 115.

He never mentions the qualifications of the celebrant, correct orders of service, or special ceremonies. While these things have their place, if we put too great an emphasis upon them, we are focusing again upon man's work in the sacrament, rather than upon God's grace.³⁷

Some believe: *"The mass is a sacrifice (work) we offer to God."*

In the Roman Catholic tradition, there is much greater emphasis placed upon the necessary actions of the recipients (the things that must be done for God). The bread and wine are offered for use in the sacrament, certain prayers are said, and the mass itself is seen as a **good work** that might benefit the living--or the **dead**.

Medieval Scholasticism argued that the mere performance of the sacraments was a work that earned the grace of God. This Luther rejected, stating that without faith nothing was received. And certainly nothing was merited, in any event.

In Lutheranism, the only sacrifice, or work, involved in Holy Communion would be a joyful response to the receiving of the grace of God. But this grace of God is in no way conditioned upon our response.

Some believe: *"We are reminded of our forgiveness through Holy Communion."*

This is the logical conclusion of believing that the bread and wine merely symbolize the body and blood of Christ. They "remind" of forgiveness, as would the altar, a cross, or perhaps a stained glass window. This is not wrong, but it fails to appreciate the real benefit of the sacrament, the forgiveness of our sins.

The placement of the altar in many churches in the Reformed tradition shows the difference in beliefs. Whereas in Lutheran churches it is always in a position of prominence, in many other Protestant churches it is a simple table, located below the pulpit.

Calling the sacrament an **ordinance** characterizes it as something we do in response to a command of God that he be memorialized, rather than as

³⁷Such was the case in the church of Luther's day. Many elaborate ceremonies had been made a part of the service and, not only added, but made obligatory. For a priest to change or omit a single word in the mass was considered a mortal sin, worse than adultery or perjury.

a gracious invitation of our God. Notice the wording of the preface in the Communion liturgy (page 170): "**It is truly good, right, and salutary**" (with a beneficial purpose). Compare that to the wording in some Protestant traditions: "meet, right, and our bounden duty."

RECEIVING THE SACRAMENT

Regularly

We will want to receive the sacrament frequently. Some hold back, thinking it will be more precious if it is less common. What if we ate food only once in awhile, that it might remain more precious? We would soon find ourselves very weak. God doesn't give spiritual food that we might admire it and hold it precious, but he provides it for our spiritual strengthening.

Think how foolish it would be for a person to tell his or her spouse, "I'm not going to tell you how much I love you very often, so that the words remain that much more meaningful." In the sacrament, God shows us how much he loves us and how he desires to do it often.

But how often should we commune? Whereas a Roman Catholic priest will receive the sacrament daily, a Jehovah's Witness will attend no more than once in their lifetime.

Those in the **early church most likely celebrated Holy Communion weekly**. However, as the years went on, actual reception of the sacrament became less and less frequent. By the Middle Ages, to receive Communion four times a year (at the three high festivals and one lesser one) was a sign of the highest devotion. Even monks were not required to participate more. People feared the confession which had to precede the reception. They feared receiving the sacrament in an unworthy manner. After a time, it was often the case that the priests would be the only communicants at the weekly celebrations. The people preferred to watch, adore the elements, and engage in private devotions.

Luther tried hard to get the people to commune more often. He wrote in the preface to his Small Catechism:

Our preaching should instead be such that of their own accord and without our command, people feel constrained themselves and **press us pastors to serve the Sacrament**. The way to go about this is to tell them that if anyone does not seek or desire the Lord's Supper at the very least four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises the Sacrament and is not a Christian,

just as no one is a Christian who does not believe the Gospel.³⁸

Luther's effort to get the people to commune more frequently ran into the resistance of a thousand-year tradition of non-communing. Since he did not believe that only the ministers should commune and if no parishioners had announced for Communion, he stipulated that only the service of the Word should be followed. Unfortunately, the non-communion service gradually became the norm in most Lutheran churches.

During this last century, our churches have gradually been rediscovering the importance of more frequent Communion. *Lutheran Worship* assumes that the main service of the day is a service of Holy Communion. While most Lutheran churches are not at the point of offering Communion weekly, it would seem logical for members to receive the Lord's Supper every time it is offered. God's grace comes through the eating and drinking, not by watching. But we also err if we go to the other extreme and come forward to commune simply because everyone else seems to be doing so.

With joy and thanksgiving

Sometimes the term **Eucharist** is used for the sacrament. This means "to give thanks" and comes from the example of Jesus giving thanks as he hosted his supper. It is only natural that we give thanks as we receive forgiveness through the body and blood.

But our demeanor has not always shown this. The seriousness with which many receive the sacrament could easily be mistaken for sadness or fear. This may indeed be the result if Communion is thought of only in terms of extreme unworthiness, depravity, and sin. The more emphasis anyone places upon the human element of the sacrament, the more fear and anxiety there will be.

At the same time we remember that our joy and thanksgiving is based upon God's gifts in the sacrament. If our thanksgiving becomes the main focus of the sacrament, we have missed the point.

For those who comprehend the gifts offered in Communion, the mood will be one of joy and anticipation. Look to the **elements of joy in Divine Service II**.

³⁸SC, preface, 22.

1. We sing, "This is the feast of victory for our God" (page 161), looking forward to the Lord's Supper and beyond it to the heavenly banquet.
2. This same feast is alluded to in the offertory as we sing, "Let the vineyards be fruitful, Lord, . . . and give us a foretaste of the feast to come" (pages 168-69).
3. The words of the Preface (page 170) are from the first centuries of the church. Look to the increasing feeling of joy, as we lift up our hearts and give thanks to the Lord.
4. The Proper Prefaces (pages 146-47) are geared to the church year. Note the element of joy in each.
5. Following the pastor's reading of the Proper Preface, the people all join in joyfully singing, "Holy, holy, holy . . ." (pages 170-71).
6. The pastor continues with a prayer (page 171), recalling Christ's work in the world and giving thanks for our redemption.
7. The pastor shares our Lord's words of institution (page 171), reminding us of the great and wonderful gifts we are to receive.
8. Ready to receive the body and blood, the pastor and people remind each other of the real peace that comes through knowing Jesus (page 171).
9. After all have received the body and blood, the pastor reminds the people that this body and blood will continue to strengthen them in the true faith, even to life everlasting (page 173). The people respond by joyfully singing together, "Thank the Lord and sing his praise; tell everyone what he has done. Let all who seek the Lord rejoice..."(page 173).
10. God's people leave his house, encouraged and strengthened by his great gifts.

As a family

The term **mass** (used more often by Roman Catholics, but also by Lutherans in some places) derives from the Latin *missio*, "dismiss." At one time the catechumens were present only during the first part of the service.

After the "Service of the Word" they were dismissed, and the communicant members continued with the "Service of the Eucharist."

In this historic tradition, our church observes the practice of **close Communion**. This means that we commune with those who are of our same faith and confession. This practice is not meant to present a "better than thou" attitude, but is used out of loving concern for those who are communing. We commune those who:

1. Have examined themselves. As we read 1 Cor. 11:28, we see the necessity of self-examination before coming to the Lord's table. This is not too see if we are without sin or even without any great sins. On the contrary, Holy Communion is specifically for sinners who are in need of forgiveness. It is sinners who confidently sing the words of the **Agnus Dei**, "Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us..."(page 172), as they prepare to come forward to the Lord's table.

Look to the **twenty questions** attributed to Dr. Luther for those intending to attend the Sacrament (pages 306-07 in *Lutheran Worship*). These can be summarized (and easily memorized) in three questions: Am I sinner? Do I believe that I will receive forgiveness through the body and blood of the Sacrament? Do I intend, with God's help, to seek to avoid these sins in the future?

We do not say that confession must follow any particular form, but simply that those communing will have looked at their own lives and motivation before coming forward. Consider who might not be able to examine themselves in this way. Those too young? Those who have never been instructed in the faith? God loves these as well, but communion is not yet for them.

