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Niemtschk: GRAPHO 2026



GRAPHO

CONCORDIA SEMINARY STUDENT JOURNAL



ONE BODY IN CHRIST

VOLUME 8 2026

*Grapho cover art:
His Promise*

The cover art, titled *His Promise*, is a digital mixed-media composition by L.A.Mc.N. The work's foundation is a physical monotype, which was digitally layered with stills from video captured during the artist's first experience of a "Call Day" at the Seminary over 25 years ago. By merging the tactile, singular nature of the monotype with retro video elements and modern technology, the piece reflects the timeless endurance of Christ's Word. The central cross stands as a testament that His promise remains as steadfast today as it was in the moment those stills were captured: no matter what the future holds or where one is called, He is with you.

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Letter From the Chairman

Grapho's theme this year, "One Body in Christ", encourages us to meditate on the ways our faith unites. By our Lord's sacrifice, all believers are bound together with the resurrected body of Christ. Inspired by the great love God shared with the church as seen in Paul's letters (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13), we are freed from sin, death and the power of the devil, and empowered to a life together. Our theme this year invites Christians to consider how our unity is found scripturally, sacramentally, and liturgically.

Scripturally, the unified body is the reality of the church here in time and there in eternity. St. Paul, in addressing divisions among Christians, encourages our life together to be founded in Christ. This reality is simultaneously ecclesiological, belonging to the active reign and rule of God, but at various times also experienced here in time. "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another". It is because you share the same saving faith that you belong to the glorious resurrected body of Christ and his church (Ephesian 4:4-6).

Sacramentally, the body directs Christians to Christ's gift of Holy Communion. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17) United in faith at the altar, we receive his true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Yet not only communion, but also baptism reminds Christians of what we share. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). That same salvation first revealed in Christ's own resurrection has been promised to the whole body of the church. Though this body should die, we await the resurrection at the end and the life of the new creation.

Liturgically we remember the hope and Joy we share in Christ through our time of worship and fellowship. By reading scripture, proclaiming God's word and gathering in prayer, congregations are formed in the faith. As Christians have done from the days of the church of Acts (Acts 2:42), we continue to boldly confess together a living faith. We share a faith, we share God's love, we share one body of all believers, called God's church. "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians

4:15-16).

The Publications Committee was overjoyed by the passion of our authors this year. Our first essay begins with extensive research into the history of our Synod.

Moving to our reflections, The first shows the blessing of our church calendar in living the faith. A second reflection celebrates the hope Christ gives, especially when our own bodies feel frail. The next reflection remembers how baptism marks us all as one family through Christ. A final reflection gives thanks for our Campus' free book shelf and the ways in which all saints are connected through Christ.

Our devotion this year considers how even in the midst of division, the church remains united in our one saving faith.

We featured two poems this year. The first paints in vivid detail the beauty of our chapel, the center of community here at St. Louis. The second Poem brings us to the Altar to remember the peace we receive in the assembly of all believers.

We were also blessed this year to publish 2 hymns. The first Hymn inspires us with the story of Christ's salvation. Our Final hymn is accompanied by an original score composed by the author of the text and confesses our unity shared in faith.

The Grapho Publication Committee prays this journal encourages readers in the faith and points to the blessed unity we count through Christ.

Essay



Peter Ross is a fourth-year M.Div student at Concordia Seminary. Originally from Kalispell, Montana he moved to White Bear Lake, Minnesota in 2008. He received a BA in History from Concordia University Wisconsin in 2022. His interests include hiking, hunting, fishing, watching sports, researching Lutheran history, and reading books.

Sisters Separated: The Past, Present, and Future of the Relationship between the LCMS and WELS

By Peter L. Ross

There are two prominent confessional Lutheran synods in the United States, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Yet these two groups are not in altar and pulpit fellowship. It often comes as a surprise to many younger members of Missouri Synod congregations that there was a time when the two synods were in altar and pulpit fellowship. As time has gone on however, there seems to be a general warming in the relationship between the two synods. In light of this warming relationship, it is good to look at the past relationship of the two synods, evaluate where the two synods stand today, and look at what stands in the way of future fellowship between them with an eye toward steps that may be taken toward unity in the future.

THE FOUNDING OF THE TWO SYNODS

The histories of the two synods are deeply interconnected. In fact, an argument could be made that whether the Wisconsin Synod wants to admit it or not, it has always been defined by its relationship to the Missouri Synod. The two synods were founded around the same time, shared fellowship for nearly 90 years, and to this day often come to the same doctrinal conclusions. Therefore, a retelling and evaluation of the history of the two synods is necessary to understand where they are today and where they are going.

The LCMS was founded in 1847 at a convention in Chicago. However, the origins of the synod date back to the late 1830s when a group of Confessional Lutherans, then known as “Old Lutherans,” led by pastor Martin Stephan began to protest the Prussian Union. The Prussian Union was formed in 1817 in an attempt to combine the Lutheran Church with the German Reformed churches that surrounded it. The Union was marketed to Lutherans as being “merely Christian, or evangelical, or Protestant, or at the very most evangelical-Lutheran.” The method, however, was not

and three other pastors formed the Northwestern Conference with the sole goal of promoting confessionalism in Wisconsin. In 1860, just seven years after he arrived in America, Bading was elected President of the Wisconsin Synod. The turn towards confessionalism was almost complete.

As the 1860s rolled on, the Wisconsin Synod became more confessional. At the 1868 Wisconsin Synod convention, the delegates adopted a resolution to “reject each and every altar and pulpit fellowship with those that believe falsely or otherwise as contradictory to the doctrine and practice of the Lutheran Church.” With that the Wisconsin Synod meant to sever ties with the unionist mission societies that had helped found it. But there were other considerations to this decision. The 1868 Convention also sought a closer relationship with the Missouri Synod. This resolution was not just meant to send a message to the founders of the synod but also to inform the Missouri Synod that the time had come for fellowship.

In October of that year, a Wisconsin Synod delegation, led by Bading met with a Missouri Synod delegation, led by Walther at Milwaukee. By that time, the Missouri Synod could concur with the Wisconsin Synod that fellowship was possible. At the meeting, an agreement between the two synods was drafted the first two points of the agreement read “1. Both Synods are happy to recognize as orthodox Lutheran church bodies. 2. Between the two synods pulpit and altar fellowship shall be established.” Walther said after the meeting “We must admit that all our suspicions against the dear Wisconsin Synod have not merely disappeared but were also put to shame . . . God be thanked for His unspeakable gift.” In 1871, the dreams of fellowship became even more of a reality for the two synods. That year, these two synods, along with the Ohio Synod, Norwegian Synod, Illinois Synod, and Minnesota Synod drafted a document that gave a lengthy explanation for organizing as a general body. That same year, the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference in North America was drafted. The next year, the six synods met at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Milwaukee to officially form the Synodical Conference. From that day forward the history of Missouri and Wisconsin would be forever linked.

In the 1880s a controversy arose that looked to destroy the fabric of the Synodical Conference. The issue boiled down to the question of whether someone is predestined to salvation in light of his faith or is he predestined unto faith. The controversy arose when F. A. Schmidt, a professor from the Norwegian Synod who was teaching at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, accused Walther of teaching “new doctrine” and of having an “un-Lutheran tendency.” The next year, at the Missouri Synod’s meeting, the Ohio Synod’s advisory delegation opposed Walther and at its convention denounced “Missouri’s heresy” before withdrawing from the Synodical Conference

altogether. The next year the Norwegian Synod left the Conference and severed fellowship with the Missouri Synod. At that point, Missouri's most significant ally was Wisconsin. At the 1882 Synodical Conference, Bading and Pastor R. Adelberg issued a report supporting the Missouri Synod stating that they found no error in the Missouri Synod's teaching and that all protested passages had "been corrected or explained correctly in other publications of the Honorable Missouri Synod." Thus the relationship of the two synods was further solidified.

A FRACTURING UNITY

As the nineteenth century rolled into the twentieth century, Lutheranism in America was changing. 1930 saw the combination of the Buffalo, Ohio, and Iowa Synods to form the American Lutheran Church. This was the first truly national Lutheran body in the United States and looked to be the beginning of the end of the synodical alliances that had defined Lutheranism in the nineteenth century. Missouri and Wisconsin were not exempt from these changes. In 1917, Wisconsin merged with the Nebraska, Minnesota, and Michigan Synods to form the Evangelical Joint Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, later the name would be shortened to the modern WELS. There were even points from the 1870s to the 1930s where the Missouri Synod offered to combine with the Wisconsin Synod. But as one WELS member put so well "Amalgamation would mean disbanding the Wisconsin Synod." The Wisconsin Synod had its own history and culture and it wanted to retain it, the merger was never going to happen.

But the new century brought new challenges to the two synods, as well, especially when it came to doctrinal matters. When World War II hit, the Missouri Synod, who had a history of sending military chaplains in times of war all the way back to the Civil War, once again decided to send military chaplains. The Wisconsin Synod, on the other hand thought that sending chaplains would be an opening of the door to unionism and opted to have an organization that daily devotions to WELS soldiers during the war. In the years following the war, the Synodical Conference took up the issue of chaplaincy. The Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod had run into their first major issue.

In the post-war years, another issue that threatened fellowship between the two synods, the issue of scouting. The WELS opposed the scouting movement from the movement's earliest days. In 1914, The Northwest Lutheran became the Wisconsin Synod's flagship English publication, in the first issue of the new magazine, the Boy Scouts were compared to fraternal lodges. The Missouri Synod did not have glowing reviews of the Scouts either. In 1925, Theodore Graebner, a professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was cited saying that Boy Scouts often required boys to attend

religious services and social functions at other churches. As the scouting movement grew, so did the gap between the LCMS and WELS on the matter. The WELS hardened its position on scouting, while the LCMS softened its position. The primary example of this change was seen in Graebner. From the outset, Graebner saw the Boy Scouts as “a preparatory school for Freemasonry and for the lodges in general.” Already in 1925, Graebner was meeting with scouting leaders to address his concerns. By the end of those meetings in 1927, Graebner concluded that the scouts could function in Lutheran churches provided that the troop committee was made up of members from the congregation and that Lutheran boys were not required to attend non-Lutheran services. At its 1944 synodical convention, the LCMS approved a report that would open the door for scouting in Missouri Synod churches. Mark Braun, a WELS historian claims that this was the first time that the LCMS acted without regard for her sister synods in the Synodical Conference, particularly the WELS and “little” Norwegian Synod. The clouds were gathering for the worst test of Missouri and Wisconsin’s relationship.

Through the 1940s and 1950s, the LCMS became more involved in the ideas of Lutheran unity. Already in the 1910s, talks of Lutheran union began. By the 1930s, the American Lutheran Church and the LCMS were discussing the possibility of fellowship. The LCMS at first kept a level head on its shoulders, wanting there to be fellowship only when true unity was discovered. However, the LCMS began to march farther and farther into these dialogues. When this occurred it moved farther away from the WELS. It was to the point that in 1938, Wisconsin’s *Quartalschrift* became the first publication in either synod to criticize the other one in 70 years. The issue at hand was that the LCMS and ALC seemed to be drifting closer to fellowship while not being in full agreement on doctrine. By the late 1940s, Missouri and Wisconsin were in open combat with each other in their official magazines.

In 1955, the ELS, a longtime member of the Synodical Conference, voted to suspend fellowship with the LCMS over the increased hostility between the LCMS and other Synodical Conference bodies. This was a real tragedy, as the two synods had been in fellowship since 1857. The Wisconsin Synod also held a convention in 1955. During that convention, WELS President Oscar Naumann stated that WELS leadership had concluded that the Missouri Synod was guilty of causing division and that the WELS now had to follow the command to “avoid them.” With that in mind, the convention’s Standing Committee on Church Union recommended “with deep sorrow” that the Wisconsin Synod must terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod. A resolution was drafted but a substitute resolution was also drafted to delay the termination of fellowship until the 1956. The reso-

lution to delay the termination of fellowship passed. The writing was on the wall for the termination of fellowship. Yet, at the 1957 WELS Convention, the action of breaking fellowship was further delayed when the resolution to terminate fellowship narrowly failed, though the WELS did maintain a position of “vigorous protesting fellowship with Missouri.” As a result of the further delay of termination of fellowship, many protests were lodged against the WELS by some of her pastors, professors and even two sitting district presidents. The dissenting members of the WELS formed the Church of the Lutheran Confessions in 1960.

