

The Historic Liturgy: Important or Adiaphoron? Yes

By

Rev. Dr. John W. Tape

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Introduction:

Are you a saint or a sinner? Is Jesus true God or true man? In the Lord's Supper do we receive bread and wine or the true body and blood of Jesus? In the divine worship service does God come to us through His word and sacraments or do we go to Him with our prayers, praises, and thanksgivings?

More examples could be given, but that is enough to make the point—in Lutheran theology when you are confronted with either/or options, the answer is often—both.

I am not the first to make this observation. Dr. Andy Bartelt writes, “One of the keys of Lutheran theology is its ability to manage tensions and polarities rather than to resolve them, as a more rationalistic approach would seek to do whether rooted in Calvin or Aquinas. . . . [this] ‘either/or’ dare never supplant the ‘both/and’ of Lutheran theology.”¹

This was extremely difficult for me to understand when I first started studying theology at Concordia Seminary, Ft. Wayne, back in 1976. My advisor Dr. David Scaer who is not noted for his patience, did his best to teach me that lesson on numerous occasions. Of course, Dr. Scaer never swore at me. But there were times when I left his presence wondering if his thoughts about me were less than kind. Maybe I was a slow learner who tested his patience.

Finally, his perseverance paid off, and by God's grace, I began to understand that part of the brilliance of Lutheran theology is balancing polarities rather than resolving them.²

Much later in life, as my theological understanding grew, I learned that with this balancing act, comes an ever-present danger. Like a tightrope walker in the circus,

¹ Andy Bartelt, “The Office of the Ministry: Keeping Our Balance,” *Concordia Journal* 39, no.1 (Winter, 2013): 10.

² "The distinctive characteristic of Lutheran theology is the affirmation of paradox. Calvin and Arminius both constructed systematic theologies explaining away any contrary biblical data in a rationalistic system of belief. Luther developed his theology in Bible commentaries, following the contours of Scripture wherever they led and developing its most profound polarities: Law and Gospel; Christ as both true God and true man; the Christian as simultaneously saint and sinner; justification by faith and baptismal regeneration; holy Communion as the real presence of Christ in material bread and wine." Gene Edward Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, revised edition 2010), 147-148.

it is much easier to fall to one side or the other, than to maintain correct balance, stay on the rope, and successfully walk from one platform to the other. Holding two theological polarities in tension always brings with it the temptation and the inclination to emphasize one point to the detriment of the other. In the church this invariably sets the stage for taking sides, gathering with like-minded people, creating a faction, generating a party spirit, and building a website to put down your enemies and advance your righteous cause.

I humbly submit to you today that this is the current problem in our beloved synod, concerning the proper role of the historic liturgy. If we are going to begin to have an accurate understanding of the liturgy, we must carefully stay on the tightrope and avoid falling to one side or the other.

Today I would like to focus on two polar elements concerning the historic liturgy and suggest several specific ways they can be kept in balance. In all of this, I hope to present five theological principles (or if you are Waltherian—theses) which will help guide us in our future liturgical discussions.

Part 1: The Historic Liturgy is both Important and an Adiaphoron

First, let us consider the importance of the historic liturgy. This importance is seen in at least three different areas.

First, some people find the liturgy to be a beautiful expression of our unity in the church.³ Most of you know I am the director of the Lutheran Student Center at Wichita State University. A couple years ago I was introduced to a new WSU student from Ethiopia. She was a long way from home. She was very lonesome. I asked her if she would like to go to church with my wife and me on Sunday morning. She accepted the invitation. After church as we were leaving, she said, “That was wonderful. I love your church so much.” I wondered to myself, “What exactly was it that she liked so much about our congregation. Was it the impressive music from our beautiful organ? Was it the friendly greetings from so many of our kind parishioners? Was it the Gospel-centered dynamic preaching from our fine pastor?” No, it was none of these. Without any prodding from me, she turned and said, “I love your liturgy--because it was just like being home.”