2. Recognize the real presence of Christ. Here, too, we seek to take Scripture seriously. In 1 Cor. 11:29 we read, "**For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment upon himself.**" To come to the Lord's table without recognizing that what we receive is truly the body and blood of Christ is not only useless, but harmful.

3. Are of one faith. "Communion" refers to the coming together of the body and blood with the bread and wine, but it also refers to the community we have with the other people who eat with us at the Lord's table. In the New Testament era, it was assumed that those who ate together were of one heart and mind (1 Cor. 10:14-22). **As we come forward to commune, we give witness to the common faith we share with our fellow communicants.**

While we have much in common with other Christians, on some points (especially on the sacraments), we have some honest disagreements. It is our Lord's earnest desire that all of his children be united (John 17:22), and as Lutherans we will dialogue and talk with anyone in an effort to achieve that goal. Whereas some denominations believe that joint celebrations of Holy Communion will help to bring about that unity, it is our belief that the agreement in faith must come first, and then we commune together as a celebration of that unity.

We give thanks to God for his grace which we receive through Holy Communion. Because **we take the sacrament seriously**, we are not careless about its use, but we look for the opportunity to share with others why we believe it is so special. When people have had a chance to hear what it is that we believe and are willing to say "Amen" to it, we rejoice to be able to commune together with them.

COMMUNION IS

In conclusion, consider these simple definitions of Holy Communion. Which are most meaningful to you? Which do you have questions about?

- Holy Communion is remembering.
- Holy Communion is giving thanks.
- Holy Communion is confessing.
- Holy Communion is receiving forgiveness.
- Holy Communion is growing.
- Holy Communion is joyful celebrating.
- Holy Communion is being together.
- Holy Communion is telling.
- Holy Communion is being strengthened to serve God.
- Holy Communion is a time to think about the future.³⁹

³⁹C. Richard Evanson, *God's Table of Grace* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 4-5.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. In Holy Communion, the believer receives forgiveness for past sins but not for sins not yet committed.
2. Holy Communion tends to become meaningless to people who partake of it too frequently.
3. Christians will sometimes find they are in no mood to partake of Holy Communion.
4. To partake of Holy Communion requires a strong faith.
5. Remembering their sins which caused Christ's death, Christians are bound to feel sad when they partake of Holy Communion.
6. We go to Holy Communion to earn the forgiveness of sins.
7. Some will not be saved because they didn't go to Communion often enough.
8. We should not go to Holy Communion if we do not feel the need for it.
9. If we keep committing the same sins after we commune, we are bringing God's judgment upon ourselves.
10. If we don't feel forgiven after Communion, we probably aren't.
11. We can sin all week long and then receive forgiveness on Sunday.

PART FOUR
LIVING BY GRACE
(Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer)



CHAPTER NINE

ALL OF LIFE AS WORSHIP

Except for a brief look at our failures in the first chapter, this course has focused almost exclusively upon **God's wonderful works**. In fact, great effort has been made to keep the focus upon God rather than upon what we might try to do to earn our salvation. Now we have a chance to respond. And the emphasis is upon response, for our salvation has been won. Anything we do is simply in the realm of a **voluntary thanksgiving**.

ROMANS 12:1-2

A brief look at the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans reveals that they provide a beautiful exposition of our salvation. The first three chapters remind us that we are sinful through and through, climaxing in 3:23 with the words, "**all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God." But then Paul immediately continues with the beautiful words of the Gospel, "and are **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (3:24). He goes on to explain the joy that comes through life "in the Spirit." The stage set, Paul now writes in verse one:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy,...

Now, as a logical consequence of everything that has been said in the book so far, Paul is urging the people of Rome to consider what he has to say next. Note that the emphasis is upon God and the great mercy that he has already shown. Similarly, we could say, "I urge you, in view of everything that you have already learned about the love of God in this course..."

...to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

The term "sacrifice" may mean little to us, but it meant everything to the Jewish people. For hundreds of years they had followed the command of God and offered various kinds of sacrifices. An ox, lamb, dove or whatever (but always an animal without blemish), was slain and burnt upon the altar as

a sign of devotion to God. Such sacrifices were designed to point ahead to the one who would himself be sacrificed for all people in all times.

With the coming of Christ, the old order was superseded by a new order. Christ allowed his own body to be sacrificed upon the cross as the ultimate offering for the sins of all people. We no longer kill animals to show our devotion, but we offer our very bodies as living sacrifices to our God. In this, **our bodies represent our entire beings**, which we dedicate to the service of God.

The idea of sacrifice marks the continuity of the new worship with the old. But we no longer offer dead animals to God. We give ourselves to God: all of our time, all of our activity, all of our thoughts. The life which we have received from God is offered back to God. This is a living sacrifice, for **we are not called upon to die for our Lord but to live for him--which is far better.**

This life of service, which is worship in the broad sense of the word, will **extend beyond the Sabbath and the sanctuary.** It is no longer valid to ask, "Is it better to be in church on Sunday morning and thinking about fishing or out on the lake thinking about church?" As Christians we will want to praise God and serve him in both places--and every other place as well.

St. Paul goes on to write in verse two:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

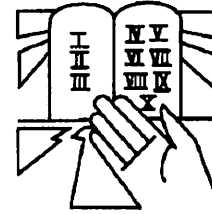
Unfortunately, the Christian lives in a hostile world, which will seek to put an end to the spiritual worship he offers in response to the mercy of God. We are here reminded not to give in or to conform to the scheme or pattern of this age. The Spirit encourages us to reach out and serve God by being a positive influence and witness in the world around us.

...Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

But now, how would God have us act in the world? As a consequence of its being renewed, the mind now seeks to determine what the will of God is. What better place is there to look than to God's Word? While we have earlier looked at the Ten Commandments and seen their power to convict us of sin and drive us to the Gospel, as forgiven sinners we look to them once more in a new light.

TEN COMMANDMENTS

It is in that spirit that we look once more at the Ten Commandments, looking not to save ourselves, but as redeemed children of God seeking to follow his good, pleasing and perfect will.



First Commandment: **"You shall have no other gods."**

This is the first of three commandments that describe our proper relationship to God. Jesus summarized this "first table" of the law with the words, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"** (Matt. 22:37).

In this commandment God is simply asking for his rightful place as the one who has created and redeemed us. We break this commandment by letting anything else (whether it be money, friends, family, possessions, house, popularity, fame, or whatever) have the most important place in our life and, in effect, serve as our god. Some think things such as horoscopes, astrology, new age, ouija boards, and seances are fun and games (and to many they are), but we worry that through these things Satan is seeking to lead us away from the true God.

Second Commandment: **"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God."**

We rejoice to have the **privilege of being able to call upon God's name in prayer** in time of need, in time of joy, and sometimes just to talk. We cringe when someone drags God's precious name down into the gutter; or uses it falsely or frivolously.

Third Commandment: **"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."**

Some think of this commandment as simply telling us to go to church on Sunday, and that is a part of it, but more significantly we are reminded of the **important place we will want to give to the Word of God** in our lives.

When this class is concluded, have you considered what your **next Bible study** will be? This is only designed to be a brief survey course over a wide variety of important topics. The Christian who is not growing is slipping backwards.

How about God's Word in your **daily lives**? Devotions, Bible reading, prayer? What value do you think there might be in spending some time with the Lord each day?

Fourth Commandment: "Honor your father and your mother."

These final seven commandments remind us of a good way to live with our neighbors. These can be summed up by simply saying, "**Love your neighbor as yourself**" (Matt. 22:39).

The fourth commandment speaks of **respect for those who God has placed in authority over us**, beginning with our parents. Lutherans are usually good citizens, not always agreeing with, but showing respect to, government officials. We are not ashamed to have the American flag displayed in our chancel.

Fifth Commandment: "You shall not murder."

We believe that God gives life and only God has the right to take it away. We therefore believe that **abortion, suicide, and mercy killing** are contrary to the will of God. As God gives us opportunity, we use our talents and abilities to help others with their bodily needs. As a congregation we do this through various local programs; as a denomination we respond as best we can to emergency needs around the world.