The 1961 WELS convention was the climax of Wisconsin and Missouri’s relationship. It would be improper to say that the events of the 1961 convention were surprising by any stretch of the imagination. It has already been demonstrated that the severing of fellowship was on the radar since 1955 if not earlier. Yet, the cessation of fellowship was still a heart-breaking tragedy that many in both synods felt. To set the scene, the story of the Franzmann family needs to be told. First there was Martin Franzmann. Martin began his teaching career at Northwestern College in Watertown, WI, the pastor’s training college for the WELS. In 1946, Martin received a call to teach at the Missouri Synod’s Concordia Seminary St. Louis. He served as the Missouri’s representative at the 1961 WELS convention. Then there was Werner Franzmann. Werner served as the chairman of Floor Committee #2, which was tasked with handling the matter of fellowship with the LCMS. Finally, there was Gerhard Franzmann, who served on the faculty of Northwestern College who was present at the convention and who spoke openly from the floor in opposition to the resolution. Though there were other players at the convention, it was defined by the Franzmann brothers.

On Tuesday, August 15, 1961, Committee #2, headed by Werner Franzmann, presented a resolution to the WELS Convention to suspend fellowship with the LCMS. Debate ran through the afternoon and into the evening. Debate continued at the Wednesday morning session. There both Martin Franzmann and the representative of the Slovak Synod were questioned extensively on the doctrine of fellowship. On Thursday afternoon, the debate started again, it would be the last day of debate on the matter. The Milwaukee Journal reported that when the vote was finally taken it was eight hours after the expected adjournment of the Convention. When the vote was finally tallied, 72 percent of the delegates had voted to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

At this point, perhaps the most memorable scene at the convention took place. Martin Franzmann, a man raised and trained in the Wisconsin Synod, now serving as the Missouri Synod’s delegate, spoke. In his speech he begged the delegates to be more patient with the Missouri Synod be-

fore giving a “lengthy and impassioned” goodbye speech to them. Werner Franzmann stood at the other microphone and responded “We have gone the long mile of Christian love with the Missouri Synod with the course and kind of admonition we have given until now. . . today a sterner kind of admonition and love is required.” Gerhard Franzmann called the scene a “very wrenching experience.” From there the LCMS and WELS went their separate ways.

THE LCMS AND WELS TODAY

The relationship between the LCMS and WELS was pretty much destroyed by the split between the two synods. The two synods became very suspicious of each other. An example of this can be seen in my own life. Growing up in what I assume was a typical LCMS family, all I really knew about the Wisconsin Synod was that if I were to ever run across a WELS member, he would not pray with me. I did not know that the LCMS and WELS were ever in fellowship until I was in college. The distrust apparently ran both ways. In 1992, an ELS pastor and an ELS laywoman wrote a book, published by Wisconsin’s Northwestern Publishing House detailing what was going on in the newly formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). In that book, written less than 20 years after *Seminex*, the authors gave a vague hope that the LCMS would hold on to its confessional identity, but the line was often repeated “the battle does not appear to be over.”

Yet, in recent years there has been a warming in the relationship between the two synods. In 2012, the WELS and ELS approached the LCMS with the intention of beginning informal dialogue. At the 2013 WELS Convention, a resolution “to continue discussions with the LCMS to strive for true unity based on full agreement in doctrine and practice,” was passed unanimously by voice vote. In 2015, both synods along with the ELS issued a joint report on the dialogue noting that many pleasant surprises, including being able to recognize “that doctrinal agreement exists in many areas.” In 2021, President Matthew Harrison attended and addressed the WELS Convention, becoming the first LCMS president to address a WELS convention since fellowship was suspended. In his address to the convention, President Harrison acknowledged that the ELS and WELS broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod to avoid the *Seminex* Controversy. The two synods still meet annually along with the ELS.

There are two main reasons that are often listed for why these talks are happening. The first goes all the way back to the 1955 ELS convention, when the writers of the resolution to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod chose the word “suspend” instead of “terminate.” The WELS followed suit in choosing the word suspend in their 1961 resolution. Werner Franzmann made it clear that the choice of wording was intentional. He

a viable option for the Old Lutherans. Joint services of the Sacrament were held between the two groups, and some Lutheran and Reformed congregations were forcibly merged. The distribution was changed from “The body of Christ . . .” to “Jesus says ‘This is my body . . .’” Those who opposed this were suppressed and were often replaced by clergy who would conform to the state’s wishes. All the while petitions to allow dissenting churches to form independent “free churches” were not granted until 1841.

Martin Stephan, a pastor in Dresden organized an emigration from Saxony to Perry County, Missouri in the hope of founding a confessional Lutheran body in America. In 1838, Stephan, along with five other pastors, 10 candidates for the ministry and about 600 other souls set out for their new Zion. Along the way, however, things took a dark turn with Stephan’s leadership. Carl Mundinger reports that already on the ships Stephan “began to conduct himself like an Oriental despot.” From that point on Stephan had the final say in the new Lutheran colony in all secular and doctrinal matters. Finally, on May 30, 1839, less than six months after the immigrants arrived in America, Stephan was excommunicated and exiled from the colony; the charge was adultery.

In the chaos that followed, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther became the leader of the *woebegone* immigrants. Born in 1811, Walther continued the family tradition of going into the office of the ministry. In 1837, he received his first call to Braeunsdorf in Saxony. During his short year in the congregation, Walther experienced the pain of trying to remain faithful to the Lutheran Confessions while dealing with a purely rationalistic hymnal, liturgy, and catechism. Therefore, he joined the emigration. In the wake of Stephan’s ousting, Walther faced a new problem. The argument was now being made that the emigrants were not a legitimate church because the pastors in their ranks had left their rightly ordered calls to join the emigration. Therefore, Walther set up a debate with Adolph Marbach in April of 1841. Walther’s arguments that won the day went, in short, as follows: the church is inherently an invisible communion of all believers, the true church exists where there is true faith regardless of the continuity of human organizations. Therefore, the emigrants must be regarded as part of the true church with the full right to call pastors. From there, the Saxon immigrants became firmly established and in 1847, the Missouri Synod was formed.

While there was less tumult in the founding of the Wisconsin Synod, it was not without its problems. Wisconsin was founded by Johannes Muehlhauser, who in 1837 was sent by United Rhine Mission Society’s school at Bremen to serve as a pastor in Rochester, NY. Nine years later, Bremen sent Johannes Wisemann and William Wrede to work with Muehlhauser. By 1849, all three men were serving in the Milwaukee area of Wis-

consin. In December of that year, the three men met in the parish hall of Grace Church in Milwaukee to form the Wisconsin Synod and Muehlhauser was chosen as the president. The next April the three men met again and were joined by Kasper Pluess of Slinger, WI to constitute the new synod. However, unlike the Missouri emigrants Muehlhauser and his companions held a “relaxed brand of confessionalism.” For Muehlhauser, the Lutheran Confessions were “paper fences” meant to keep Christians from expressing true unity in the gospel. To that end, though the initial constitution of the new synod required subscription to the Lutheran Confessions for new pastors, the words were quickly crossed out and replaced with the phrases “pure Bible Christianity” and “pure Bible Word.” This was without a doubt Muehlhauser’s doing.

EARLY CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

The relaxed confessionalism of Wisconsin and the staunch confessionalism of the Old Lutherans in Missouri gave rise to near immediate hostility toward one another. In Wisconsin, the Missouri Synod, along with the Buffalo and Iowa Synods, was labeled as a “Romanizing sect” by Muehlhauser. The love for Wisconsin was not lost in Missouri. In 1861, a Missouri Synod pastor in Michigan accused the Wisconsin Synod of being a deceptive and lying church that was “thoroughly unionistic.” Another Missouri Synod pastor in 1861 accused Wisconsin Synod pastors of living comfortable lives so that they could “missionize where the gospel is already being preached.” In 1862, the Wisconsin Synod established a congregation in Watertown, WI, where the Missouri Synod had already set up shop. One Wisconsin official said that it was “high time our synod came to Watertown,” because, before this the choice was between “Methodistic enthusiasm” and the “rigoristic exclusivism of the Old [Missouri] Lutherans.” The Missouri Synod’s official publication responded by saying that the new Wisconsin Synod congregation would serve as a place where those who were indifferent on doctrine or hated church discipline could “find a refuge for their sensitive skin,” all the while they could still pretend to be Lutheran. This marked the first phase of the relationship between the two synods, utter conflict.

Yet even as these fights of the 1850s and early 1860s grew fierce, there was a subtle shift towards confessionalism in the Wisconsin Synod. By the mid-1850s, Weismann and Wrede began to insist on stricter adherence to the Lutheran Confessions and clearer definition of confessional subscription in the synod. As time went on, they were able to overrule Muehlhauser and get subscription to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession into their constitution. Another major development was the arrival of Johannes Bading in 1853 from a mission school at Hermannsburg where he was trained in the Lutheran Confessions under Ludwig Harms. Two years later, Bading

said that the word suspend was used “because we wanted to use a less harsh term hoping that the Missouri Synod will return.” In recent years, this fact has been a key talking point for the Wisconsin Synod leaders when giving explanations to their members on what is going on between the two synods. Second, the WELS and ELS recognize that the LCMS has changed since fellowship was suspended. Thomas Nass, a retired professor at the Wisconsin Synod’s Martin Luther College writes, “The LCMS has solidly reestablished its commitment to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions and has ended all official discussions with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Perhaps now is the time for former partners from the Synodical Conference to become reacquainted.” This sentiment seems to be shared by the members of both synods.

Even as the two synods are getting reacquainted both are careful to remind members that fellowship is not on the radar yet. In the 2015 report issued by the LCMS, ELS, and WELS, the three synods noted that despite the agreement in most doctrinal areas “a number of significant differences (real or perceived) remain that need to be thoroughly addressed. It should be stated clearly that we do not expect to reestablish church fellowship in the near future. All of us are convinced that church fellowship requires complete agreement in doctrine.” Though the two synods have warmed up to each other, fellowship is still a long way down the road.

THE FUTURE OF THE LCMS AND WELS

It is too early to tell if fellowship between the LCMS and WELS is possible. As mentioned earlier, both synods agree that complete agreement in doctrine is required for fellowship, and both agree that they do not have full agreement at this time. Fellowship between the two synods may not happen on this side of Christ’s return. If there is any hope of fellowship between the two synods taking place before Christ’s return, there are three doctrinal areas that need to be clarified.

First, both synods seem quite defined in their doctrine of fellowship. The very issue that tore the two synods apart more than 60 years ago is still at the very heart of what separates them. While there is agreement on the matter of closed communion and on “general principles” of church fellowship, there is still heavy disagreement. The LCMS is firm in its belief that joint prayer may be conducted between LCMS Lutherans and Christians who are not in fellowship with the LCMS. The WELS on the other hand, is defined by its stance of not praying with Christians who are not in altar and pulpit fellowship with the WELS. Something would have to give on either side for fellowship to happen. It does not seem possible for that to happen at this time.

Second, the synods disagree on the office of the ministry. The WELS says that the office of the ministry is given to the congregation and the congregation may call a layman to step into the role of the public ministry on occasion. However, a layman may only do this when called upon by his congregation and must relinquish the role when that (for a lack of a better term) “temporary call” ends. For example, an elder at a WELS congregation may take unconsecrated elements to a shut-in and conduct a Communion service if his congregation asks him to do so. He may not, however, baptize his own children (except in an emergency) or do a Communion service in his own home. In addition to this, the WELS does not believe that the office of the ministry is synonymous with the pastoral office. Instead, Wisconsin teaches that “the church has the freedom to establish different ‘forms’ or offices of the public ministry.” The Wisconsin Synod has three of these “forms”, the pastoral office, teachers (both male and female), and “staff ministers” (the role of DCE would fall into this category).