³ Some people do find the liturgy to be an expression of unity in the church. Luther was not one of them. See Appendix 5: Jaroslav Pelikan on Luther’s View of Unity and Succession in the Church.

How important was the liturgy to this young college student? Here was a young lady from the other side of the world. But through the liturgy, she was comforted. She was strengthened. And she felt at home in God's house. The liturgy brought her closer to our church members. And it brought her closer to God. Surely such importance should be recognized, respected and appreciated.

The second important thing about the liturgy is that it purposefully and intentionally focuses our attention on Jesus Christ. My wife has a cousin who some years ago (if memory serves me correctly) was a youth pastor at some nondenominational evangelical church. He visited our congregation one Sunday morning. After the service, he commented to me that he appreciated our liturgy. I was quite surprised knowing that he came from a non-liturgical background, so I pushed the issue just a bit—to satisfy my curiosity. I asked him, “Just what is it about the liturgy you liked so much?” He replied, “It has such a beautiful focus on Jesus Christ.”

Can any church service do better than that? What can be better in a church service than focusing your parishioners' attention on Jesus Christ? The historic liturgy is a wonderful tool that helps us do just that. The focus in the liturgy is completely on Jesus Christ and all the gifts he has earned for us. The importance of that focus should certainly be appreciated and respected.

The third important thing about the liturgy is that it is rooted in thousands of years of pious church life and deep theological reflection. It was not carelessly or haphazardly thrown together. It is a beautiful gift God has given his church through the hard work of a countless number of dedicated churchmen over the ages. Is the liturgy old? Yes, it's old. That is part of its beauty. That is part of its charm. That is part of its importance. Its long-standing use in the church is no accident. It has withstood the test of time because so many sincere and dedicated generations of Christians have found it to be beneficial for their Christian faith and morality. Does that mean it is old-fashioned, overused, and needs to be replaced? Hardly. Rather it can be respected and used to the glory of God and the edification of His people.

This emphasis on the liturgy's importance is not just something I have noticed in my own life. Luther recognized this importance as well. In his treatise on the Latin

Mass, he wrote, “It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God.”⁴

The importance of the churches historic liturgy is also emphasized in the Lutheran Confessions. The Augsburg Confession, article 24 (paragraph 1 of the English translation of the Latin text) reads, “Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. In fact, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained.”⁵ The churches historic liturgy has much to offer. It has been valued throughout the ages for a good reasons.

Yet, as important as this liturgy is, it would be a mistake to stop there. For that is only one side of the equation. To get a complete understanding of the liturgy, we need to get a look at the other side of the picture as well—the other pole that needs to be balanced—that includes understanding the liturgy as an adiaphoron.

The Church’s Historic Liturgy Is an Adiaphoron

Here, there is no better place to begin than with our own beloved Dr. Martin Luther.

To get an accurate understanding of Luther’s view of the liturgy, it is helpful to look at both his treatise on the Latin Mass of 1523⁶ and his treatise on the German Mass of 1526.⁷

In his 1523 treatise on the Latin Mass, Luther’s main purpose was to rid worship of any hint that the Lord’s Supper was a sacrifice that we perform to win God’s favor and thereby participate in earning our salvation. Such a Roman Catholic emphasis

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 55 vols., eds. Helmut T. Lehmann and Ulrich S. Leupold, American Edition in English Translation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, and St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 53: 20. Hereafter abbreviated as L. W.

⁵ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 69. Hereafter abbreviated as, Kolb, Book of Concord.

⁶ In the American edition of Luther’s Works volume 53 it is entitled, “An Order of Mass and Communion For The Church at Wittenberg” pages 15-40. The Latin text may be found in Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 12 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883), 205-220. Hereafter abbreviated as WA.

⁷ In the American edition of Luther’s Works volume 53 it is entitled, “The German Mass and Order of Service” pages 51-90. The German text may be found in WA: 19: 72-113.

was completely contrary to the Reformation teaching that we are saved by grace through faith alone.