Sixth Commandment: "You shall not commit adultery."

We give thanks to God for the gifts of sex and marriage. We fear the results of a society which underestimates the power of the sexual urge, which God wisely has reserved for the **commitment** we call marriage. Unfortunately, "living together" does not necessitate that same kind of commitment.

God does not prescribe a specific ceremony for **weddings**. We cannot say that a church wedding is any more valid than a secular one, although God's house does seem to be an appropriate place to take such an important vow.

When a couple is married in the church, we believe that it is first and foremost a service of worship to God. We hear God's Word. We sing hymns and offer prayers to God. The bride and groom are encouraged to love each other as God has first loved them.

Divorce is simply not part of God's plan. It is a result of sin in the world. We do not deny that it happens and that sometimes it might even be necessary. When that is the case, it is important for both parties to

acknowledge their shortcomings and ask for God's forgiveness. That does not make divorce right, but it is not beyond forgiveness.

Seventh Commandment: "You shall not steal."

God has given us all certain material possessions, and it is not for us to arbitrarily "redistribute wealth," whether this be by armed robbery, embezzlement, cheating, or shortchanging a customer. We will want to **help others** through material resources, rather than to take from them.

Eighth Commandment: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

While most of us are not likely to give false testimony against our neighbor in a court of law, we so often find it easy to share some "important" **gossip**. We are called upon to explain questionable actions of others in the kindest way, as we seek to protect and build up the reputations of others.

Ninth and Tenth Commandments:

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house."

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."⁴⁰

Coveting is **having a sinful desire for anyone or anything that belongs to our neighbor**. What kinds of things do people covet in this day and age? While the world would not generally think of coveting as a sin, they might agree that it can lead to stealing, murder, adultery, slander and the like. God says it is better to stop these problems at their root. What role do you think coveting might play in various forms of **gambling**?

A better way to live

What kind of world do you think it would be if everyone kept these commandments? Obviously, because of our sinfulness that is not going to

⁴⁰Some traditions combine these two into one commandment, after having divided the first into two (adding "you shall not make any graven images"). As a result, the commandments have a different numbering. It doesn't matter, because the meanings are the same.

happen. We believe that, as we individually seek to follow this "better way", we will be much happier. And so as forgiven Christians, we look to the Ten Commandments not as a way of saving ourselves, but as a way to give God glory, and a better way to live.

STEWARDSHIP

As Christians we often use the word "stewardship" to describe how we use the resources God has given us. We recall that God has given us the earth and all of its resources, our physical abilities and all of our mental capacities. In response to his grace, we seek to be good stewards, or managers, of all that the Lord has given us.

We give thanks to God for the **time** he has given us. While we all have twenty-four hours in the day, most of us would like more. Worship and Bible study can easily be omitted in that press for time. Living in God's grace, we will want to set aside priority time for his service and praise.

As we recall that life itself is a gift of God, we want to use our **talents** in his service. Each one of us has different gifts which are needed in the Christian congregation. Whether it be singing, teaching, leading, cooking, ushering, arranging flowers, leading, painting, driving, cleaning, serving, organizing, or what have you, there is a way to serve in the church. Indeed, the church would not long survive without its volunteers.

Sometimes people complain about the church needing **money**. It does take money to run a church--lots of it. But our church has a tremendously inefficient way of paying the bills. There are no membership fees, admissions, or assigned dues. We do not charge for specific services. We do not tell people what they should give or make contribution records public. Yet people do give--and very generously. This is not because they have to, but it is a simple way of saying thanks to God for the tremendous gift of his grace.

Consider the note that we routinely include in our Sunday bulletin as part of our welcome to visitors: **"We do not expect you to take part in the offering, for we assume that you support the Lord's work through your home congregation. We are glad to have you as our guests."** This statement stems from our theology. We do not charge admission! The collection plate is not designed to elicit a response through guilt or obligation. We freely support the Lord's work as a response to his blessings.

Receiving and presenting the offering is part of our worship service. Look to page 168 in *Lutheran Worship*. Through this action we are

acknowledging that all of our gifts are from God, and we are gratefully returning a portion to the Lord for his work. Note that **we sing the words of the offertory as an act of worship as the gifts are brought forward.** At one time worshipers brought all sorts of commodities for the offering: grain, fruits, animals, precious metals and the like--whatever happened to be the first-fruits of their labor. That is no longer the case in our monetary society, but the **dollars we give symbolize the spiritual worship of our Christian lives** which is offered in response to God's grace.

When we speak of the term "worship," we most often think of what happens in churches on Sunday mornings or, perhaps, a group or individual doing something in the "devotional" sense. As New Testament Christians we realize that our worship is far more encompassing than that. It is the entire life we lead in response to God's grace.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Loving God is more important than loving people.
2. The most effective religious education of children can be accomplished in the church.
3. Talking about others is permissible as long as we keep within the bounds of truth.
4. There are no civil laws that prohibit coveting.
5. The measure of people's contentment is a measure of their happiness.
6. God gives us his law because he wants us to live happy lives.
7. Lying about others is a sin, but not as serious as stealing from them.
8. "Love God, and do as you please" is a viable motto for a Christian.
9. Many people are grudging givers because they have not yet seen and claimed the freedom Christ gives.
10. Jesus, having set a person free from the need to be good, gives a person the freedom to be truly good.
11. Freedom in Christ is both exciting and scary.

CHAPTER TEN

WE WORSHIP TOGETHER

If all of life is worship, **why do Christians bother to come together for special services?** Why do we use special forms?

Peter Brunner has a helpful discussion in this regard. While all of life is worship, Christians have found it helpful ever since the New Testament era to come together in a common assembly, finding there a "concrete focal point, a power station, so to say, which controls and directs their whole existence." When he speaks of worship, he refers simply to what Christians do when they come together "in the name of Jesus."⁴¹

In Luke 4:16 we read: "He [Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and **on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.**" Christ, whose followers we are, regularly attended the Sabbath Day services, even though he found much fault with the church in his day and was persecuted by church people. Christians naturally came together for worship in the early church.

Unfortunately, Protestants seem to have a more complacent view towards worship than Roman Catholics have. It is easy to say that the latter are motivated by fear and legalism, but might there be a deeper cause? We can engage ourselves in so many activities which are connected with the church that we sometimes excuse our absence from worship on the grounds that we have fulfilled our duty by teaching a Sunday School class, serving on a committee, or helping with the youth. But then we are depriving ourselves of the great blessings that come through pausing to worship with our fellow Christians.

WE RECEIVE GOD'S BLESSINGS IN WORSHIP

There is no term that can adequately express what happens when Christians gather together for worship, for it is something radically different

⁴¹Brunner, 17-18.

from the worship of Israel or any pagan cult. *Lutheran Worship* follows the tradition of Luther and the Lutheran confessional writings in using the term "**Divine Service,**" as a reminder that it is God who comes to us with his blessings. For Luther, the Sabbath rest of the Third Commandment meant more than a pause from work; it was an opportunity for God to do his work on man.

For the philosophy behind the writing of *Lutheran Worship*, read the first three paragraphs of the introduction on page 6. We never quit needing the strengthening that comes to us from Word and Sacrament. The "sacrifice" of worship cannot be anything more than thanksgiving for God's blessings.

Since the gathering of believers is only a part of the total worship life of Christians, we dare not prescribe certain mandatory forms. The Lutheran Confessions speak only of the Biblical necessity of the **Gospel being preached in its purity and the sacraments being administered** according to the Gospel. "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places."⁴² The "Northfield Statement on Worship" (1983) put it this way:

The core and center of corporate worship, then, is this: a gathering around Jesus Christ, who is present in the community through his Spirit-empowered means of grace, a gathering in Jesus Christ to give praise and thanks to God.⁴³

In planning worship, we can only ask which forms are most helpful as we seek to give God thanksgiving for the gifts we receive.