The LCMS teaches that the office of the ministry is the pastoral office and that the primary function of the ministry is the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This office is given by God through the congregation to be exercised by the pastor on behalf of the congregation. All other “ministries” of the church are auxiliary offices meant to support the one office of the ministry. For example, a congregation may have a Sunday School to supplement what the children are learning in the Divine Service. Even though these seem cut and dry, there at times seems to be ambiguity in both synods on the matter. Nass, who is a long-time attendee of LCMS and WELS dialogues, claims that the difference is really over the language that the two synods use. Yet, the two synods at times talk and practice like the other synod. Therefore, some clarity on the matter from the two synods would be in order.

The final area of disagreement is the area of the role of women in the church. While both synods agree on the matter of the order of creation and both synods reject women’s ordination, there is disagreement on whether women voting in the church constitutes women having authority over men. The LCMS generally believes that it does not constitute authority and therefore most LCMS congregations allow women to vote and women delegates are allowed to vote at district and synodical conventions. Meanwhile, in the WELS, women are not allowed to vote in congregational, district, or synodical meetings. It would be difficult to change the doctrinal position of either of the two synods at this time. Therefore, further conversations need to continue in this area of doctrine.

While fellowship between the LCMS and WELS is still highly unlikely at this point it is still worth pursuing. Schisms are after all, an affront

to our Lord. Therefore, we should take steps to improve our relationship with the WELS. It would now be helpful to look at what individual pastors and laypeople in the LCMS can do to make the relationship better. First, all Missouri Synod Lutherans can pray for their brothers and sisters in the Wisconsin Synod. Pray that the Holy Spirit guides them in the truth of the Word of God. Pray that he guides the conversations at the dialogues between the two synods. Even though it seems so far away, pray that God leads our two synods back into fellowship with a true agreement on doctrine. Second, pastors and laity in the LCMS can read WELS materials with proper judgement. The Wisconsin Synod has a rich history of theologians that many in the LCMS have never heard of. These theologians provide excellent insights into doctrine and are worth our time. A good example of this would be the writing of Adolf Hoenecke whose Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics rival Pieper's Dogmatics in their brilliance. It is also helpful to read WELS theologians in the areas where we disagree, a good place to start would be Mark Braun's *A Tale of Two Synods*. This will give us a better understanding of what they teach as we are not relying on what other people say about them, but what they say about themselves. This is why the majority of my sources for this article are from a WELS point of view. Finally, LCMS pastors can get to know the WELS pastors in their area. Even though they will not pray with us, it is still good to get to know them. Go out to lunch with them, invite them and their families over for dinner, maybe even invite them to Greek study. All the while we wait with the rest of creation in eager expectation for the day when Christ will restore all things, including the fractured relationship between the LCMS and the WELS. May God grant that the relationship is restored on this side of Christ's return.

Endnotes

- 1 *The former organization will be referred to as the LCMS, the Missouri Synod, or Missouri. Likewise, the latter will be referred to as the WELS, the Wisconsin Synod, or Wisconsin*
- 2 *Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839-141, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 15.*
- 3 *August R. Suelflow and E. Clifford Nelson, "The Promised Land," in The Lutherans in North America, ed. E. Clifford Nelson, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975), 154.*
- 4 *Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, 16.*
- 5 *Abdel Ross Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 116. Suelflow and Nelson dispute this number and claim that there were closer to 700 immigrants that made it to New Orleans and up the river to Missouri. Suelflow and Nelson, "The Promised Land," 157.*
- 6 *Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod: The Genesis of Decentralized Government in the Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947),*
- 7 *Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod, 89.*
- 8 *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 117.*
- 9 *Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, 523.*
- 10 *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 118. For the full text of all eight of Walther's theses at the debate Cf. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, 523-525.*
- 11 *John A. Braun, Together in Christ: A History of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 3.*
- 12 *John Braun, Together in Christ, 4.*
- 13 *Mark E. Braun, A Tale of Two Synods: Events that Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 20.*
- 14 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 20.*
- 15 *John Braun, Together in Christ, 4-5.*
- 16 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 20.*
- 17 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 27.*

- 18 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 28.*
- 19 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 28.*
- 20 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 29.*
- 21 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 29.*
- 22 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 30.*
- 23 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 31.*
- 24 *John Braun, Together in Christ, 12.*
- 25 *John Braun, Together in Christ, 12.*
- 26 *Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 181.*
- 27 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 33.*
- 28 *Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America, 180.*
- 29 *This body will be referred to as the Synodical Conference for the rest of this article.*
- 30 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 34.*
- 31 *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 213.*
- 32 *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 213. The precise accusation was that Walther*
- 33 *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 213-214.*
- 34 *Johannes Bading and R. Adelberg, "The Wisconsin Synod Supports Missouri," trans. Carl Grossman, in Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod, ed. Carl S. Meyer. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 273-274.*
- 35 *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 297. This, and its successor body shall be referred to as the ALC.*
- 36 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 55.*
- 37 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 50.*
- 38 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 89.*
- 39 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 93-95. It should be noted that neither syn-*

od sent chaplains

when the United State entered World War I in 1917. Cf. Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 76. It should also be noted that the Wisconsin Synod was not the only church body that questioned the idea of submitting their ministers to the government for the War. The most notable example of this was the Presbyterian Church USA which urged its members to try to avoid becoming part of the military establishment. Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 86.

40 There was an issue of the doctrine of the Office of the Ministry in the early 1900s that still persists to this day, but at the time the lines on the ministry were not clearly based on synodical lines. The adage was used “Missouri practiced what Wisconsin preached, and Wisconsin practiced what Missouri preached.” Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 73.

41 Hans K. Moussa, “The Craze for Organizations,” *The Northwest Lutheran* 1, no. 1 (1914): 5-6.

42 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 103.

43 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 106.

44 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 108.

45 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 109-110. The “little” Norwegian Synod would later be renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). That synod’s history with the LCMS is also an interesting case study but that is another story for another time.

46 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 147-149. It should be noted that both synods did criticize things about each other in those 70 years but generally differences between the two synods seemed to be differences of personality more than anything else.

47 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 214.

48 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 230.

49 Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill: A History oof the Evangelical Lutheran (Norwegian) Synod, 1918-1968*, (Mankato, MN: Board of Publications, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 194.

50 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 231.

51 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 233.

52 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 239.

53 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 240-241.

- 54 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 247.
- 55 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 248.
- 56 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 265.
- 57 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 266.
- 58 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 269.
- 59 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 265-266. *The Slovak Synod was the Missouri Synod's sole ally through this ordeal. At some point the Slovak Synod was re-named the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, SELC. In the 1970s the SELC was absorbed by the LCMS and became one of the non-geographic districts of the LCMS.*
- 60 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 266.
- 61 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 2.
- 62 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 268.
- 63 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 268-269.
- 64 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 2.
- 65 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 269.
- 66 Patsy A. Leppien and J. Kincaid Smith, *What's Going on Among the Lutherans?: A Comparison of Beliefs*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 328. *Interestingly enough, the back of the book contains two endorsements from LCMS pastors, one of which was the Fort Wayne professor, Kurt Marquart.*
- 67 Thomas Nass, "Continued Conversations," *Forward in Christ*, last modified: July 31, 2025. <https://forwardinchrist.net/continued-conversations/>.
- 68 Paula Schluenster Ross, "WELS Resolves to Continue Discussions with LCMS," *Reporter*, last modified: August 12, 2013. <https://reporter.lcms.org/2013/wels-resolves-to-continue-discussions/>.
- 69 John A. Moldstad et. al., "A Report on the Meetings of ELS, LCMS, and WELS Leaders, 2012-2015," n.p. 1.
- 70 Robert Pasbrig, "Minutes of the 66th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod," *Presented at the 66th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Watertown, WI, July 27, 2021. Proceedings 2021*, 72.
- 71 Matthew Block, "LCMS President Greets WELS and ELS Lutherans," *International Lutheran Council*, last modified: August 12, 2021. <https://ilcouncil.org/2021/08/12/lcms-president-greets-wels-and-els-lutherans/>.

- 72 *Aaberg, A City Set on a Hill, 194. The full text of the resolution to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod can be found on pp. 283-287 of that book.*
- 73 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 266.*
- 74 *Nass, "Continued Conversations." Cf. Mark Shroeder, "Purposeful Discussions," Forward in Christ, last modified: November 29, 2021. <https://forwardinchrist.net/purposeful-discussions/>. The second article is by the President of the WELS and was written three months after President Harrison addressed the WELS convention.*
- 75 *Nass, "Continued Conversations."*
- 76 *Moldstad et al., "A Report on the Meetings," 3.*
- 77 *Nass, "Continued Conversations."*
- 78 *Thomas P. Nass, "The Revised This We Believe of the WELS on the Ministry," Logia 10, no. 3, (2001), 33.*
- 79 *Nass, "The Revised This We Believe," 34.*
- 80 *Nass, "The Revised This We Believe," 34.*
- 81 *C. F. W. Walther, The Church and the Office of the Ministry: The Voice of Our Church on the Question of the Church and Office. Study Edition. Trans. J. T. Mueller, rev. and ed. Matthew C. Harrison, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 262.*
- 82 *Walther, The Church and the Office of the Ministry, 284.*
- 83 *Nass, "Continued Conversations."*

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Reflection

Essays



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The Church Year: A Unifying Story for Christ's Body

By Travis Galle

Our postmodern world makes much of the diverse range of “human experiences” that subjectively shape the masses. Consequently, the contemporary task of the Church is to discern how best to comprehend and apply her proclamation to these varying experiences. Consider the experience of time. Human experience of time is something that is ostensibly common to all, yet cultural customs shape its perception. Some societies construct their calendars based on the cycles of the moon, others on the sun (such as the modern western calendar). Seasonal variations also universally impact all cultures, but to different degrees based on their respective climates. Certain civilizations base their dating systems on important historical events or simply referring to the durations of the reigns of their various monarchs.

Despite these varying ways of measuring time, time itself is an objective, external force that is exerted on all humans equally. One of the most important doctrines that would emerge in the Patristic era is the understanding that God created time yet exists completely outside its effects. This is one of those things that simply makes God God. The Lord is the ruler of the universe and thus presides over space and time. St. Augustine, arguing that time began at creation, noted that God must inhabit a state of timelessness where past, present, and future are simultaneous before Him. Unlike created, mutable objects, God is not at the mercy of its progressive alterations. It is difficult for humans to comprehend this fact, which is why man-centered theology often tries to diminish it.

Yet, God does not leave us in a state of bewilderment before the ever-shifting sands of time. Moses tells us that on the fourth day God created lights in the heavens, to separate day from night; and delineate the seasons. (Gen. 1:14) All creation is subject to change, so God mercifully gave us objects that change constantly so that we may comprehend time in a consistent manner. Cultural subjectivity comes in how we choose to relate these signs

to one another. One may be tempted to see these variations as merely functional; societies will construct frameworks of timekeeping based on climatic factors such as the cycle of the harvest.

The truth of the matter is that the cyclical rhythm of time provides an opportunity for each culture to tell its story. What is the story that our contemporary American culture wishes to tell? One flip through a standard calendar hanging on the wall will show us the plot points of our common societal story. All of these, of course, reflect our highly individualistic and consumeristic tendencies, but I will attempt to avoid a cynical tone as I unpack them.

New Year's Day ushers in the beginning of the year and represents a clean slate for the beleaguered American who feels the pang of disappointment of unfulfilled promises in the previous year. This usually comes with New Year's Resolutions, a new set of personal promises to make up for past failures. When the page flips to February, all eyes turn toward Valentine's Day, when flower and card companies salivate over their sales ascending as men scramble to make their significant others feel as special as possible. The coming of spring usually coincides with a Spring Break of some sort, a time when the hint of warmer weather prompts a cause for leisure for students of all ages. April typically contains the holiday of Easter, a fun stand-in for a spring festival befit with children hunting for eggs and (maybe) going to church.

Then comes summer, which is a time of extended leisure for many; hot weather dictating such activities as beachgoing and sporting. This sacred time for sun-starved Americans contains three festivals which mark the beginning, center, and end of the season; Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day. The first two are patriotic recognitions, the latter a testimony to, once again, leisure. All three of these holidays typically center around the sacred American outdoor culinary custom known as barbecuing, a summer staple.