Luther wrote,

What I am speaking of is . . . that abominable concoction drawn from everyone's sewer and cesspool. The mass became a sacrifice. . . . Whereupon the mass began to be a priestly monopoly devouring the wealth of the whole world and engulfing it—as with an apocalyptic plague . . . Thus came the masses for the departed, for journeys, for prosperity—but who can even name the causes. . . . And there is no end of it yet. And what shall I say of external additions of vestments, vessels, candles, and palls, and organs and all the music and of images? There was scarcely a craft in all the world that did not depend on the mass for a large part of its business⁸ Let us, therefore, repudiate everything that smacks of sacrifice.⁹

With that goal in mind, Luther uses nine pages in the English text of this treatise discussing the order of service—the Introit, Kyrie, Gradual, Creed, Prayers, Agnus Dei, and Benediction.¹⁰ Then after all that, Luther explained that different liturgies should still be allowed. He wrote,

Thus we think about the mass. But in all these matters we will want to beware lest we make binding what should be free, or make sinners of those who may do some things differently or omit others. All that matters is that the Words of Institution should be kept intact and that everything should be done by faith. For these rites are supposed to be for Christians Who observe them voluntarily and from the heart, but are free to change them how and whenever they may wish. Therefore, it is not in these matters that anyone should either seek or establish as law some indispensable form by which he might ensnare or harass consciences. Nor do we find any evidence for such an established rite, either in the early fathers or in the primitive church, but only in the Roman church. But even if they had decreed anything in this matter as a law, we would not have to observe it, because these things neither can nor should be bound by laws. Further, even if different people make use of different rites, let no one judge or despise the other, but every man be fully persuaded in his own mind [Rom. 14:5]. Let us feel and think

⁸ L. W. 53:21-22.

⁹ L. W. 53:26.

¹⁰ L. W. 53:22-30.

the same, even though we may act differently. And let us approve each other's rites lest schisms and sects should result from this diversity in rites.¹¹

Luther makes this same point in a letter to Prince George of Anhalt, (July 10, 1545) Dean of the cathedral in Magdeburg, when he wrote,

Accordingly, I cannot advise that ceremonies be made uniform everywhere. Diversity may be tolerated provided that manifestly godless and foolish ceremonies are abandoned. For example, if some ceremonies have been discontinued in certain places, they should not be restored, and if some ceremonies have hitherto been retained, they should not be given up. This applies to the customary location of alters, to the sacred and secular vestments of the clergy, and to other similar things. For if heart and mind are one in the Lord, one man will readily allow another's ceremonies to be different.¹²

Some object to this diversity saying these liturgical orders are based on scripture and the early church. Therefore, they should never change. Luther addresses this in his treatise on the Latin Mass by emphasizing that "liberty must prevail." He wrote,

And if any should ask that all these [forms] be proved from Scriptures and the example of the fathers, they do not disturb us; for as we have said above, liberty must prevail in these matters and Christian consciences must not be bound by laws and ordinances. That is why the Scriptures prescribe nothing in these matters, but allow freedom for the Spirit to act according to his own understanding as the respective place, time, and persons may require it. And as for the example of the fathers, [their liturgical orders] are partly unknown,

¹¹L. W. 53: 30-31. Luther then continues discussing vestments. "We have passed over the matter of vestments. We think about these as we do about other forms. We permit them to be used in freedom, as long as people refrain from ostentation and pomp. For you are not more acceptable for consecrating in vestments. Nor are you less acceptable for consecrating without vestments." L. W. 53: 31.