A DAY OF WORSHIP

Every Sunday is designed to be a **mini-celebration of Easter**. In the Old Testament, the command was to rest on the Sabbath, the seventh day, Saturday. It was a good command of God designed to give his people the rest they needed. But the Pharisees took it legalistically. They found ways of getting around the work prohibitions, but were quick to criticize Jesus for plucking grain to eat or doing healings on the Sabbath. **Jesus abolished the old rules and regulations** (Col. 2:16-17), reminding his hearers simply to worship.

⁴²AC, VII.

⁴³Eugene Brand, ed., *Worship Among Lutherans* (Geneva: Department of Studies, The Lutheran World Federation, 1983), 5.

Already in the first century, Christians began the custom of worshipping on Sunday, not as a new day of rest but as a weekly anniversary of the resurrection of Christ. J. J. von Allmen writes:

This change of day by the apostolic Church is the strongest proof that the meaning of Sunday is not understood if the social concern for a weekly rest takes priority over the thought of the paschal joy which Sunday evokes.⁴⁴

Note that Sunday was not a holiday for these early Christians. Christians gathered before or after their long work days. While Christians have been worshipping on Sunday since the first century, it was not until 321 A.D. that the emperor Constantine declared the "day of the Sun" to be a holiday.

While we continue to observe Sunday as our principal day of worship, we do not say that we must worship on Sunday, even offering Thursday as another opportunity in our parish. We believe that it is a good practice in our hurried society to rest. We encourage people to spend some time relaxing with their friends and family. And Sunday has been a good time to do this, but we cannot say it must be done on Sunday or any particular day.

THE VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

God and man in worship

Have you ever noted that **sometimes the pastor faces the people in the service and sometimes he faces the altar**. When the pastor faces the people, he is speaking to the people on behalf of God. When he turns and faces the altar, he is speaking to God on behalf of the people. In recent years, most churches have followed the ancient tradition of moving the altar out from the wall. In this way, the pastor can stand behind the altar for parts of the service and, especially when officiating at the Communion service, make it very clear that God is speaking to us and is the host at our supper.

In some parts of the service, we are very definitely receiving God's gifts. This includes the absolution, the salutation, the Scripture readings, the sermon, Holy Communion, and the benediction. In other parts of the service, we are responding by giving thanks to God for his great gifts and calling upon his mercy. This includes the confession of sins, the kyrie, the hymn of praise, the prayer of the day, the prayer of the church, the offering, and the post-

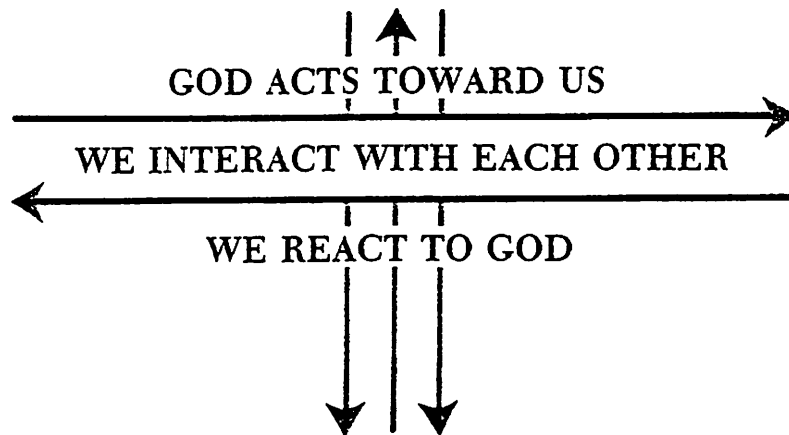
⁴⁴J. J. von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 222.

communion canticle. There are other sections, such as hymns, which might be considered a bit of both--God strengthening us even as we give God praise.

We come to God's house to receive God's blessings, and to give him praise. While we also enjoy visiting with our fellow Christians, this is not our primary purpose. We are reminded of this as we begin our worship service "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," or as in the case of the service of Matins "O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth will declare your praise." John Calvin always began with Ps. 124:8, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." While we have the custom of having

announcements and time to greet one another before the first hymn, please note that we begin our actual worship with that first hymn.

- | |
|--------------------------|
| Hymn |
| Invocation |
| Confession of sins |
| Absolution (forgiveness) |
| Kyrie (Lord have mercy) |
| Hymn of praise |
| Salutation |
| (The Lord be with you) |
| Prayer of the day |
| Scripture readings |
| Hymn |
| Sermon |
| Creed |
| Prayer of the church |
| Offering--Offertory |
| Holy Communion |
| Post-communion canticle |
| (Thank the Lord) |
| Benediction |



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We interact with other people in worship

That is not to say that we ignore the other people gathered in God's house. If that were possible or desirable, we could just as well limit our

⁴⁵Schoedel, 19.

worship to our own private devotions or possibly just watch a service on television. The **horizontal** element of worship is also important. Read 1 Thess. 5:11. Can you think of ways in which we encourage one another or build each other up in the Christian community?

In a church of more than a few hundred members, it is not likely that all of the members will know each other. Yet we believe that it is important to recognize that we are all united by our common Christian faith. We take a minute before the service begins to **greet one another**. We pass **Friendship Registration** booklets so that people might note the names of those sitting on either side of them. We invite people for coffee after services. We have fellowship activities. Which of these do you think are most helpful as a reminder that we worship together with fellow Christians?

We try to make visitors feel comfortable. Members will greet them, make sure that they have a bulletin, and help them to follow the service. Can you think of other things that can be done to help visitors feel at home?

Have you ever thought what **church architecture** says about our view of worship? Our church is in the Gothic style, long and narrow. As our eyes naturally look to the altar, the cross, the pulpit, and the lectern, we can hardly forget God's presence. The danger is that we can forget we are among fellow Christians. It is for this reason that most new churches are built wide, often with the seats angling towards each other, as a reminder that we are worshipping God with our fellow Christians. Some churches have even been built in the round. What do you think would be the advantages and disadvantages of that? How about some traditions in which the choir sits behind the pulpit?

Balancing the vertical and horizontal

Since pastors strive to make worship more meaningful, it can be **tempting to place greater emphasis upon the worshiper, at the expense of the worshiped**. Eugene Peterson has some strong words about this tendency, likening it to the pagan religion of Baalism which was always so troubling to Old Testament Israel:

The emphasis of Baalism was on psychological relatedness and subjective experience. The gulf between people and God was leveled out of existence by means of participatory rites. The terrifying majesty of God, his "otherness," was assimilated to the religious passions of the worshiper. The god of the bull image, the god of wine, the god of the fertility figurine was the god of relevance, fulfilling personal needs with convincing immediacy. The desires that inflamed the soul were fulfilled

in the cultic act of worship. The transcendence of the deity was overcome in the ecstasy of feeling.

Sensory participation was featured. Images were necessary--the bolder, the more colorful, the more sensational, the better. Music and dance became the means for drawing persons out of their private diversities and merging them into a mass response. Sexual activity in the cult was frequent since it achieved the primary Baalistic goal so completely--the ecstatic plunge of the whole sensory person into the passion of the religious moment.

. . . Baalism is worship reduced to the spiritual stature of the worshiper. Its canons are that it should be interesting, relevant, and exiting.

. . . Pastors are subjected to two recurrent phrases from people to whom they give spiritual leadership. Both are reminiscent of Baalism, enough to earn the label, "Neo-Baalism." The phrases are: "Let's have a worship experience" and "I don't get anything out of it."⁴⁶

People like stories, jokes, short sermons, easy music, visual aids, and the like. None of these things are wrong in and of themselves, in fact they can and might be used to the glory of God. But if they become ends in themselves, the church is soon in the **entertainment** business. While such techniques have been openly used by some churches, these methods are self-defeating in the end. How can the church compete with television, movies, and the like that spend hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars producing each minute of their entertainment packages? Worse yet, such techniques could portray God as a genie in a bottle whose sole responsibility is providing for our pleasure.