September usually brings cooler weather and a return to ordinary labors. The build up to Halloween defines most of autumn, culminating in that spooky night of candy and comradery. In November all eyes are turned toward Thanksgiving, another festival centered around food with civic character. Finally, December is dominated by Christmas, many complaining that its significance has even eclipsed Thanksgiving in the previous month. Arguably the most important of all American holidays, Christmas certainly has a sentimental familial aspect to it despite its commercial trappings. Finally, the modern American year ends triumphantly with New Year's Eve, a time to celebrate the past and prepare for the future, regrettably accompanied by much debauchery. And then the cycle repeats itself again.

Now that we have examined the annual American story, let us reflect on what our collective conception of time tells us about ourselves. Most of our holidays center around the interplay of work with leisure, weather, or national considerations. Family and romance also are featured. There are only two explicitly religious holidays that are on the calendar; Christmas and Easter (Valentine's Day and Halloween have religious origins but are scarcely understood as such today). Yet neither of these holidays are exclusively, or even primarily, religious. Attending church on these high feasts is optional, and doing so only on these dates underlies the lack of religious observance as a whole throughout the civil year.

The story we in the modern American landscape tell with time is not irredeemably bad, but it is insufficient for full spiritual edification. A yearly rhythm dictated only by the ebbs and flows of work and play and even familial concerns does not build up the Body of Christ. This borderline nihilistic narrative our culture inhabits presents a perfect opportunity for the Church to witness to a story much more grounded in Christ and His mission.

Fortunately, the Church already has a historic narrative cycle already ready to be implemented: the Church Year. And due to the liturgical reforms of the past century, most liturgically minded denominations tell a similar story. Yet even though these churches use this calendar on paper, it rarely seems to impact much in the way of spiritual formation in the lives of the laity. We tend to think in terms of the "church calendar" on the one hand and the "civil calendar" on the other, the latter of which has much more meaning to the average church goer. Congregations will even accommodate the civil calendar in order to be more relevant to the greater public (Mother's and Father's Day sermons, Thanksgiving Eve services, etc.) It is almost as if the Church is slightly embarrassed to have a sense of time different from the surrounding culture, and at times wishes she could shake off such a difference.

But when we compare the Church's relationship with her story and that of the world's, we see the reverse. Prior to modernity, the Church's sense of time largely shaped the society around her. It has often been retorted that the average medieval peasant had significantly more days off compared to the modern worker due to all the feast days observed. Specific elements of certain holidays shaped practices that straddled class divisions, such as the king washing the feet of the poor on Maundy Thursday. Lenten fasts actually affected the economy, for better or for worse. Holidays like Michaelmas and Whitsun were once close to if not on par with Christmas and Easter in the esteem of Christendom. People used to take the Church's unique cyclical story seriously, and that narrative embedded itself in the vocational

life of the people.

At the dawn of the Reformation, certain reformers were cynical of the fact that almost every day on the calendar had an observance for one saint or another. When everyday becomes a special festival, it certainly diminishes the uniqueness of any given portion of the larger story. Unfortunately, some of the more radical reformers would throw the baby out with the proverbial bathwater, essentially abolishing the Church Year. Why maintain a manmade tradition when other superstitions are being cast aside?

Thankfully, the Lutheran Reformation was more conservative. The founding confessional document states that Lutherans, “teach that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquility and good order in the Church, as particular holy days, festivals, and the like.” (AC, XV, i) Though not overly specific, this article is testament to the historical fact that Lutheran congregations maintained observance of the Church Year and the historic lectionary as an edifying element for the Body of Christ. Of course, the very next line quickly dispels any suggestion that such observances merit salvation. This is where the notion of *adiaphora* comes in, which much like with the liturgy itself is invoked as a license to set aside any tradition deemed unnecessary to the modern context. Even minute alterations such as moving weekday festivals like Ascension and Epiphany to the nearest Sunday are done in the name of contemporary convenience, undercutting the significance of such feasts.

Voicing concern over such proceedings is usually met with a quote from St. Paul, the *sedes doctrinae* for liturgical flexibility of any kind, “One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord... while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.” (Rom. 14:5-6) Paul is expressing that such value ascribed to certain days should not be a matter of conscience, yet many in the modern Church take this to mean any use or disuse of any element of the Church Year is purely a matter of context. Doing so implicitly subordinates the unified, self-confessing story for Christ’s body to that of the story which belongs to the broader, secular culture.

Lutherans have always wisely emphasized pure doctrine over pure practice, yet even the most experimental practitioner must admit that *lex orandi lex credendi* (how one worships is how one believes) generally holds true. In this age of subjectivity, the Church alternative confession is best made when we have a universally accepted story to tell about ourselves. The Church Year that we have received accomplishes this in spades. It is up to us to treasure this annual cycle, teach it to its full effect, and encourage

our people to embody it in their daily lives. No embarrassment. No fear of inconveniencing those who are running on another schedule, but a full embrace of the time-honored rhythm of our collective salvation history. We are always going to have some story at some level; some cyclical system to which we adhere, governing our witness and shaping our people. Jesus Himself did not shirk from participation in His own nation's story. He celebrated Passover with His disciples (Matt. 26:18-19), and He was in Jerusalem to observe both the Feast of the Tabernacles (John 7:2-10) and the Dedication (John 10:22-23). Indeed, our Lord willingly kept to the regular cycle of time known to His people according to the flesh, more strongly communicating His fulfillment of that story, inviting us to inhabit the story He has for His bride the Church.

One way to make the rhythm of the Church Year more “real” for our people is to lean into the poetic structure already present therein. The liturgical calendar has two “pillars” signifying the two most important doctrines of the Christian faith: the incarnation and the redemption, Christmas and Easter, respectively. Both of these doctrinal pillars can be divided into three seasons each centered around three liturgical activities for the people of God: reflection, celebration, and meditation. For example, the Time of Christmas begins with Advent; a four-week season which many have forgotten to be a time of penitence. Although it is a preparation in celebrating our Lord's Nativity, it often becomes merely a countdown to Christmas. Communicated rightly, Advent is a serious time of reflection on how our God comes to us; in the past, present, and future. The three-year lectionary captures this well. The first Sunday of Advent contains readings about the Last Day (future), the second concerns the law-focused preaching of John the Baptist (present), and the fourth centers around the prediction of Jesus' birth (past). This season of reflection is then relieved by a twelve-day period of celebration of the glorious mystery that God was born for us, the infinite becoming like us in every way. We then meditate upon that mystery for five to eight weeks in Epiphanytide, where we contemplate the revelation of the divine Son to all the world.

This same threefold pattern is observed on a larger scale during the Time of Easter. Ash Wednesday begins the six-week Lenten fast, which our modern churches rightly understand already as a time of personal reflection upon our sin. Much like Christmas, the great Resurrection feast triumphantly ends the fast with the joy of the defeat of that same sin, a celebration which also lasts seven weeks. The still longer period of meditation follows, the so-called “green season” which spans from Pentecost to the end of the Church Year, many weeks later. This period is the toughest liturgical nut to crack, as it tends to be glossed over as a time for generic teaching about nothing in particular. The lectio-continua featured in the epistle and

Holy Gospel readings in the three-year lectionary does not help dispel this notion that the Season after Pentecost is void of theme. More can be done to emphasize certain aspects of what living as God's redeemed people entails. The progression from Pentecost to Advent should not be full of nondescript Sundays, but cohere with what Herman Sasse wrote, "as every Sunday is celebrated as 'The Lord's Day' anticipates the Parousia."

Fortunately, we do have historical precedents for adding flavor to the stagnancy. Informal as these divisions may be, Anglican and Lutheran traditions of the historic lectionary have emphasized various movements within the "green" season. We have Johntide, centered around the Nativity of John the Baptist on June 24. A thematic unity across all lectionary cycles can be construed around the prophetic preaching and teaching of the Word (many of the gospel texts concern the sending of the disciples for example). Around the end of Summer comes Marytide, derived from the August 15th feast of Jesus' mother. This movement's emphasis shifts from the going out of the Word to the community shaped by the Word itself, the Church and her composition of living stones. Themes of discipleship and Christian brotherhood are strong here. As the days grow darker and fall comes upon us, Michaeltide centers the Christian life on the Church Militant, the ever-present struggle against the power of Satan and His kingdom. This fits nicely within Lutheranism, as this period-concludes on October 31, the Feast of the Reformation where false teaching is displaced once and for all. Finally, the month of November is dominated by themes of the End Times. All Saints Tide is the best attested of these subseasons as the Church Triumphant is boldly proclaimed through an emphasis on the glorious day to come for believers everywhere. Finally, the promise of eternal rest punctuates the long year.

This all sounds great on paper, but how do we make this story a reality for God's people not only on Sunday but in their lives as well? This author does not suggest that we compel our people to ignore the civil calendar completely, but we should strive to make this ecclesiastical rhythm a reality in all aspects of their lives. There are still too many blank stares and too much abject disinterest by the members of the body when we present them with the "twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost." Intentionally making meaningful connections for our people helps us cultivate a common language for the Church that transcends cultural and civil barriers.

Teaching is the foundation of this. Cutely telling the congregation "Happy New Year" on the First Sunday of Advent or reminding people that it is still Christmas on January 5 is only the beginning of letting people know we have a Church calendar. It continues with drawing broader liturgical connections in the pulpit across the readings and the greater context

of the season so inhabited. This is not to say we should move away from a textual approach to preaching, but we ought to concern proclamation with the aforementioned activity of the given season (reflection for Lent, celebration for Christmas etc.) The given portion of our salvation story will come to fuller life in this thematic attention. Furthermore, Sunday morning Bible class is an opportunity to teach the laity about the chapter which that particular Lord's Day inhabits. What makes this day special and how does it communicate to us the Church's divinely penned narrative? Monthly newsletters are also a terrific means of providing fuller analysis and devotional material explaining the liturgical situation occurring at that time.

Most significantly, conversation is key to forming a people who share a common story. How we speak about time with our parishioners will no doubt shape their temporal thinking. It could be a simple adjustment from saying "I'll have that done sometime in January" to "I'll have that done sometime this Epiphany." If the pastor's sense of time is not governed by Christ's story, why should the laity bother? Subtle changes like this form a shared dialect.

This is not a call to radically remove the Church's connection to the secular calendar. Instead, it's a positive proposal to immerse the living stones of God's temple into the cornerstone's foundational narrative. Reverently reflect upon human sin when the time is right. Rejoice with fellow believers in what Christ has accomplished. Live in that new reality in intentional and unique ways as the circumstance warrants. Human experience craves this sort of rhythmic variety in reference to the temporal signs God gave us. Give thanks for what has been handed down to us. We pray with Moses to the Lord of time, "teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom." (Ps. 90:12)



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The Broken Body

By Benjamin Wagner

I remember sitting on the dugout bench wishing that I could play the same way the other kids did. They did not need to labor with such great exertion that their lungs might collapse—but I did. I was born with several chronic conditions that made all physical activities exceedingly challenging. For me, sports, exercise, or even playing with other kids always came with complications. I knew, deep down, that something was wrong with me. My body was not as it was meant to be.

Through the various limitations that I experienced in childhood, I discovered that I (perhaps more than most) am acutely aware of this world's fallenness. It is easy for a surgeon to observe and treat the ailments of his patients, but when he is himself underneath the scalpel and the blinding lights of the operating room, he knows—much more intensely—the suffering which these ailments cause his patients. Likewise, it was one thing for me to know about the fallen state of the world, and another entirely to experience the heartrending pain of sitting on the sidelines while the other children played.

It was in those moments of deepest resentment for my own condition that I found myself longing, groaning for something more than what this present world offered. We are very rarely conscious of our breathing, digestion, or other natural functions of the body. Only when they are not functioning as they ought to be—such as a case of bronchitis, or indigestion—do we notice there is something wrong with them. For me, my body was in a perpetual state of “wrongness,” discontent with the present state of affairs.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, uses this very language of the body to describe the church: “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Corinthians 12:26). Just as my physical limitations taught me to acutely feel the brokenness that others might overlook, so too does the

church's scandals reveal a profound wound in Christ's body. The elder who steals from the church's treasury and the pastor who has an affair are not mere organizational inconveniences—each, in its own way, is a rupture in the body of Christ Himself. Christ mourns over the affliction which plagues His Church. Daily, there are schisms, scandals, breaches of trust, fits of rage, wrath, and conflict that hurt His beloved Church. Christ is not detached or disinterested in our sufferings; He knows them more deeply than we could ever fathom and therefore longs with eager anticipation for the consummation of all things.