¹²Martin Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert. (Vancouver, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 1960), 312-313. Luther even discusses close communion within the context of evangelical freedom. He writes, "For participation in the Supper is part of the confession by which they confess before God, angels, and men that they are Christians. Care must therefore be taken lest any, as it were, take the Supper on the sly and disappear in the crowd so that one cannot tell whether they live good or evil lives. On the other hand, even in this matter I do not want to make a law, but simply want to demonstrate a decent and fitting order to be used in freedom by free Christian men" (L. W. 53: 34).

partly so much at variance with each other that nothing definite can be established about them, evidently because they themselves used their liberty. And even if they would be perfectly definite and clear, yet they could not impose on us a law or the obligation to follow them.¹³

In this treatise on Latin Mass of 1523, Luther never uses the word *adiaphoron*. But he makes it very clear that evangelical freedom forbids any liturgical legalism. “Scriptures prescribe nothing in these matters, but allow freedom for the Spirit to act according to his own understanding as the respective place, time, and persons may require it.”¹⁴

Luther remained consistent in this view. Three years later in 1526 Luther wrote his treatise on the German Mass. But he was not the first to write a mass in the vernacular.

In 1522 Wolfgang Wissenburger in Basel and Johann Schwebel in Pforzheim had begun services in the vernacular. The same year Kaspar Kantz introduced and published a German mass. In 1523 Thomas Münzer followed with a German mass, Matins, and Vespers elaborately printed with all the original plain-chant melodies. Other orders were introduced in Reutlingen, Wertheim, Königsberg, and Strassburg during 1524. The multiplicity of German masses threatened to become confusing, and Luther’s friends appealed to him to end the confusion and to submit his own blueprint of a German mass. But the Reformer dragged his feet and for several years shied away from fulfilling their request. . . . When his friend Nicholas Hausmann proposed an evangelical council to enforce liturgical uniformity, Luther objected to the use of compulsion. He felt that each evangelical center should be free either to devise its own liturgy or to borrow from others.¹⁵ When Hausmann in March of 1525 sent a few samples of German liturgies (probably from Nördlingen, Allstedt, Strassburg, or Nürnberg), Luther answered: “I am returning the masses and have no objection against having them sung in this manner. But I hate to see the Latin notes set over the German words.”¹⁶

¹³ L. W. 53:37. Confer Appendix 5.

¹⁴ L. W. 53: 37.

¹⁵ L. W. 53: 53. For Luther’s letter to Hausmann see L. W. 49:87-91. The Latin text may be found at WA, Br 3: 373-374.

¹⁶ L. W. 53: 54.

Note three things here. First, when Luther became aware of liturgical diversity in Germany, he did not write a letter to all of them telling them to stop because such diversity was contrary to the unity of the Gospel. Rather, he let them go for several years.

Second, when Nicholas Hausmann proposed an evangelical council to enforce liturgical uniformity, Luther objected to the use of compulsion. He felt that each congregation should be free either to devise its own liturgy or to borrow from others. Luther explained,

If in these external matters one congregation (*ecclesia*) does not voluntarily want to follow another, why should it be compelled to do so by decrees of councils, which are soon converted into laws and snares for souls? Of its own accord, a congregation should, therefore, follow another one, or else be allowed to enjoy its own customs; only the unity of the Spirit should be preserved in faith and in the Word, however great may be the diversity and variety in respect to the flesh and the elements of the world.¹⁷

Third, also note, when Hausmann sent samples of German liturgies to Luther, Luther did not object to any of them. The only criticism Luther had was on the music. He felt it was tacky to set German words to Latin music. Here again, we see Luther had no problem with divergent liturgies.

Finally in 1526 Luther gets around to writing his German liturgy and the very first words from his pen are these.

In the first place, I would kindly and for God's sake request all those who see this order of service or desire to follow it: Do not make it a rigid law to bind or entangle anyone's conscience, but use it in Christian liberty as long, when, where, and how you find it to be practical and useful.¹⁸

Here we see what is important for Luther. Rigid uniformity is not important or necessary. He says, "Do not make it a rigid law to bind or entangle anyone's conscience, but use it in Christian liberty." Then Luther continues,

That is not to say that those who already have good orders, or by the grace of God could make better ones, should discard theirs and adopt ours. For I do

¹⁷ L. W. 49: 90-91.