Liturgy, by definition, is the activity of the people. We come together to worship God together. A church which follows a **liturgical framework** will be less likely to fall into the trap of producing a new entertainment package each week. On the other hand this is no excuse for dullness or sloppiness upon the part of the those preparing and leading worship. The bottom line is this: it is more important to please God than to please man.

⁴⁶Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 143-145.

There is thus a huge **difference between a worship service and a school or civic program**. While we naturally clap when our children sing a song in a concert at school, we do not do so in worship, for they have sung that song to the glory of God and not to receive human praise. We do not stand up and take flash pictures or videos in worship, for it puts the emphasis upon human performance rather than godly praise. If it is sometimes difficult for us to understand the differences, maybe we are more caught up in "neo-Baalism" than we realize.

SAMENESS AND VARIATION

All of the changeable parts of the service, the **propers**, are related to the Scripture readings for the day. This would include the prayer of the day, the introit, the prayers, and the hymns in addition to the sermon.

Those parts of the service that are the same from week to week are called the **ordinary**. Some examples would be the hymn of praise, the confession, the creed, the Communion liturgy and the like. (There are options for each of these, but they are not determined by the lessons.)

In planning worship, it is important to have a balance between those parts of the service that change each week and those that remain the same. A church with too much emphasis upon sameness can become monotonous, even rigid, as it withdraws from the world into the liturgy. A church which changes everything from week to week runs the risk of getting caught up in every whim and fancy of the world. The members of our congregation like change, but they recognize the importance of the familiar as well.

MUSIC

The people of God have always sung praises to their God. The psalms served as the hymnbook of the ancient church and are still used for this purpose. Examples from our hymnal include "Create in me" (Ps. 51; LW 5) and "Oh, come, let us sing to the Lord" (Ps. 95; LW page 209). Other songs taken directly from the Scriptures are called canticles and include: "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Is. 6; LW 6), "O Christ, the Lamb of God" (John 1; LW 7), "Lord, Now Let Your Servant Depart in Peace" (Luke 2; LW 11), and "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" (Luke 1, LW page 255).

The place of music in worship

At the time of the Reformation, there was a difference of opinion as to which music was suitable for the worship of God's people. Zwingli banished it altogether from corporate worship and Calvin only grudgingly permitted it a place. Some believed that only psalms and canticles drawn directly from Scripture were to be used. **Luther believed it was important that the people be able to sing** in their own tongue, using hymns that godly poets had written, based upon the words of Scripture. While the sense of the Scriptural passage had to be maintained, there was no need to cling to the actual words. Their task was not unlike that of a pastor proclaiming God's word in his sermon. Luther himself wrote many hymns so that the people might be able to sing the liturgy, as opposed to the older pattern of simply watching and listening to what was going on between the clergy and the choirs.

Luther saw music as a special gift of God, next in importance to theology. It has much more of an ordering and regulative force than the simple, spoken word. It enables God's people to blend their many voices into one. Luther believed it was imperative for Christians to sing the faith that was within them. He maintained the devils flee at the sound of music, even as they do in the face of a word of theology.

Music style

While any form of music could be used, Luther believed that the highest levels attainable should be utilized. He wrote in the Preface to the Wittenberg Hymnal of 1524:

And these songs were arranged in four parts to give the young-who should at any rate be trained in good music and other fine arts--something to wean them away from love ballads and carnal songs and to teach them something of value in their place, thus combining the good with the pleasing, as is proper for youth.⁴⁷

While we do not say that music has to have a particular style, **we will want to offer the Lord our best**. We can all think of certain styles of music that are popular one day and forgotten the next (disco, rap?). In compiling hymnals we seek to include that music which has enduring quality. In some cases, we "like" best the music we are most used to and, when a group of people are involved, it is never possible to please everyone.

⁴⁷LW 53:316.

Whatever the melody, we will want to emphasize **hymns which extol Christ**, rather than our personal experiences. For we believe that a hymn not only carries petitions, praise, and thanks to God, but also proclaims the faith to all who are singing it.

Accompaniment

We generally use the **organ** for accompaniment, although we use other instruments for special occasions. This is in contrast to the belief of one denomination which states that all singing must be done a cappella, since organs, pianos, and the like were not used in the New Testament church. We do not maintain that they were, but give thanks to God for these gifts which we can use to give him praise.

Role of the choir

What then is the function of the choir today? It is most definitely **not to perform**. Robin Leaver quotes P. W. Hoon and then adds his own comments:

"The congregation is the true choir, and music should be conceived within this principle." The choir is not separate from the congregation, although for musical reasons it is desirable that its members should be grouped together. But it is not its special place but rather its functional role that is of paramount importance. The choir, and instrumentalists too for that matter, should encourage, lead and develop the music of the total congregation.⁴⁸

It has usually been the tradition in the Lutheran church to have the choir sit in the balcony, rather than in the front of the church. While it does not have to be this way, it does seem to be consistent with their role as part of the worshiping congregation, rather than performers. For the same reason, we **do not pause and applaud for their anthem**, even though at times it is certainly worthy of praise. But the focus must be on our worship of God, rather than on the lifting up of human beings.

⁴⁸Robin A. Leaver, *The Theological Character of Music in Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 16.

VESTMENTS

This, too, is the reason we wear vestments in the Lutheran Church. Since the pastor is functioning as a representative of God, he wears **garments which mask his own identity**. How tragic it would be to have people distracted by the shabbiness (or expense) of his suit or of his choice of ties. He wears garments which people are used to seeing their worship leaders wear. These are not special garments designed for church wear but are the normal garments of another era. Fashions in society changed, but those in the church did not.

The only changeable factor in the pastor's wardrobe is the **stole** he wears around his neck. It varies by the season of the church year and matches the paraments which are on the altar, lectern, and pulpit. **Green** is the color of growth and is the "everyday" color. If there is a special event in the life of the church (Pentecost, Reformation, Confirmation, Anniversary), the color is **red**. **Purple** is the color of reflection and repentance and is used during Advent (can also be blue) and Lent. The major church festivals (Christmas and Easter) feature **white**. **Black** is only used on Good Friday.

Arthur Carl Piepkorn offers five reasons for the wearing of vestments, although he realizes that in the end the practice can only be encouraged, not insisted upon:

- 1) We no longer worship in houses, as did those in the early church who wore ordinary clothing.
- 2) The classical clothing style has greater aesthetic value than contemporary fashions.
- 3) Clergy could distract from the message by wearing tasteless clothing.
- 4) We live in a society in which people expect officials to have identifiable clothing, e.g. magistrates, policemen, firemen, and the military.
- 5) We continue in the historic Lutheran tradition.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Ecclesiastical Arts," in Paul John Thielo, ed., *Christian Worship: Reprints from the American Lutheran Magazine* (New York: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, n.d.), 29.

Whether one agrees with any or all of these reasons, the point is clear: vestments are not meant to show off the minister but, just the opposite, to take attention away from his person and direct it to Christ.

REMEMBERING THE REASON FOR ALL OF OUR WORSHIP

Since God is the only one who can truly give, we render nothing other than praise. **Our worship does not earn our salvation; it simply gives thanks and praise to God for the righteousness he has already given to us.** An early Lutheran theologian, David Chytraeus, summed it up several centuries ago:

Under no condition ought we to offer God sacrifices of praise in order to merit the remission of sins or righteousness and eternal life by so doing; for these benefits have been freely provided and given to us through that sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, which was accomplished once for all upon the cross in our behalf.⁵⁰

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Private worship of God is more important than participating in public worship.
2. Jesus found much fault with the services of worship of his day.
3. Religious broadcasts over radio and television may take the place of going to church.
4. The Bible takes it for granted that children of God will meet regularly in public worship.
5. "I didn't get anything out of the service" is a common, justifiable complaint.
6. Newcomers are apt to feel lost in a liturgical service.
7. The sermon is the most important part of the service.
8. Martin Luther wrote a new liturgy for the Lutheran Church.