This is the great Christian virtue of hope—to await that glorious day when all is restored through Christ. It is through hope, looking to this consummation, that the Christian begins to find himself—in a very real sense—changed. As I am sure many can attest, the man or woman who is engaged is not the same as they once were. Before, they found no need to drastically concern themselves with the health, wealth or wellbeing of another person. Yet, upon the acceptance of the proposal, there is a fundamental shift in their attitude towards all things. They no longer view themselves, their friends, their family, or anyone the same way—they are a new person. Now, all relationships, indeed, all things, are governed by that one hope—the day when they are united to their future spouse. That future event, and the confidence of it, changes who they are now and indeed changes their relationship to the world around them.

In the same way, the Church longs for her union with Christ. Considering this hope, the bride eagerly prepares for her wedding day. She prepares, washes, clothes, and adorns herself—all in eager anticipation of that blessed day. The Church does not remain complacent, but eagerly prepares to welcome her Savior. As C.S. Lewis observed,

The Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. (Mere Christianity P.134)

Lewis's point is precisely the one at stake here: it is not despite but because of their heavenward gaze that Christians are equipped to confront the church's present wounds. So easy is it, in our moments of despair, frustrated by all the scandals and brokenness which rots the church, to lose sight

of the age to come and focus entirely on the present suffering. That is not the calling of the Christian. Our calling is far higher: to long and look for the heavenly realm where our inheritance is hidden with Christ. So, we are to yearn, plead, and pray that Christ will come soon! But more than that, we are to bring His kingdom here and now!

The new creation is not some far-removed fantasy which is only wishful thinking—it is here! Christ's kingdom has invaded this present world and is now restoring it through His church! And we, as members of His body, are bringing into this dead and dying world the restoration of all things. The poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, put it this way, Christ “plays in ten thousand places, / lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his, / to the Father through the features of men's faces.” Christ lives, heals, and restores through His church—through people of every tribe and tongue, every people who hear and receive the Word of God, and partake of His sacraments! Where the Word of God is, there Christ is healing His creation! The calling of the Christian is not just a hope for the future, but to enact that hope in the here and now!

What might this hope-driven healing look like in practice? It begins with confession—acknowledging before God and one another that the church's failures have hindered our witness and grieved the Spirit. In confession, the body names its wounds honestly, and in absolution, it receives the healing word of Christ who forgives and restores. From this foundation, there is faith, trusting the promises of God, that Christ, our glorious Savior, will come and come soon! If He is coming, we would be foolish to sit idle. There is work to be done for the wedding! We must feed the hungry, care for the orphan, defend the vulnerable—for not one deed of kindness will go forgotten by our lovely Savior. All this is done for the body, the Church, that she may be ready as she now eagerly awaits the return of her Savior.

So, when I sat on that bench in little league, I knew that there was something I awaited—something much more than my present suffering. My physical body's brokenness pointed beyond itself to a deeper fracture: the brokenness of Christ's body, scattered and tattered across continents and centuries, torn by history and pride. So too should every Christian who has known the pain which infests the Church await that glorious day when there is no more suffering—when we see Christ face to face and are gathered together under one Shepherd. And in longing for that day, we labor to make it visible even now. We pursue peace, guard truth, and love one another across every human boundary that would seek to hurt what Christ has made holy.



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One Body?

By Christopher Genszler

“**O**ne Body, In Christ”. This is a great theme. Biblical. Staunch. Solid. But when I read this, I had a small twinge in my heart. I remembered the youth groups. I remembered the summer camps. I really couldn’t help myself in connecting the two because they have become so very similar. The parents drop the child off for some good, Christian education, but then go elsewhere. Parents everywhere have an option to be as unengaged with their child’s walk with Christ as they see fit. I know I don’t know all of the situations they may be going through. And I wonder, perhaps selfishly, if the church has tried to meet the needs the parents have.

The youth group, though certainly well-intentioned, has become something unintended. The youth group was meant to teach the children about their Savior in a way they can comprehend. I cannot help but wonder if they are still doing this. Moreover, it doesn’t seem like unity when the youth are pulled out of the service for youth groups. The very first time they actually sit through a full service? During confirmation, when they have to take notes because the instructor will ask them questions. Not the pastor. He only sees the youth on Sundays. I’m only giving you an example. If this sounds familiar, don’t worry. You’re not alone; many churches look like this now.

“Well, we tried keeping the children in service, but they were too noisy.” That’s about the nicest way I’ve heard this complaint listed. I could list alternate phrasings here, but they wouldn’t be printed (rightly so). I understand when children get rambunctious in the service (I have two kids myself). Surely, there might be another option beyond removing the child. How long has it been since the children were allowed to be in the entire service? I’m not asking to be rude; I’m trying to make a point. If the system was changed ten years ago, that’s ten grades of children who haven’t been in church until confirmation. If each class is 10 kids, that’s 100 children who have grown up never hearing a sermon until they have to analyze one in

confirmation. That's bigger than several of the congregations in the LCMS today. Again, I'm not assigning blame; I'm noticing a pattern (concerning one) emerge.

While a healthy church should have many facets, they are one body in Christ. If we are the one body in Christ, we would meet together to study God's Word. We would meet together to praise Him. We would meet together around the font. Around the altar. We are gathered by our Lord. The one body would gather together, as crazy as it sounds. The one body would confess the same words regarding Christ. They would sing similar songs. They would receive the same Christ on their lips. They would pray the same prayers. The one body of Christ would not let their differences overshadow what it means to be a child of God. The confirmation process would involve the parent directly. Might even require them to attend also. Confirmation wouldn't be another hoop. It'd be a child of God calling out, "Abba Father!" It'd be the child being able not only to answer questions on a test but give a reason they have hope. It'd be a child showing and reminding all of us old people the joy and wonder that is this faith God gives us so graciously.

Sound impossible? There was once a man, born of a virgin, who approached a prophet by the river and was baptized for the forgiveness of sins. One thing: he had no sins to forgive. He was the holy, innocent Lamb of God, the one ordained to take away the sins of the entire world. Why would He receive Baptism? Why would He, in His perfection, subject Himself to earthliness and be baptized like a common sinner? To pave the way of adoption. Baptism is a place where we receive the marks of the cross upon our foreheads and hearts, to mark us as a redeemed child of God. Christ's death and resurrection is the turning around of death, and He commissioned the disciples to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. Children are included in all nations. They are just as much the children of God as you.

God has declared us His adopted, beloved child through Christ. Christ has declared us, declared YOU, my beloved reader, as a child of God. You are a member of his body, and yes, this body of Christ can look chaotic. And that can be good, as long as there is unity. Let's start there. We are one body in Christ. This is whom He established on this earth. His body, one, in Him. Sustained by Him. He died for it. He rose to life for it. Meant for all human beings. All ages. Everyone. Let's take that as the starting point, and work from there. After all, this is the one body of Christ. All of His redeemed, renewed, regenerate children, being gathered to Him again to receive His gifts.

I pray that, as we are sent out into the harvest fields, we might have the boldness to set aside all that which divides us and instead focus on being

the one body of Christ. In Him, all things are made new. All things have been made new. Look to your neighbor. Love your neighbor. Help your neighbor. Look at this one body in Christ with fresh eyes. Engage it with new ideas. Inspire those who have grown cold. Call to faith the little ones, the ones of whom God said, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." The Lord has prepared the harvest field, and while we are going out to work, we have the incredible privilege of keeping the resurrection in our minds, our eyes fixed on Christ and showing this great cloud of witnesses the incredible blessings Christ has given to you.



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Liturgical Renewal and McDonaldization

By Daniel Johnson

What is McDonaldization?

Imagine with me that it is the 1950s, and you are going on a road trip down Route 66. You get hungry, so you decide to stop for food. You pull off the side of the road and park in front of a classic American diner to get yourself a burger and fries.

Every diner is slightly different. This diner has several details which catch your attention. Perhaps the name of the joint is unique. Maybe it's a silly name, maybe it's the family's name, or maybe it's a regional name. Perhaps the logo looks unique—a unique color, artwork, font, texture, and so forth. Perhaps the artwork in the diner is unique. Maybe with black and white photos, or maybe there are posters of national parks, or maybe there are car models.

You sit down and wait to order, and comb through the menu. The menu is also slightly unique. Sure, every diner you have been to has burger and fries, but they all have their own variation on the theme. This one maybe has outer-space themed burgers. Maybe it has wild west themed burgers.

Your waitress comes and asks for your order. Every waitress (or waiter) at the diners you have been to has the same job: take your order, give the food to you, check on you, and close out your tab. But the way in which they do this job is always slightly different. This waitress maybe starts with a silly joke. Or maybe they have a certain line they recite to welcome you. Maybe they make recommendations. Maybe they don't. So on, and so on.

The point is, 70 years ago, each diner was slightly different, but they all had something in common: burger and fries. They all had the same essential theme, but each had their own variation on that theme. The variations were celebrated and expected. If the central theme was not there, then the diner would feel like a bad diner. If you went to a diner, and they didn't have burger and fries, but only sold salads, you would be outraged! If you went to a diner, and the walls were blank, it would feel wrong!

Fast forward with me 70 years later to today, and let's go on a road trip. You get in your fancy 21st century car and head down the road and get hungry. You want a burger and fries. Where do you stop? You go to McDonalds, or a to a chain very much like McDonalds.

You have been to hundreds of McDonalds. You have lost count. And they are all basically the same. Sure there are minor variations, every McDonalds has differing levels of quality, the bathrooms may or may not be cleaned, etc., but everything is basically the same. The architecture is the all the same. They all have that familiar logo, those iconic golden arches. They all have that drab tan-colored siding. They all have familiar artwork. The flooring is all the same. The furniture is all the same. There might only be three floor plans for every McDonalds in the whole country. The menu is the same everywhere. The same dollar menu. The same entrees. The same drinks. Sure, there is some slight variation, but it's all basically the same. Even the prices are all basically the same, depending on the municipality. The customer service is basically all the same too. The same perfunctory performance of the ordering process is pretty much expected at every joint, although with a major exception being made for especially friendly cashiers. We even have started to get rid of customer service and have started to use kiosks or our phones to order instead! I could go on!

The point is, McDonalds represents a trend in our society. 70 years ago, when you wanted a burger, you went into a mom and pop diner which had welcome and delightful variations on a theme: burger and fries. But nowadays, all of these variations have been radically flattened and done away with. Now they are replaced with rigid conformity. Yes, we still get burger and fries, but all of the unique characteristics which used to be there are unwelcome. Sure there are still some who cling to the good 'ol days, but for the most part, people don't want variation. If the burger isn't the same as the last one we had, we get upset. If the drink doesn't have the same quotient of syrup, we are dissatisfied. We want the same experience everywhere. We want the same architecture. We want something predictable and stable.

Now we come to my main point: This isn't just about food. This is an overall trend in society called McDonaldization. Like it or not, this is an actual sociological term, first used in 1983 by sociologist George Ritzer in the *Journal of American Culture*. Reflect with me for a moment. We expect McDonaldization in so many areas of life: healthcare, grocery stores, movie theaters, car dealers, government offices, and so on. We crave a stable, conformed, flattened, and de-personalized experience everywhere!

The question must be asked, is this always a bad thing? In some ways, no. For example, consistency is a good thing. I don't want to walk into a diner and have a menu full of salads! I don't want to walk into a diner

and encounter a staff that is confusing me with weird idioms and unusual customer service. Likewise, quality is a good thing. I don't want a moldy burger! I do not want lazy or under-qualified workers! McDonaldization has done some good, we must admit. There are clear standards which are often met.

Yet it also can do some harm. Personality and particularity are good things, and we are losing this. Having variety can help to better connect with one another. Having particularity can help us to fit within our context in a more meaningful way. For example, if you go to a diner and the vibe really catches your attention, you are more likely to strike up a friendship with the workers and return. This is good for society, it brings us together in meaningful ways.

But, whether you like it or not, McDonaldization exists.

McDonaldization in the Church

Is McDonaldization found in the Church? The answer is complicated. In some ways, yes; but in other ways, no.