¹⁸ L. W. 53: 61.

not propose that all of Germany should uniformly follow our Wittenberg order.¹⁹

Luther makes it very clear that it is not necessary for all churches to worship the same way. But he does not stop there. He continues in this treatise on the German Mass by explaining that there are three kinds of liturgies. First, there is the Latin liturgy. Second, there is the German liturgy. Both of these generally follow the historical tradition of the church.

But then Luther writes, there is the third kind of liturgy.

The third kind of service should be a truly evangelical order and should not be held in a public place for all sorts of people. [He is suggesting here that this third type of service is not for everyone.] But those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do other Christian works. According to this order, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reproved, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ, Matthew 18 [:15–17]. Here one could also solicit benevolent gifts to be willingly given and distributed to the poor, according to St. Paul's example, II Corinthians 9. Here would be no need of much and elaborate singing. Here one could set up a brief and neat order for baptism and the sacrament and center everything on the Word, prayer, and love. Here one would need a good short catechism on the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Our Father.²⁰

¹⁹ L. W. 53: 62.

²⁰ L. W. 53: 63-64. Jaroslav Pelikan, professor of Ecclesiastical History at Yale Divinity School comments on this passage. "According to Luther, the need for ritual was in inverse ratio to the earnestness of Christian faith. The more serious a group of people became about their Christian profession, the less liturgy they needed. For elaborate liturgical forms were a concession to those who were unable to be content with the simple minimum that Christ had prescribed. That simple minimum was a restoration of the true worship of God as it was practiced by the patriarchs. Luther's *Commentary on Genesis* describes the 'very bare, pure, and simple worship and religion which God gave to Adam, in which there was nothing tedious or elaborate'. It also extols the simple worship of Abraham, which was devoid of decorations and which concentrated on the Word of God and sound preaching. . . . When and if it became possible for such a group of earnest Christians to be formed, the traditional ritual of the church was not to be permitted to interfere with their free worship." Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 93-94. For biographical information on Pelikan see Appendix 5.

Here Luther is talking about an individual congregation of sincere Christians centered on the Word, prayer, and love. The only order of service they need is something simple perhaps taken from the small catechism.

One might ask, if that is a good idea, why didn't Luther lead such a congregation? He explained:

If one had the kind of people and persons who wanted to be Christians in earnest, the rules and regulations would soon be ready. But as yet I neither can nor desire to begin such a congregation or assembly (*gemeine oder versamlunge*) or to make rules for it. For I have not yet the people or persons for it, nor do I see many who want it. But if I should be requested to do it and could not refuse with a good conscience, I should gladly do my part and help as best I can.²¹

Here Luther makes it clear that with a congregation of sincere and dedicated Christians there are ways of worship outside the traditional historic liturgy.

Martin Chemnitz, following in the footsteps of Luther summarizes Luther's teaching well with these words,

Christian liberty places a limit on apostolic rites, namely, that ceremonies may be according to their nature adiaphora . . . should be observed in freedom, so that they can be instituted, changed, or done away with for reasons of edification, place, time, persons, etc. . . . The church has therefore declared its liberty in traditions of this kind by this very fact. For the doctrine is universal and perpetual, but the ceremonies can be freely changed according to circumstances.²²

In this first part of the presentation, we have focused on the two polarities of the historic liturgy. On the one hand, the historic liturgy is important, and it can serve a useful purpose for Christian faith and morality. On the other hand, we have seen from the writings of Luther that although he does not use the word adiaphoron (as Chemnitz does), they both agree that the historic liturgy is not commanded in the scripture and there are good, acceptable reasons to worship a different way.

²¹ LW 53:64.

²² Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol.1, trans. F. Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 269-270.

Therefore, the first principle in understanding the historic liturgy is:

Principle 1: To discuss the liturgy accurately it is necessary to understand that the historic liturgy is both important and an adiaphoron.

Part 2: How Do We Balance These Two Polar Elements?