⁵⁰John Warwick Montgomery, *Chytraeus on Sacrifice: A Reformation Treatise in Biblical Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 118.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BASIC WORSHIP--PRAYER

In a limited sense, we sometimes think of prayer in terms of asking something of God. This is not wrong, for God himself has invited us to do so with the words of Ps. 50:15: **"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."** Jesus promised: **"Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete"** (John 16:24).

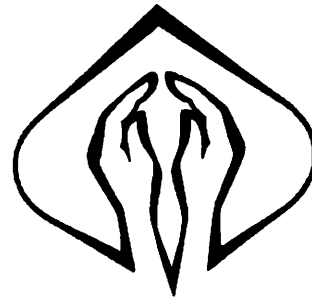
In a wider sense, prayer can simply refer to any conversation with God. **"Talking with God"** is a simple way of putting it. Whereas we are reminded not to misuse God's name in the second commandment, prayer is calling upon God's name in a good and proper sense.

Prayer and worship are in many ways synonymous, both including adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (requests for ourselves and others). Worship is the broader term, referring to many things that come together for this purpose. Prayer usually refers specifically to the formed words of address to God.

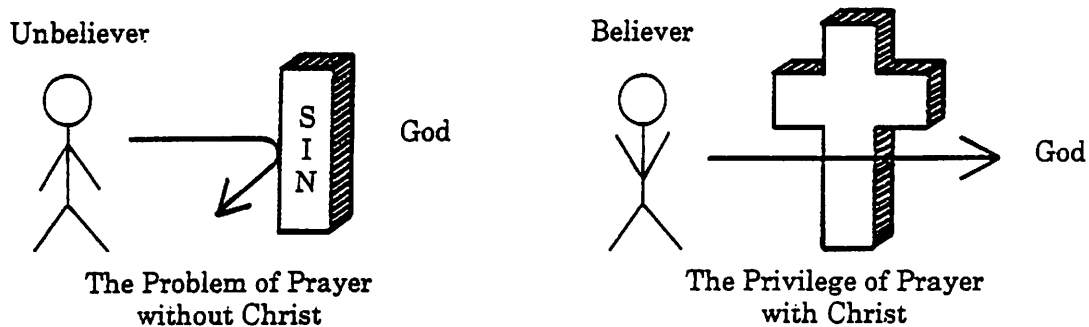
Some prefer a disciplined prayer life--specific prayers at definite times. Others prefer to "talk to God" whenever. Some use memorized prayers, others use printed prayers from a special book, and still others compose their own prayers. With which style are you most comfortable? What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of each?

BY THE GRACE OF GOD WE HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

We pray **"in the name of Jesus."** If this were not true, we would have no right to call upon the almighty God of the entire universe for any



reason. As forgiven sinners, we can ask, and confidently assume, that God will hear our prayers--for Jesus' sake.



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Sometimes we verbally say "in Jesus name" in our prayers, while at other times that is simply assumed. We do not believe that it is necessary or proper to pray to, or in the name of, anyone else, including Mary or saints of any kind. For **Christ made it possible for us to go directly to the Father with our prayers.**

While commanded to pray, we do not see our prayers as a work of merit, nor do we expect that God can or will answer them because of what we do or do not do. **It is by the grace of God that we bring our humble petitions before the Almighty.**

PRAYERS IN WORSHIP

For Luther, prayer was one of the most elementary components of worship. In 1523 he wrote that a Christian congregation should never assemble without preaching and prayer. He believed that the act of prayer was a profession that God was present and would hear the prayers of his people for Jesus' sake.

⁵¹Forest L. Bivens and David J. Valleskey, *New Life in Christ* (Milwaukee: Board for Parish Education, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1986), 49.

Several styles of prayer are a part of the worship service. Simply being in God's house, which Jesus called a "house of prayer," will encourage **silent, spontaneous** prayer. This may be when we first sit down, during the offering, during the communion distribution, or before we leave. At what other times are people likely to be praying silently during a worship service?

Sometimes the pastor prays on behalf of the congregation. One such prayer is the **Collect, or Prayer of the Day**. This is a short prayer near the beginning of the service which "collects" the basic thoughts expressed in the Scripture readings. These prayers are listed with the other "propers" on pages 10-123 of the hymnal. Note that there are many additional prayers for special occasions listed on pages 124-133.

These collects are written in the ancient **five-part prayer form**. In one sentence they include: 1) an address to God, 2) grounds upon which the prayer is offered, 3) petition, 4) hoped for benefit as a result, and 5) termination. Where else in the service do you find such collects being used?

The Prayer of the Church is the longer prayer offered after the sermon. This is not designed to be a time for the pastor to re-preach his sermon, but is a time to bring specific prayer requests to the Lord. Note the suggestions on page 144 for items to be included in this prayer. There is a balance between needs of the world and those of the local congregation. Can you think of other items that might be included in this prayer? What do you think is the purpose of the congregation responding to the individual petitions? Prayer requests can either be communicated directly to the pastor or written in the prayer request notebook in the narthex.

The **Kyrie** is a prayer that we often overlook or, unfortunately, sometimes sing without much thought. The word Kyrie comes from the Greek word for lord, and is often used in the phrase, *kyrie, eleison*, or "**Lord, have mercy.**" Note the responsive format used in Divine Service II (pages 159-60) and the simple form in Divine Service I (page 137). To ask for mercy means to ask for pity so that help might be given. The form in Divine Service I can be thought of in this way: We ask for help of God the Father (Lord have mercy) through the work of God the Son (Christ have mercy) by means of the activity of God the Spirit (Lord have mercy). We might say in contemporary terms, "**God, help!**" Why do you think the Kyrie has traditionally been used at this point in the service?

Other prayers used in church services include the **psalms**, many of our **hymns**, special responsive prayers called **litanies** (see page 279 as an example), and **canticles** such as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), the Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79), and the Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32).

QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

Where should we pray? Can you think of any places in which it would not be appropriate to pray? Some people in Jesus day prayed loudly in public in order to show off. Read Matt. 6:5-6. What advantages do you see to having a quiet place to pray? Do you think this precludes praying in a public place, like a restaurant?

When should we pray? In 1 Thess. 5:17 we read "Pray continually." Are we to take this literally? How can we? When are you most likely to pray? In light of this command, need we ever feel guilty about taking up too much of our Lord's time with our prayers?

For whom are we to pray? Read 1 Tim. 2:1-2. Who are some people that particularly need our prayers at this time? Do you spend more time praying for yourself or for others? In Matt. 5:44 we are called upon to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. What effect do you think that will have upon the one praying? While we pray for all, this does not include those who have died, since their final destiny was sealed at the time of their death.

For what are we to pray? We can pray for anything--although we would not want to ask God for something foolish or dangerous. Since we do not always know if this might be the case, it is good to pray, "**if it be thy will,**" trusting that God knows better than we do. This is how Jesus prayed in the Garden on the eve of his crucifixion (Luke 22:42).

Does God answer all our prayers? Absolutely, but it may not always be the way in which we expect. He may answer: 1) **no**, I love you too much, or 2) **wait**, for the time is not yet right, or 3) **yes**, I was waiting for you to ask, or 4) here is something even **better**. By faith, we are content to leave the final answer in the hands of our loving God.

To whom should we pray? To pray to anyone other than the Triune God is idolatry. What would you do if someone asked you to offer a prayer in a public meeting, but asked you to keep it general, not mentioning the name of Jesus, because it might offend non-Christians in the group?

If God knows what we need, why pray? Our prayers are a sign of faith that we are trusting in God to satisfy our needs.

THE LORD'S PRAYER—A MODEL PRAYER

Read the Lord's Prayer in its context in **Matt. 6:5-15**. Note that Jesus is not teaching his disciples what to pray, but how to pray. It is unlikely that Jesus meant that these were the exact words that Christians were to pray for all time. Indeed, when prompted to give instruction on prayer in Luke 11:1-4, he taught the same prayer with some variations. Look to the Lord's Prayer on page 171. The traditional translation is on the left, and a more contemporary translation is on the right. We usually use the version on the left because it is well-known and loved. We cannot say that the contemporary translation is wrong, nor are those Christians wrong who say "debts." If we worry too much about wording, we are making the prayer into something we would do for God, rather than a privilege he has given us.