In some ways, the Missouri Synod has become more and more corporate as time has gone on. The most specific example of this is the success of the Lutheran Service Book. In the vast majority of cases, if you walk into any LCMS church, you will see the familiar burgundy hymnal, and hear the familiar tones of LSB services and hymns. Likewise, certain other publications like the Portals of Prayer and other devotional resources have become indelible marks of the LCMS in Lutheran Congregations.

While this could share some qualities with McDonaldization, I argue that the use of Synodical materials has not reached the extent of organizational conformity to which other organizations like McDonalds have now reached. When I walk into an LCMS congregation, there is still much variety found between congregations. Furthermore, I believe that the resources put out by CPH have truly been beneficial for the building up of healthy unity in the LCMS, rather than spurring on excessive conformity. There is still lots of diversity within the LCMS, and we have not succumbed to McDonaldization.

There are so many possible areas in society and in the Church that the topic of McDonaldization could be studied, and I would like to invite you to think about those things and reflect with a friend about it. But for this essay, there is one area in particular that I want to focus on, namely, the liturgical practices of the LCMS, since it is an area I am highly interested in.

Liturgical Variety in the LCMS

We can all attest that there exists a great variety within our congregations. Even between two churches only miles apart, the liturgical variety is astounding. Here are some of the obvious ways: Most congregations use the LSB, but some still use TLH. Some use LW. Some even use the LBW. Some don't use a hymnal at all, opting for CCM music with projectors. Some congregations are led by an organ. Some by a piano. Some by a guitar. Some by a praise band. Some pastors vest in the full array of a chasuble. Some only an alb and stole. Some don't vest at all, instead wearing just a collar. Some wear a suit. The choice of Bible translation even has some variety within the LCMS; most congregations use the ESV, but some still use the NIV. Some even use the NRSV, and some use the NKJV. I have even heard of one congregation using the NLT. The choice of lectionary has great variety too. Some use the historic one-year lectionary, but a majority use the three-year. Some congregations even worship in Spanish.

We can all attest to this variety of worship practices in the LCMS. This should not come as a surprise to anyone reading this essay. What I have written above is only a brief overview of this fact. Yet it is important to note, because this is the context in which Liturgical Renewal has taken root in the LCMS.

Liturgical Renewal in the LCMS

Within this sea of variety, there has emerged one particular strain which I will call the Liturgical Renewal or Revival movement. This is a movement which seeks to re-introduce the historical and traditional elements of the liturgy: chanting, traditions, lectionaries, vestments, and so forth. This is no small movement, it has enjoyed success in many congregations. You cannot escape this movement, many clergy, seminarians, and even laity are craving and seeking after Liturgical Renewal. I myself am a product of this movement, and have greatly benefited from it. It is my conviction that this movement is beneficial for the whole church, and I hope and pray that it truly be beneficial in a God-pleasing way to our Synod.

The liturgical revival movement has always been a part of the LCMS, stretching all the way back to the original Saxon immigrants from Germany. These immigrants were seeking refuge and escape from Pietistic Germany, which had suppressed the ancient liturgical forms of the Lutheran Church. When they came to the United States, liturgical renewal was already a top priority, and this was reflected in their publications.

There has also been a recent resurgence of liturgical renewal in the LCMS, which has varied roots. Some will point to the so-called "Oxford

Movement” from around the turn of the 20th century as its inception. Some point to the ecumenical efforts coming out of Vatican II. Some point to the home-grown roots in the LCMS that I mentioned above. No matter its origin, Liturgical Renewal has become a powerful movement and trend within the LCMS. Such magazines as *Gottesdienst* have become the public face of this movement within the LCMS, and have done much work to further it.

I pointed out earlier how much variety there is within the LCMS regarding worship practices. Many within the Liturgical movement gawk at this variety. Many of them see this variety as a problem. Their reasons for this are not unfounded, some of the variety in our Synod is bad variety, resulting in malpractice. However, variety is not in itself a bad thing. Even within the Liturgical Revival movement, there is still a great variety.

Here are a few examples. One congregation uses the semi-gothic chasuble with the distinctive round cut all the way to the floor, and another congregation uses the Roman-style chasuble which has distinctive cut-outs for the arms. One pastor wears the maniple around his arm, while another doesn't. One congregation uses the scent of frankincense and myrrh for their incense, while another might not use incense at all. One congregation might dutifully chant the Gradual with an LSB psalm tone, while another might opt for a choral setting. One congregation might sing the hymns in parts, another might not. One congregation reads the Gospel from the lectern, and another might read it from the chancel, and another might read it as part of a procession. One congregation has a large organ, while another might have a small organ. One congregation might consistently use setting three of the Divine Service, whereas another might use setting one. One congregation might use the hymn of the day in the propers, whereas another might not. One congregation might use the three year lectionary, and another might use the one year. One congregation might veil the crucifix on Palm Sunday, but another might do so on the 5th Sunday of Lent. The differences go on and on. The point is, that even within the liturgical revival movement, there is great variety. It is not a monolithic movement.

The Temptation to McDonaldization

As beneficial as I believe Liturgical Renewal is to the LCMS, we must be wary of the temptations of McDonaldization. In many ways, this movement has recently become a reaction to the great amount of variety in the LCMS. Many participate in this movement precisely because it offers a greater unity of practice. This is not an inherently bad thing! The LCMS was even founded on this principle, and certainly there are many benefits that come with liturgical unity. The danger arises when we try to go beyond liturgical unity and insist on the extreme conformity of McDonaldization.

Here are some concrete examples for how McDonaldization is seen in the Liturgical Revival movement in the LCMS:

Many advocate for the pastor to hold his hands in the late medieval position of the palms flat together, fingers forward, and thumbs crossed. This practice is a wonderful confession of faith, and a beautiful, God-pleasing way to conduct oneself within the liturgy. The problem comes when people insist on this as the only “right way” to hold your hands. Yet, many have done this. Within a dignified liturgical context, there are a variety of ways to hold your hands, such as folding them, or even holding a book. Yet you can see here the tendency to conform and flatten the variation of hand-posture between congregations to a point that is tightly controlled.

Likewise, Divine Service, Setting Three is frequently hailed as a historic liturgy. Indeed, it is historic and beautiful. It retains the classic language of the Common Service, which not only is aesthetically dignified, but also is historically and theologically dignified. Since it was the main setting of the Mass that was available to the LCMS for several decades, many have it memorized through and through. These are all wonderful, God-pleasing things. The problem comes when people insist on it as the only “right way” to worship. Many have tried to do this, and have insisted that one can only rightly do the Mass with this setting. On the contrary, there are a variety of God-pleasing settings of the Mass available. In fact, Setting Three did not exist until relatively recently in history. Not only are the other settings in the hymnal capable of uplifting a reverent liturgy, but there are many even more ancient settings of the Mass which are equally as beautiful. For instance, Matthew Carver has published a book of chants taken from the ancient Gregorian tones of the late Medieval period. With the insistence of only using Setting Three among all congregations, we see the clear marks of McDonaldization.

Another example is the lectionary. Those invested in liturgical revival often advocate for the One Year Lectionary in the LSB. This lectionary is a fantastic, historic, and rich lectionary. Although it has been updated several times throughout history, the essential shape has its traces all the way back to the Church Fathers. The benefits of this lectionary are manifold. The pastor preparing for his sermon can benefit from the wealth of sermons all the way from the Church Fathers to Luther and Gerhard. The annual repetition of texts can also be very helpful as a teaching tool, as it is commonly said, “Repetition is the mother of learning.” The problem comes when people insist that this is the only right lectionary to use. The Three Year Lectionary is also a wonderful, dignified, theological, and thoughtful lectionary. It has many benefits that should not be ignored. By insisting on the One Year as the only right lectionary to use this leads to McDonaldization.

There are several other possible examples, but for the sake of brevity, the few I have supplied should suffice. The point remains, that there is the potential danger of McDonaldization within the liturgical renewal movement of the LCMS. There is the temptation to want every congregation to look exactly the same. There is the temptation to see any variation as bad, even when the variation is happening within the context of a dignified liturgical tradition.

Although I have pointed out this possible danger, we should be diligent not to over generalize this movement. The majority of those participating in the movement do not represent the caricature that I presented above. I myself have greatly benefited from the Liturgical Renewal movement, and I pray that this movement be nothing but a blessing for the church. The point is that we must be wary of this temptation in order to avoid it. Nor do I wish to cast the first stone—I myself realize that I have this temptation too!

There is such a thing as good variety, even within Liturgical Renewal movement. In fact, it cannot exist without it; the Liturgical movement is itself a product of variation. Just like how competition can spur on innovation and excellence in areas like sports or business, so variety in Liturgical Renewal can lead to even better forms of Liturgical Renewal. This is precisely how it began—through variety. Take for example the use of chanting. This was abandoned by many congregations, and led to a state of affairs where chanting was completely foreign and unknown to most. Then the Liturgical Renewal movement came along and reintroduced the practice of chanting. Now, from a macroscopic historical perspective, this is not a striking variation. But from the microscopic contextual perspective, this was an incredible innovation! This innovation led to good variety: the introduction of something beneficial, which ended up being adopted by many other congregations.

McDonaldization destroys variety—all variety, both bad variety and good variety. The danger of McDonaldization in Liturgical Renewal is not only that it flattens variety to a point of suffocation, but also that it eliminates the possibility of beneficial improvement to our liturgies. I am not advocating for the wild and inappropriate liturgical innovations of the 20th century. Rather, I am warning that McDonaldization could eliminate the possibility of reintroducing other historical, traditional, faithful, and beautiful forms of the liturgy into our church.

Another potential problem with McDonaldization is that it can ignore the needs of a particular context. The needs of the congregation should, to a certain extent, impact the decisions made in the Liturgy. For instance, if you are in the 16th century and you have a congregation of illit-

erate peasants, it would be very unwise to put a latin psalter in front of them and expect them to chant it! Or likewise, a particular congregation may have developed a bias against particular liturgical forms. Even if this bias is unfounded and wrong, it would be incredibly unwise to force these forms upon the congregation. These and other needs must be considered when deciding what will be used in the Liturgy. McDonaldization is completely oblivious to context. Instead, we must take the posture of serving those to whom we are sent.

A Way Forward

So, what is the way forward? What do I propose?

Let's return to the analogy of the diner. Remember my description, that every diner was slightly different. Each diner had its own variation on the theme of burger and fries. One diner might have different artwork from the next, for example. Yet, even though they had variation, there was a central point of unity that was held in common between every single diner: burger and fries. If you went in to a diner, and they didn't have a burger and fries, you would be offended! In other words, there was unity and variation. There was a theme, but also variation on that theme.

Applying this analogy to the liturgy, we come to my proposed solution: Identify the central unifying element that constitutes a proper liturgy (the 'burger and fries'), and even while insisting on the preservation of this unifying element, we must allow for variation.

So, what is the 'burger and fries' of liturgy, according to this analogy?

Word and Sacrament.

Yes, it is that simple! Word and Sacrament. This ought to be the central unifying element to which we cling untiringly.

If we take the means of grace seriously, and truly believe that when we encounter the Word and Sacraments in the liturgy we are encountering God Himself, this will change everything we do. All of a sudden, we will be behaving differently. Perhaps our body language will be more reverent and dignified. Perhaps we will design the architecture of our churches in a more historic and Sacrament-centered way. Perhaps the music will be different too, in order to adorn the Liturgy with greater beauty and bring the Word into people's hearts. Perhaps we will use things like the lectionary to inculcate the Word in an orderly and consistent manner.

Prioritizing Word and Sacrament leads to a liturgy which is more

reverent. If these are mere human activities, then why should I behave differently around them? But if Word and Sacrament are divine activities, God Himself coming to us, then I should behave differently: as if I am in the presence of God. This doesn't mean that we act like stoics. It doesn't mean that everyone needs to feel sad during the liturgy. It does not mean that all emotion other than a blank face is wrong. It just means that what we do, even if it is rejoicing, we do with the focus set on God and His activity, and in response to His activity. Keeping the focus on Word and Sacrament does this.

Furthermore, if we do not get Word and Sacrament at our local congregation, something is seriously wrong! If the Word is not taught faithfully, if there is error or negligence, then this is like getting a moldy bun on a burger. If the Sacrament is not given rightly, then this is like getting an undercooked patty of beef in our burger. We must insist on Word and Sacrament. Furthermore, it's impossible to do Word and Sacrament too well. We can always improve the burger and fries. This doesn't mean changing the Gospel, because it doesn't need change, but it means that we can always preach the Word and administer the Sacrament more faithfully.