Now that we have established that understanding these two polarities is necessary for an accurate discussion of the historic liturgy: 1) it is important and 2) it is an adiaphoron, how do we navigate around these two poles? Can we hold these two in balance? Can we revolve our discussions around these poles in a neat elliptical orbit; or, are we doomed to alternatively overemphasizing one to the detriment of the other, like a pinball in an arcade machine that erratically bounces back and forth?

Our understanding of the two poles of the liturgy is not doomed to chaos and confusion. For we are not the first ones to tackle this challenging issue. Here again, a look at our Lutheran history is beneficial. There were two times in the past when our Lutheran fathers struggled with issues concerning the liturgy. If we see how they handled it back in the 16th century, this will give us a great deal of guidance for today.

First, let's consider the liturgical confusion in Livonia.

Livonia (present-day Latvia and Estonia) was impressed with the teaching of the Reformation. In late 1524 the congregation in Dorpat, Livonia welcomed Melchior Hoffmann as their new preacher, trusting that he would teach and preach faithful biblical theology. But that did not happen. In a matter of months there were big problems. Hoffmann was a fur trader who knew very little theology. He knew less about how to be a pastor. But none of that stopped him from preaching. He seemed to have the knack of sowing seeds of chaos and confusion wherever he went. Under his leadership, the people throughout Livonia became confused about theology, church practice, and the liturgy. They didn't know what to believe.

Luther heard about their chaos, and in June of 1525, he wrote them, hoping to bring some order to their confusion. Concerning their liturgical chaos and disunity Luther wrote,

In times gone by, councils were held for this purpose, and all sorts of rulings and canons [or church regulations] were made in order to hold all the people to a common order. But in the end these rulings and canons became snares for the soul and pitfalls for the faith. . . . For those who devise and ordain universal customs and orders get so wrapped up in them that they make them into dictatorial laws opposed to the freedom of the faith.²³

Surely there is a better way to find liturgical peace and harmony than to have a liturgy determined by an ecclesiastical authority and then forced on the congregations. Just seven months earlier Luther was explaining this to Nicholas Haussmann. Now in his letter to the Livonians, he is making the same point. However, here he continues in more detail. He writes,

Now even though external rites and orders such as masses, singing, reading, baptizing, add nothing to salvation, yet it is unchristian to quarrel over such things and thereby to confuse the common people. We should consider the edification of the lay folk more important than our own ideas and opinions. Therefore, I pray all of you, my dear sirs, let each one surrender his own opinions and get together in a friendly way and come to a common decision about these external matters, so that there will be one uniform practice throughout your district instead of disorder—one thing being done here and another there—lest the common people get confused and discouraged. For even though from the viewpoint of faith, the external orders are free and can without scruples be changed by anyone at any time, yet from the viewpoint of love you are not free to use this liberty, but bound to consider the edification of the common people, as St. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 14[:40], ‘all things should be done to edify.’ . . . Now when your people are confused and offended by your lack of uniform order, you cannot plead, ‘Externals are free. Here in my own place, I am going to do as I please.’ But you are bound to consider the effect of your attitude on others.²⁴

In this letter, Luther’s main purpose was to bring order and harmony to the chaotic situation in Livonia. There are two important theological principles for us here.

Although it is brief, Luther specifically mentions it, and it is well worth emphasizing. The second principle in understanding the historic liturgy is:

²³ L. W. 53:46. (For the German text of Luther’s letter see, WA 18, 417-421).

²⁴ L. W. 53:47-48.

Principle 2: It is unchristian to quarrel over such things.

This letter also has a third principle here for us. This bears repeating: “let each one surrender his own opinions and get together in a friendly way . . . The external orders are free and can without scruples be changed by anyone at any time, yet from the viewpoint of love you are not free to use this liberty, but bound to consider the edification of the common people . . . you cannot plead, ‘Externals are free. Here in my own place, I am going to do as I please.’ But you are bound to consider the effect of your attitude on others.’”²⁵ This brings us to principle number 3.

Principle 3: There may be times when you are called upon to sacrifice your evangelical freedom for the sake of peace and unity in the church.