Christians early developed a special fondness for this prayer which the Lord himself had taught. Already in what is called the *Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, which dates from second-century Palestine, Christians were instructed to pray the Lord's Prayer three times daily. When Luther wrote his Small Catechism, he looked to the Lord's Prayer as offering all the instruction we needed to know on prayer. At one time (and still in some places) as the Lord's Prayer was prayed in the village church, the church bells were rung, so that those who were home sick in bed would hear the bells and join in praying this special prayer.

But Luther also called the Lord's Prayer "**the greatest of martyrs**," for it is all too easy to "say it" without "praying" it. Indeed, if we are not careful, it can easily become no more than the useless, repetitious babbling it was meant to replace. To guard against that, we will look at each petition in turn, as a reminder of how we are to pray. Look to Luther's explanations of these petitions on page 302 of *Lutheran Worship*.

Our Father, who art in heaven.

Our faith in Jesus allows us to address the almighty God of the entire universe as our loving Father. The Aramaic term was probably "*abba*," which could be rendered as the familiar "daddy." It is only by the grace of God that we dare to begin our prayer in this way.

Hallowed be thy name.

A name represents one's reputation. God's name, which of course is holy in and of itself, is revealed to the world through our words and actions. What kind of witness are we giving?

Thy kingdom come.

We here pray that God might reign in our hearts and lives. We are praying that others, too, might come to know Jesus. We anticipate and look forward to the day when our Lord will return and we will be ushered into the heavenly kingdom.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

We know it is God's will that all would look to Jesus and be saved. We pray here that God would strengthen us that we might resist Satan and walk in ways that are pleasing to our Lord.

Give us this day our daily bread.

This is the only petition that asks for material things. How do you think that compares with most prayers that we compose on our own? Daily bread refers to the basic necessities of life, not luxuries. Note the listing Luther offers in the section "What is meant by daily bread?" (page 302). The word "daily" means that we are willing to trust in God "one day at a time."

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Here we speak of forgiveness in two directions. We are confident of the vertical: God forgives us for Jesus sake. We sometimes neglect the horizontal: sharing forgiveness with those who have hurt us in some way. We rejoice that God is far more generous with his forgiveness than we sometimes are.

And lead us not into temptation.

"Temptation" is used in two ways in the Scriptures. It can be used to refer to the testing of our faith which God will do to bring us closer to himself. It is also used to refer to the attempts of Satan to lure us away from God. We are here praying that God would help us to resist and overcome the evil temptations of Satan.

But deliver us from evil.

This concluding petition asks that God would keep us from all sorts of evil that Satan would bring into our lives. This will be perfectly accomplished in the heavenly kingdom.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.

This was very likely not an original part of the Lord's Prayer, but has been used as a liturgical ending since the time of the early church. Similar ascriptions of praise are offered in Rev. 1:6 and Rom. 16:27. We are free to use or not to use this ending.

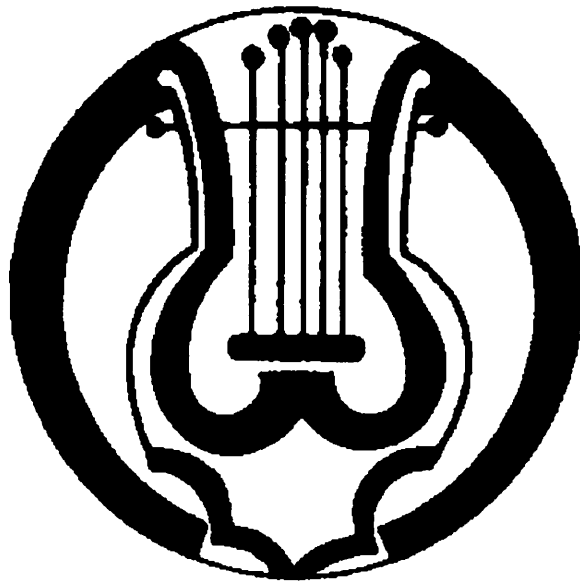
Amen.

We traditionally conclude our prayers with amen. To a child it may mean nothing more than that the prayer or the service is at an end. To a mature Christian it is a statement of faith and commitment. Amen, "it shall be so," is the Biblical Yes. People say amen when they want to give witness that a prayer is their own. Amen is the last word we sing in worship, as a way of underscoring the fact that we have all worshiped God together.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. It doesn't make any difference how you pray, as long as you pray.
2. It is better to pray alone than with others.
3. Memorized prayers often do not come from the heart.
4. A Christian who doesn't pray has probably lost his faith.
5. Those who deny Jesus Christ cannot really pray.
6. It isn't important that we want to pray, as long as we do it anyway.
7. We should add "if it be thy will" to every prayer.
8. People who are wholly ignorant of God's word cannot really pray.
9. The biblical admonition to pray constantly was not meant to be taken literally.
10. Every prayer must be made in the name of Jesus.
11. We can pray for anything our heart desires, as long as we pray in the name of Jesus.

SECTION FIVE
GOD'S GRACE FOREVER



CHAPTER TWELVE

THE FUTURE

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

On November 24, 1991, there was a large ad in the *Des Moines Register* which proclaimed that Jesus would be "coming in the air" on October 28, 1992. Those who had placed the ad had supposedly unraveled some secret codes in the Bible to figure this out. Their point was to warn others. Many believed the predictions, with the result that there was a great deal of anger and disappointment when Jesus did not come on that day.

As Lutherans we pay little attention to such predictions. It is not that we do not believe in Christ's return. Even as Jesus ascended into heaven the angel told the disciples that he would return (Acts 1:11). We would even go so far as to say that it will be soon and we should be ready. But this is **not something that we fear**--for we believe that by the grace of God we are ready--whenever the actual day might be.

Christ could come at any time

While we do not place a weekly emphasis upon the end times as some groups are inclined to do, our Scripture readings do have this focus at the end of the church year. **Look to the Gospel for the Second-last Sunday in the Church Year, Matthew 24:1-14.** After Jesus remarked that the temple will be destroyed, his disciples wanted to know: 1) when it would happen, and 2) what would be the sign of his coming at the end of the age?

In the following verses, Jesus says that there will be many **false Christs, wars and rumors of war, famine, earthquakes, and that the Gospel will have been preached throughout the world.** We believe that all of these signs were **first fulfilled** during the very first century of the church. And for good reason: Christ wanted his followers to share the Gospel with a sense of **urgency.**

The only thing we can know for sure about the date of the end is that we will not be able to figure it out. We read in **Matt. 24:36**, "**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**" The image is used of the second coming being a surprise, as a thief might come in the night (1 Peter 3:10). Anyone who would presume to predict the day of the end is either foolish or a liar! It is not for us to know. God would have us be ready at all times.

We are ready--by the grace of God

Predictions of an imminent end usually instill fear among a certain portion of the populace. The sense of guilt we talked about at the beginning of the course takes over. Indeed, if we did not know Christ, we would have great reason to fear. As Christians trusting in Jesus for our eternity, we have confidence, as we read in **Luke 21:28**: "**When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.**" Because we know Jesus, we know that the next stop will be heaven.

One final judgment

As we read in 1 Cor. 15:51-52, the last day will come **suddenly**. In the twinkling of an eye, those who are yet alive will receive new perfect bodies. Those who have died in Christ will be raised and given the same reward. It will not be a long, drawn-out affair. There will not be any question about what is happening. No one will have time to doubt, for it will happen as fast as lightning flashes across the sky (Matt. 24:27). And then we will be heaven--for Jesus' sake.

The end is the end

As Lutherans we are content to stop at this point when it comes to teaching about the end. It is all we can know and all we need to know. God has provided for our salvation, and he will take care of the details of the end. As someone once said: "We don't know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future."