So we should focus on the 'burger and fries'—Word and Sacrament, yet we should allow for variation. The Liturgy is not McDonalds. It is not a commodity that we can demand to be presented in the exact same way no matter where we go. Your local parish is not a branch of a mega-corporation which ought to look the same as every other branch. We must recognize that variation and local custom are beneficial.

Look at the example of the early Lutheran Church, during the period of orthodoxy, from about 1580-1750. Each individual territory had slight variations from one another. Every territory was doing the Mass. Every congregation was faithfully distributing Word and Sacrament to its members. Each congregation deeply cared for dignified and holy liturgies. Yet, one territory used the chasuble, while another only used the alb and stole. One parish might use German for the readings, whereas a school down the road would use Latin. One parish may use the German Mass from Luther, and another may use the Latin Mass from Luther. The exact lectionary would differ depending on the territory. While every congregation was serving 'burger and fries,' Word and Sacrament, there was variety between them due to local custom.

Another good example of this is found by watching the Gottesdienst videos. Throughout their videos which demonstrate the conduct of the Divine Service, the pastor repeatedly says that local custom will vary. In one of these videos, the pastor even shares one of these local customs during the demonstration. During the Kyrie, it is local custom at their congregation

for the chancel party to cross their arms across their chest. This is a rather unusual practice in the LCMS; I myself never heard of this practice before watching the video. At most other LCMS congregations engaging in Liturgical Renewal, the simple posture of hands together with the thumbs crossed is more common during the Kyrie. Yet, it is the local custom at this congregation, and is a longstanding tradition to cross the arms. Either option is dignified and uplifts the liturgy in a reverent way. Whether you cross your arms or not during the Kyrie, the central element of Word and Sacrament is present in either case.

This is the way forward: Insist on Word and Sacrament, but allow for variation and local custom in how this is carried out. We should avoid the temptations of McDonaldization at all costs. We must resist the allure to insist that every liturgy look exactly the same in every parish. A proper liturgy can be presented in a variety of ways, and there is not one perfect way to do it. We should not relentlessly search for one particular instantiation of the liturgy to which everything else must be measured. Instead, we should insist on what truly makes for unity in the Liturgy: Word and Sacrament, and allow for variation to accompany it.

One Body, Many Members

Liturgical Renewal is not a bad thing. Advocating for more reverent liturgies is in no way a bad thing. Even liturgical unity is in no way a bad thing. But liturgical McDonaldization is a bad thing. Insisting on only one perfect way to do the liturgy is a bad thing. Something which is good—unity, should not be perverted to become something bad—excessive control.

After all, this is what Paul talks about when he says that we are one body but many members. Each of us have something unique to bring to the body, yet we are all connected to the same body. Not all of us have the same gifts or interests, and this should be celebrated.

Applied to the liturgy, variety in liturgical expression is a good thing. There are many ways to glorify God in the way we craft our liturgies.

We also need variety. If every member of the body was a foot, we wouldn't be able to see. It would be suffocating to have to perform the liturgy in the same way everywhere. Every context demands some form of adaptation.

Yet we all need to be unified. If we have nothing holding us in common, this could lead to chaos or conflict. This is why Word and Sacrament must be the focus. We must stay on the center of the path and avoid these two ditches: (1) anything goes, or (2) excessive control. We must allow for local custom. This does not mean that we fling wide the doors and anything

goes! Rather it means we should cling to what matters most—the dignity of Word and Sacrament, and should not get hung up on granular details such as hand posture. A reverent liturgy can take a variety of shapes. This does not mean anything goes. Nor does this mean that we should stop discussing what makes for a more reverent liturgy or advocate for particular practices, but it does mean that we allow for each congregation to have its own unique liturgical life and custom.

My hope is that this paper drives us to have more intentional conversations about liturgy. I would like to invite you to talk to a friend about this essay, share with them the idea of McDonaldization, and reflect on this question: What is most essential for the liturgy? Why?



Henry Eising is a Sem IV student in the Master of Divinity program. Before attending Concordia Seminary, he received a bachelor's degree in history from Hillsdale College, and taught school for a year. He enjoys poetry, banjo, mandolin, and drawing. He is married to Stacey, and they are overjoyed to be expecting their first child.

An Ode to the “Free Book Shelf”

By Henry Eising

*It is rumored the younger generation does not know
those solid joys and lasting pleasures in those ancient
treasures. O tempora, O mores!*

— William Dallmann, *My Life*

When a new mound of books begins to accumulate in some obscure corner of our campus, it is as though new life is stirring. There is excitement when it is brought to our attention that some seminarian of uncommon fortune has been given a set of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. Our ears prick up at the hushed mention of some Ancient Christian Commentary volumes that have been acquired, which have also—blessedly—been made available for borrowing and perusal. Sometimes, seminarians begin to see the campus in terms of who has which books, and where among the vast network of people and shelves they are located. Indeed, we love our many and various libraries.

Libraries! How marvelous they are—whether great or small, tended by magus, monk, duke, or lowly student. It is rather an odd truth that libraries have been at the center of so many of history's great twists of fate. We need not speak here of the adventure and intrigue surrounding Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. How wildly do the wheels of the ages turn, and so often in such close proximity to so many books! One wonders how the mighty course of the West might have been charted, had we not been witness to the accursed flames which burned in Alexandria, long ago. What sandstorm swallowed Eusebius's books, which had been bequeathed to him by the old sage, Origen? What tribe of voracious worms ate up the bulk of the fabled Hexapla? And oh! To sigh with Chemnitz as he caressed the treasured tomes in the Silver Library at Königsberg! Those, as the Second Martin himself would say, were “days of clover.”

And here, we today on our little plot of earth, sigh in our dear

libraries, where innumerable storied volumes are working, playing, and resting. And we do dream—in flights of fancy—of the stories they might tell us, if they could say more than what is pressed into their pages...which of their brethren were lost on the doomed *Amalia*? How many of them were uncrated by a young W. H. T. Dau in the old Jefferson Avenue building, long after the log cabin was no longer sufficient? How many of those books now dwelling in Hasse saw their kinsmen carried off, when the hall was ransacked by the confused and wayward Seminex-ers? And let us not forget that there are also the professors' libraries...what rarities and oddities are shelved in those remote caches? The students, too, we may hope, possess treasures of their own. Perhaps there are more books than there are bricks on this campus.

There is one “library” on the campus that is especially dear to this author’s heart. And apart from the fact that the humble library under consideration is where the author met his wife, it displays many delights and virtues that ought to be touted. This little piece of writing aims to garner appreciation for this unassuming and ever-changing home for books.

Pressed against a wall between two doorways, a pair of lowly bookshelves stand. From these, the books watch seminarians going out and coming in, all to study among Hasse’s formidable shelves—or to retreat from studying in that noble setting. But our in-between and wayside library is nothing grand. The books which call it home are drifters. They have been cast off in fits of pragmatism. Downsizing has sent them hither and yon, until we find them and are left to wonder what lonely studies these volumes have called home. What weary pastor has pulled them from the shelf in an hour of emptiness? What lately refreshed pastor has pored over them in a fit of unbridled curiosity and delight? What is remembered of them by their former owners? Why were they ever kept? Why were they discarded? These things we might ask of any book which has found itself on Concordia Seminary’s beloved “Free Book Shelf.”

As we know, not all the batches of books that make their way onto those humble shelves are to be cherished. Indeed, oftentimes, we are grieved to see that the shelves are “dry”—filled only with outdated self-help books, comic artifacts from the Church Growth fad, or profuse wads of “how-to” literature. But such spells serve to send our thoughts and imaginings forward to the next rich crop, whenever it may appear, to be greeted with wonder and delight. Always, we wait in quiet expectation for the next interesting item or collection to be cast upon the shelves, as if waiting for a rain-shower to water a patch of fertile ground that has been planted.

This wayside inn for wandering books has supplied my own shelves with rich food. The Free Book Shelf is responsible for some of the dearest

treasures in my library. These select volumes are not particularly rare, nor are they exceptionally useful, or even pretty. Rather, what gives them their worth (a worth that I alone have attached to them) is their provenance. By these humble books, once left to the winds of fortune in their liminal, out-of-the-way orphanage, I have been ushered into the studies and homes of men I never knew. I have been able to sit at the feet of teachers I never heard speak. I am invited to imagine and reflect upon days gone by in the Church, and on our own campus, which has itself been a waystation—and final resting place—for so many drifting books.

Permit me to tell you of two treasures now, which have fallen into my hands by way of the selfless Free Book Shelf.

The first dear little treasure is entitled *Monumental Brasses*. What on earth is a monumental brass? When I found the book, I was ready to take it simply because the title was so intriguing. What a strange artifact! It was printed in London in 1890, and bears an inscription by the author, an Anglican priest who was, among other things, the secretary of the Cambridge University Association of Brass Collectors. The “brasses” in question, I have since learned, refer to life-sized, richly inscribed slabs of brass which were used to cover the graves of English knights, nobles, and clergy between the 13th and 16th centuries. The volume contains plates depicting these brasses, which are mostly portraits of the aforementioned personages, and are all pleasing and interesting to behold.

As agreeable as the subject matter already was, this book garnered even more curiosity because it was among some books that had the name “Feuerhahn” written inside the front cover. Here was a name that aroused my interest. I wish that I could have known the sainted Rev. Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn. If you listen for his name, you will hear it, perhaps most likely when a professor speaks of Sasse, of things confessional, or of things liturgical. It is easy enough to read his writings and hear recordings of his marvelous sermons. But Dr. Feuerhahn’s book that I lifted from the shelf would tell me more of this great pastor, churchman, and teacher. After I picked up the book about brasses, I learned that the Feuerhahns had made a hobby of collecting rubbings from these monuments when they lived in England. Some of their rubbings are now housed in Concordia Historical Institute. Did they pack this book along as they travelled from site to site? Even now, as I page through the antique guide, I am transported to the countryside surrounding a little Lutheran parish in Cardiff, at the end of the earth, back in those heady days when the Missouri Synod was putting down roots in England—of all places—and I am filled with wonder.

The second and final treasure which I share with you here is the book that is perhaps most dear to my heart out of all the volumes in my per-

sonal library. Two Decembers ago, the shelves of the Free Book Rack were weighed down with abundant contributions. In those days, this would occur not infrequently, and the shelves would be so full that portable racks would have to be wheeled out into the passageway in order to contain all of the books that were being offered up. On this particular occasion, the collection was a farrago of obscure humor and cartoon books, thrown among English travel guides from the 1960's, Kingsley Amis's *On Drink*, paperback guides to engaging in polite conversation, and a number of other "head-scratchers." As I pawed through the odd assortment, my hand alighted on a pocket-sized and beat-up poetry anthology entitled *The Poet's Way*. When I looked inside the front cover of faded green cloth, a label placed there by the former owner provided the key to the unusual mixture of books which had found themselves upon the shelf.

The label read,

N. E. NAGEL
 CONCORDIA COLLEGE
 UNLEY, ADELAIDE
 SOUTH AUSTRALIA

I was stunned. I flipped through the volume and saw that the margins were filled with the sainted professor's unmistakable Carolingian miniscule. These poems had been lovingly read and reread. Here was a treasure of treasures—college notes from one of the seminary's most beloved and memorable teachers, a man whose heart and mind were graciously distributed among a blessed generation of Missouri pastors. To this day, Dr. Nagel's fingerprints are ubiquitous upon the many surfaces of the Church's life, and he retains an exalted place within the hearts of many of the Church's people. When I page through his college poetry textbook, I am reminded of my own humble gratitude for Dr. Nagel and his many gifts.

These are not the only things which have fallen into my possession by way of the Free Book Shelf. These are not the only books collected there with such stories and sentiments attached to them. I am sure that there are many such books around campus. For my part, the books described here each urge me to think on my gratitude for these faithful men, and for the many other saints who have guided me upon the way. I am reminded of what I have inherited from them theologically. I think of all that they gave to the Church, and to the ministerium which, prayerfully, I will be blessed to enter soon. Above all these things, I am reminded that I am bound to these men by more than a dusty codex which has taken up residence on my

humble shelf. These men taught Jesus Christ. They lived to speak of Christ crucified for the sins of the whole world—for their sins, and for mine. Like me, and all of us, they, too, were *and remain* members of Christ's mystical body. And for that body, I am eternally grateful.