But note what he does not say. He does not say to express their unity and resolve their liturgical chaos they must all do the Latin mass. Nor does he say they must all do the German mass. Why, because the liturgical order is an adiaphoron. He clearly says the “orders are free and can without scruples be changed by anyone at any time.” So he is not going to insist on any one particular order. He is not going to say, “This is the way you have to do it.”

Rather he says, “Get together in a friendly way and come to a common decision about these external matters.” Twice in these two sentences, Luther says to consider the edification of the people. “Serve your neighbor's edification, as also St. Paul says in Romans 14[15:2] ‘Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him.’”²⁶ In this 5 ½ page letter Luther uses a form of the word “edification” five times. Therein we see his main point. Choose a common liturgy—one that is most edifying for your people—and use that. This brings us to our 4th principle.

Principle 4: Use that liturgy which is most edifying to your people.

A shallow, superficial reading of this letter might lead one to misconstrue that Luther is saying nontraditional liturgies are wrong. Don't do them because—look at how they are bringing confusion and chaos to the people in Livonia.

²⁵ L. W. 53: 48.

²⁶ L. W. 53:48.

But such an understanding cannot be correct because we have already seen in his treatise on the Latin Mass (1523) and in his letter to Haussmann (1524), and in his treatise on the German Mass (1526), that Luther had no problem with non-traditional liturgies in themselves. But in this particular situation in Livonia, we see that numerous nontraditional liturgies were wrong, because they were bringing chaos and confusion to the people. Chaos and confusion are not edifying. That is the point that remains the same throughout the ages. If a certain liturgy is going to bring chaos and confusion into the congregation, then don't do it. The point is—use that liturgy which is most edifying.

Maybe you are a big fan of the traditional liturgy. Maybe you're a big fan of contemporary liturgies. But what you are a big fan of does not matter. Which liturgical style you love and appreciate does not matter. What matters is—what is edifying to your people. That is why at this point in his letter to the Livonians Luther quotes Philippians 2:4 saying, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.”²⁷

Luther here is talking about the very heart and core and purpose of the pastoral ministry. He summarizes that all in 6 words, “You are there for their edification.”²⁸ He quotes Romans 15:2 “let each one of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him.”²⁹

But even here, Luther explains there is a danger in liturgical unity. No matter what liturgy you agree on and use, be it traditional or nontraditional, “a preacher must watch and diligently instruct the people lest they take such uniform practices as divinely appointed and absolutely binding laws.”³⁰ So even if everyone agrees on a common liturgy, the people still are not to view such a liturgy as divinely appointed or absolutely binding—because liturgy is an adiaphoron.

We now move forward to a different situation 21 years later. After the death of Luther, the church which bears his name still struggled with liturgical issues.

In 1547 Emperor Charles V finally used military force against Lutheranism. He focused specifically on two leading Princess, Elector John Frederick of Saxony and

²⁷ L. W. 53: 47.

²⁸ L. W. 53: 48.

²⁹ L. W. 53: 48.

³⁰ L. W. 53: 48.

Landgrave Philip of Hesse. In early spring, Charles V invaded Saxony and led both of them away in chains.³¹

To suppress Lutheranism, the emperor implemented a new order called the Augsburg Interim.³² This reintroduced the theology of medieval Catholicism, rejected the clear Biblical teaching of justification by grace through faith alone, and restored all ecclesiastical authority to the pope. Because of the imposition of the Augsburg Interim, over 400 hundred Lutheran pastors with their families were sent into exile, and most of their pulpits stood empty.³³ “Some were imprisoned, a few were killed.”³⁴

To his credit Phillip Melanchthon urged rejection of the Augsburg Interim, pointing out the many places at which it contradicted biblical truth. Nikolaus von Amsdorf tore apart the theology of the interim article by article. Johannes Brenz sharply criticized the interim then immediately went into hiding.³⁵

Melanchthon’s Prince Elector Moritz, found himself between a rock and a hard place. He felt pressured to keep the Augsburg Interim. But he also needed to bring peace to his people. What’s a prince to do? The solution seemed to be compromise.