Some try to figure out more details about the second coming. Some look to symbolic writings in the book of Revelation and speak of a coming one-thousand-year reign ("**millennium**") of Christ on earth, either before or after judgment day. Some speak of a "**rapture**" in which believers will be whisked out of this world. Others divide the history of the world into **dispensational periods**, supposedly described by the book of Revelation in which God deals with his people in different ways. Some speak of a "**Great**

Tribulation," a world-wide conversion of the Jews, and a future political ruler who will be the "**Antichrist.**"

While we do not doubt the sincerity of fellow Christians who dwell upon such things, we would rather focus upon what is central in Scripture--by the grace of God we are saved. We believe, as did St. Paul when he wrote to Titus, "**We wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ**" (Titus 2:13). We will leave the details of the end up to God.

DEATH

Ever since Christ's ascension into heaven, Christians have speculated about the details of his return. For all practical purposes, those millions of people who have died in the faith **experienced the final judgment at the point of their death.** And that may very well be the case for us as well. But no matter, if we believe in Jesus, we are ready for the end whenever that might be.

"Looking forward to death"

We might be reluctant to put it that way, for most of us would prefer not to think about death at all--or at least not until we are ninety or so. And there is nothing wrong in desiring to live longer and achieve more things for our Lord in this world. How beautiful the faith of St. Paul who was a comparatively young man when he wrote: "**I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body**" (Phil. 1:23-24).

Do you realize that we are saying the same thing when we sing the words of Simeon, the *Nunc Dimittis* (page 152 in *Lutheran Worship*), after having received Holy Communion? Simeon had been waiting for the birth of the Messiah (Luke 2:25-32). Now that he had seen his Lord, he was perfectly content to die as he confessed, "**Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation . . .**"

Sometimes it is obvious that death is near. As Lutherans we do not generally practice what is called the **last rites**, although we do not condemn the practice. Luther wrote:

We do not deny, therefore, that forgiveness and peace are granted through extreme unction; not because it is a sacrament

divinely instituted, but because he who receives it believes that these blessings are granted to him.⁵²

We would object if someone said that this is necessary for salvation. Then that would make it something we must do, and it would only cause grief if the person died before this rite could be performed. As Lutherans we believe that we are ready for death at any time. We will provide for the reception of Holy Communion as a special strengthening for the person on their death bed.

The Christian funeral

What we do here is in the realm of **care for the grieving**--for the person who has died in the faith is already with the Lord. The church is saying in effect, "When death comes, these are the things that we believe."

The service is saturated with Scripture, especially those references which remind us of the sure hope of everlasting life through Christ's resurrection. The hymns will express this same sure confidence. Look to the hymns 264-69, the death and burial section in the hymnal. They express confidence in the resurrection. Can you think of any better hymn for the funeral of a Christian than 264 in *Lutheran Worship*?

**I know that my Redeemer lives!
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
He lives my everliving head! (verse 1)**

Notice the explanation points. These words are based upon the confident words of Job, even as he saw death and destruction all around him.

As Lutherans, we shy away from **eulogies** (literally, "good words") in the sense that these are words that are meant to assure the mourners that "Uncle Fred surely was a good guy who deserves heaven." **We lift up the loving promises and acts of God** and the faith of the deceased in those promises. For that is the only thing that matters when all is said and done.

We do not deny the reality of **grief** at funerals. No matter how expected the event might have been, death is always a shock and it always hurts. We grieve because we miss our loved one and life is not going to be the

⁵²LW 36:122.

same again. God has given tears as a beautiful gift to let some of this grief out, and it must come out.

But at any given funeral, there will be some people who are not grieving for the deceased at all. Perhaps they are business acquaintances of a family member and hardly knew the person who died. This death may have opened old wounds and hurts from a previous loss. Grief often lies hidden under a thin layer of forgetting. The pastor will address words of comfort from God's word to a hurting people. We will grieve, but we do not "grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

Between our death and Christ's return

If, at the last day, Christ will come to **judge the living and the dead** (as we confess in the Apostles' Creed), what happens to all those people in the time in between?

In Eccl. 12:7 we read, "**The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to the God who gave it.**" The body is most often placed in a cemetery, "a place in which one sleeps." Whether this is before or after the funeral makes no difference. It also makes no difference if the body is **cremated** or is destroyed in some accidental manner. We will have a new, glorified body when we are called forth on the last day. What this will look like, we will have to wait to see.

We simply say the **spirit is with God** until the final judgment. Just what state of consciousness it is in at the present time is something that theologians debate about, and is certainly beyond our comprehension. Luther once compared it to a deep sleep in which time will become irrelevant. Is. 57:2 speaks of the rest we find in death. It might seem as if we have just dropped off, and then we are suddenly with our Savior. Judgment day will not change anything in the relationship we have with God. Those who live with Christ now will live with him in the hereafter.

HEAVEN

What will heaven be like?

We do heaven an injustice if we simply describe it as a place with streets of gold and pearly gates. While the Scriptures use these images, they are a concession to our limited ability to understand and comprehend a beauty which is beyond words.

It is better to speak of heaven as the **place where God is**. Read Rev. 21:1-8. Note that when we are in heaven with God, death, mourning, crying, and pain will be gone forever. These things, and everything else which stems from our sinful world, keep us from enjoying the true blessings of God at this time. In verse six we read that all of this will be ours without cost, for Jesus has already paid the price.

Verse eight reminds us that not all will enjoy the heavenly kingdom. **Hell** was meant for Satan and his helpers. It is only those who reject the salvation that Christ offers who will spend their eternity completely apart from God. Such is not God's will for anyone.

Either heaven or hell

People will spend eternity in one or the other. There is no such thing as **reincarnation**, although the thought of having another chance is intriguing to many. Lutherans do not believe in **limbo** (the place of the unbaptized) or **purgatory** (a temporary place before we can enter heaven). When we die, or when the Lord returns, we will either be trusting in Jesus or we will not be. There is no in between.

Is it possible for anyone to be sure they will go to heaven?

Absolutely, for it does not depend upon anything we have done, but completely upon the grace of God. Jesus tells us in John 14:2-3, **"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am."** Jesus goes on to explain in verse six, **"I am the way and the truth and the life."** By the grace of God we can be sure of the gift of heaven.

Anticipating heaven

As we prepare to come to the Communion table, we sing together the words of the *Sanctus* (pages 170-71), **"Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might: Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."** It could be said that we are warming up for the heavenly choirs (as we read in Rev. 4:8).

When we sing, **"This is the feast of victory for our God..."** (page 161-63), we are again echoing the heavenly choirs. We look forward to God's banquet table in heaven. All of the questions that this course could not answer,

the things that we now accept by faith, shall be answered to everyone's satisfaction. And all of this is ours by grace--the **amazing grace** of God.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. No one knows where heaven is.
2. A loving God would never make anyone suffer forever in hell.
3. A believer will never die.
4. Our souls will live in heaven, but not our bodies.
5. When we believe in Jesus, we will not fear his return to judge us.
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Webber was reared a Baptist, attended Bob Jones university, received his Th.D. from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, teaches at Wheaton College, and is a member of an Episcopal parish. He chronicles what led him to embrace the liturgical tradition.

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_____. *Worship: Old and New*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

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Here is a systematic review of the history of liturgy, from the early church to the counter-reformation, drawn from the writer's lecture notes.

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He is very concerned that experiencing be an important part of learning. The liturgy (*Book of Common Prayer*) provides one with a starting point for doing practical theology.

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Liturgy must be more than a tool for teaching doctrine.

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This statement of the Commission on Worship (of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod) seeks to identify what makes Lutheran worship "Lutheran."

White, James F. *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

A basic instruction to the subject. The writer traces the development of liturgy from an ecumenical perspective. He believes that the current trend is divergency.

_____. *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1989.

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Willimon offers some interesting historical tidbits. His ecumenical bias colors his perception.

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Classes for new members should focus on the weekly liturgical service.

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A collection of many articles, some of which are more helpful than others.