Devotional Material



Rory Fry lives with his wife and two kids in Robinson, TX, a small town in the Waco area. He serves as sole pastor at a small church plant named Gathering. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, writing, playing video games, watching movies, and spending time with his family.

“One Body”

By Rory Fry

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.”

*Introduction*¹

Often when people talk about the church, they talk about a building. They will say things like, “I will see you at the church,” or “It is our month to clean the church.” They speak of the church as though it were one specific place in time and space. Yet the church is so much more than that. It is more than a building, more than a single location.

The truth is that when we talk about the church, we are talking about the people of God. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians remind us that the church is not first a structure or institution, but a Spirit created body formed through baptism. Through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, we have been brought into the community of believers in all places and times.

When we gather with our local congregations, we do so within the larger community of believers. We gather as part of the holy Christian church, as those who have received the forgiveness of sins. We are members of Christ’s body, and He gave His life for us and sustains us.

With this in mind, we now look more closely at Paul’s use of the body metaphor. In 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, Paul does more than offer a helpful illustration. He shows how baptism shapes a community and how that shared identity in Christ calls the church to live differently.

The Body

This passage from 1 Corinthians sits in the middle of a larger section dealing with life together in the church, stretching from chapters 11 through 14. In those chapters Paul addresses problems at the Lord's Supper, confusion over spiritual gifts, and the need for love to shape everything the church does. These are not isolated issues. They all have to do with how a baptized people live together as one community.

It is in that setting that Paul introduces the image of the body. This metaphor was not new in the ancient world. Political writers in the Greco-Roman world sometimes spoke of society as a body, often to reinforce hierarchy and maintain social order. But Paul does something different. He roots the image in baptism: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free" (1 Cor 12:13). The unity he describes is not built on shared status or common background. It is created by the Spirit.

The simplicity of the image remains powerful. You have hands and feet, eyes and ears, a heart and a head. There is real variety within you, yet it all makes up one body.

Each part serves a purpose. Your hands enable you to hold your spouse's hand. Your feet carry you to the altar to receive the Lord's Supper. Your eyes allow you to see the moon. Your ears enable you to hear your children's voices. Your heart pumps blood, and your head directs the rest of your body. Each part does something different, yet all belong to the same life.

The same is true of the church. The church is varied, yet unified. It is made up of people from different walks of life. We are young and old. We come from different places and backgrounds. We carry different stories and experiences with us. In Corinth, those differences were sharp: Jew and Greek, slave and free. In a society structured by status and division, Paul's claim would have sounded radical. Baptism forms a new belonging. It does not erase difference, but it refuses to let difference define who matters.

Though we are varied, we make up the one body of Christ. "For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Cor 12:14). As members of Christ's body, we are given different gifts through the Spirit. Some of us are generous. Some are skilled in administration. Some can play instruments or sing well; others should probably sing a little more softly. Some love to host gatherings and open their homes to strangers. Our gifts are many, and they come from God (1 Cor 12:1–11).

Along with these varied gifts, we share a common purpose: the upbuilding of the church and the spread of the gospel. United to Christ through bap-

tism, we are freed from competing for position and called instead to love and serve one another, just as our Lord loves and serves us.

The Issue

The Apostle Paul did not write this section simply to give us a nice theological picture of the church, though he certainly does that. He writes because the Corinthian Christians were struggling. Division had begun to take root among them, visible in factional loyalties, status divisions, and competing understandings of spiritual maturity. Earlier in the letter he speaks about factions forming around different leaders, with some claiming Paul, others Apollos, others Cephas (1 Cor 1:10–12). These were not just personality differences. They were shaped by preferences, pride, and likely deeper social divisions within the congregation itself. The church gathered together, but it was not always living together as one body.

Those same tensions show up again in chapters 11 through 14. At the Lord's Supper, some were eating while others went hungry (1 Cor 11:17–22). Spiritual gifts were becoming reasons for comparison rather than opportunities for service. A people who had been brought together through baptism were beginning to forget what that shared identity meant.

Paul's response is worth noticing. He does not begin by scolding them into unity. Instead, he reminds them who they already are. "You are the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27). Before he tells them what to do, he tells them what is true. Their unity is not something they must create or manufacture. It has already been given by the Spirit. The call to live differently flows from that reality.

Paul's body image presses this even further. In Christ, we are not merely individuals who happen to gather together. We belong to one another. When one member suffers, all suffer together. When one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Cor 12:26). The life of the church is marked by shared sorrow and shared celebration. This challenges our instinct to compete or compare, reminding us that the good of one belongs to the good of all.

The interconnectedness of the body makes this clear. When your hand is injured, it affects everything. When your head aches, the rest of you feels it. Paul says the same is true of Christ's church. He confronts division not by denying difference but by placing every difference within the shared life created by the Spirit.

It was this reality that drove Paul to speak so directly to Corinth. He longed for them to live in the unity that was already theirs in Christ. That unity belonged to them, and it belongs to us as well.

The Point

This is a sobering section of Scripture. Though we are united in Christ, how quickly can we, like the Corinthians, become divided? How easily can sin fracture the life we share together? Anyone who has spent time in the church has likely seen this reality. I know I have.

Early in my ministry, I served as a music director at a small congregation in Santa Cruz, California during a season marked by division over pastoral leadership. Disagreement over a pastoral transition created deep tension, and it became clear how quickly identity can shift from Christ to preference, loyalty, or personal vision. That experience was a reminder that division is never just theoretical. It takes root wherever pride and fear begin to shape how we see one another.

Moments like that make Paul's words in 1 Corinthians feel less distant. The Corinthians were not uniquely flawed. They were human, like us. And Paul does not address their division by offering better management strategies or stronger personalities. He reminds them of what is already true: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). Unity is not something the church achieves through effort or strategy. It is a gift given through the Spirit².

This is the Gospel at the heart of the passage. Christ has already made us one. Before we fix our divisions, before we resolve our conflicts, before we learn to love perfectly, we are already joined together in Him. Through baptism, we belong to Christ and therefore to one another. Our failures do not undo what He has accomplished.

Christ continues to build His church. He forgives our pride. He gathers what we scatter. He gives gifts for the upbuilding of His body and calls us back again and again to the unity that is already ours.

We are united in Christ. The task before us is not to create unity, but to receive and live within the unity already given to us in baptism, trusting that what Christ has accomplished for His church is stronger than what threatens to divide it.

Endnotes

1 *This article is adapted from a catechetical sermon series originally delivered at Gathering Lutheran Church in the summer of 2024 and has been revised for clarity and for a seminary audience while preserving the original voice and theological emphasis.*

2 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer similarly critiques individualistic conceptions of Christian identity, emphasizing that discipleship is grounded not in self-definition but in the call of Christ that establishes a new communal reality. See *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1963), chap. 5.*

Poetry



Nathaniel Pekari is a 2nd year M.Div student from Peabody, Massachusetts. He graduated from Hillsdale College where he studied English literature and French.

Chapel of Saints Timothy and Titus

By Nathaniel Pekari

Our chapel's bricks refract the season's light.
Dark, smoke-green slate takes on a shade of blue
in autumn fog. When sparks of snow blaze white,
the limestone blazes too. Sunset imbues
gray marble with its purple tide. At night,
ash fades to black and deepens like a bruise,
but dawn's pale rose makes golden flecks ignite,
sandstone bleeds scarlet with a martyr's hue.
Our chapel's varied stonework is as bright
as its famed stained-glass windows. And we too
are living stones, who stain as seasons smite
our hearts with shards of an eternal view;
we, too, contribute something to the sight,
a rainbowed buttress bridging heaven's height.



Joshua Fields is a second-year M.Div student. He was born and raised in Orange County, CA, and he attended Biola University to earn a B.A. in music composition and study Western literature in the Torrey Honors College. He and his wife Olivia enjoy reading and going on hikes together.

Broad Table

By Joshua Fields

Eph. 2:13

For we, who once were wanderers wide
In scattered estate—last shadow of Babel—
Loosed shamle delusions and mired all sides
With lies upon lies (ourselves we most fabled);
Leastways till our Signet, our Changing of Tides
Vast spread forth His hands, bore all He was able:
Took masses discordant and made us His prize,
Brought near in one bounty at His broad table.

Hymns



Jacob Moede is a fourth-year M.Div. student at Concordia Seminary from Bonduel, Wisconsin. He graduated from Concordia University Wisconsin in 2022 with his BA in Theological Languages before entering seminary. In the Fall of 2026, he will begin his Ph.D. coursework in Biblical Studies. Jacob and his wife, Caroline, have two daughters, a toddler and a baby. In his free time, Jacob enjoys family outings, reading, and hymn writing.

At the First, O Word Incarnate

- 1 At the first, O Word Incarnate,
Flowed Your lifeblood full of love.
Man and woman You created
In Your Image from above.
In Your blood is life and it is
Light for man in Your embrace.
In the garden, Lord, You put his
Life and work before Your face.
- 2 Sacrificial lamb of Eden
Cover Adam's naked breast.
Crimson fleece from lamb uneaten,
Clothing for the sin-oppressed.
Innocence is spilled with blood and
Calls to God from muddy ground.
Sin comes rushing like a flood and
Must be ruled lest man be drowned.
- 3 Son of Abr'ham, Spirit-guided,
Blessed ram of sacrifice,
On the mount the Lord provided
Holy blood that would suffice.
Cain was marked by God and taught in
Trespass, turn to Christ alone;
By Your marks, O sole-begotten,
Father's promises are known.
- 4 Presence of Almighty Yahweh,
Cherubs are Your holy throne.
Yet You came to man in Your day,
Into flesh, sin to atone.
By Your passion, Lord, You saved us
From eternal death and hell.
Resurrected, life You give us,
In Your blood You make us dwell.
- 5 Holy Off'ring, Highest Priest, You
Shed Your blood once in our place.
Precious meal bestowing peace to
Your redeemed by lavish grace.
Jesus, by Your lifeblood bring us
Through Your Spirit's Holy Flood.
Wash us white and make us drink of
You—"This is My very Blood."

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Tune: Pablo D. Sosa, 1933-2020

CENTRAL
87 87

We Believe in God the One



1 We be - lieve in God the One, Might - y Fa - ther, by Whose Son
 2 We be - lieve in God the Lord, Je - sus Christ, the Son a - dored,
 3 Light from Light and God from God, Trul - y God from Trul - y God,
 4 Christ for all man - kind came down, For our sa - ving left His crown,



All in heav'n and earth was made, Seen, un - seen, His love dis - played,
 Sole - Be - got - ten from a - bove, From the Fa - ther's end - less love,
 Christ be - got - ten, ne - ver made, He through Whom all things were made,
 By the Spi - rit, flesh as - sumed, Of the Vir - gin, God en - womed,



Him Who o - ver all pre - sides, Ma - ker Who for all pro - vides.
 Who, be - fore all a - ges stirred, Was be - got - ten, God the Word.
 With the Fa - ther He is One, Es - sence same as God the One.
 For us men a man be - came, Je - sus, Yah - weh - saves, His Name.

5 Under Pilate crucified,
 Suffered, buried, God had died.
 On day three He rose from death,
 Witnessed by the Scriptures' breath.
 He ascended to the sky
 To the Father's right on high.

6 Christ in glory comes again,
 Judging dead and living men,
 He Whose Kingdom never ends,
 He Whose Name all names transcends.
 By His Spirit is outpoured
 This confession: Christ is Lord.

7 Holy Spirit we confess,
 Life-Creator, Lord we bless,
 From the Father and the Son,
 Worshipped, glorified as One,
 God Who through the prophets spoke,
 And breathed Scripture's ev'ry stroke.

8 We believe the Church is one,
 Holy, cath'lic, justly won,
 Apostolic doctrine pure,
 We, Christ's Body, shall endure.
 We confess one Baptism true,
 Sins forgiven, man made new.

9 We believe the dead will rise,
 Faithless men to their demise;
 To the faithful God gives life
 Everlasting, free from strife,
 Coming age, God dwells with men.
 This is true, amen, amen.



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