In the summer and fall of 1548, he called together a group of theologians to work on such a compromise document. That group included Philip Melanchthon, Johann Pfeffinger, and others. They were surprised when their compromise document—which became known as the Leipzig Interim—proved to be incredibly divisive.

³¹ Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 172-173. Hereafter abbreviated as History and Theology of the Book of Concord. John Frederick was imprisoned for 7 years and Philip was imprisoned for 5 years. In May of 1547 Emperor Charles V stood at the gravesite of Luther. His soldiers accompanying him suggested they dig up Luther’s body and burn it at the stake. To which the emperor replied, “My quarrel is with the living, not the dead.” Jacob Preus, *The Second Martin: The Life and Theology of Martin Chemnitz* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 58.

³² For a copy of the Augsburg Interim the reader may wish to see, Robert Kolb and James Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 144-182.

³³ History and Theology of The Book of Concord, 176-177. The Augsburg Interim did allow for the marriage of priests and giving communion to the laypeople in both kinds.

³⁴ Eugene F. A. Klug and Otto F. Stahlke, *Getting into the Formula of Concord: a history and digest of the Formula*: (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 61.

³⁵ History and Theology of The Book of Concord, 177.

Many former students of Melanchthon found it [the Leipzig Interim] an appalling betrayal of God, Luther, and their Praeceptor's [teacher's] own integrity. They labeled the settlement 'the Leipzig Interim.' They found its doctrinal content inadequate, confusing, and at points heretical. Moreover, they were convinced that its compromises in various areas of church life were dishonest and could only confuse the common people.³⁶

There were many problems with the Leipzig Interim, but for this paper, we will focus only on the liturgical issues.

The Leipzig Interim insisted on the use of the Latin Mass. It also insisted on the Roman Catholic worship ceremonies, including, memorial masses for the dead, and the use of bells, lamps, vestments, and compulsory fasting on Fridays and Saturdays.³⁷ Many Lutherans sided with Phillip Melanchthon and thought these compromises were acceptable in order to restore peace to the church and to express unity in the faith.³⁸ This group soon became known as the Philippists.

The other group was comprised of Matthias Flacius Illyricus, Nikolaus Gallus, Nickolaus von Amsdorf, and others. This group became known as the Gnesio-Lutherans. They would not accept any compromise on liturgical issues.

Both groups were sincere and dedicated Lutherans. Both were driven by pastoral concerns. Both wanted to be faithful to the Scripture. Yet they could not overlook their important differences.

Melanchthon wanted to save Lutheranism from being wiped out by the emperor. He thought compromising on issues of adiaphora was acceptable. The Philippists who followed him were willing to sacrifice some evangelical freedom for the sake of harmony in the church. Melanchthon believed one could separate adiaphoristic liturgical issues from absolute doctrinal issues. If you need to compromise on liturgical issues to bring peace in the church, then why not do it? After all, they are adiaphora.³⁹

³⁶ History and Theology of The Book of Concord, 178.

³⁷ For a copy of the Leipzig Interim the reader may wish to see, Robert Kolb and James Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 183-196.

³⁸ Later (in 1556) Melanchthon wrote a letter to Flacius confessing, "I have sinned in this matter and I ask forgiveness of God." Klug and Stahlke, 63.

³⁹ History and Theology of The Book of Concord, 182. Melanchthon became increasingly embittered feeling that he was misunderstood and unappreciated.

The Gnesio-Lutherans did not see it that way. Amsdorf, Gallus, and the other Gnesio-Lutherans claimed that parishioners often associate the fundamentals of their faith with outward signs and expressions. They believed that compromise in liturgical matters would confuse their parishioners. They specifically commented on the problem of reinstating liturgical vestments.

Reinstating vestments that had been laid aside in order to demonstrate that the Reformation had rejected the old order could only lead laypeople to believe that the Reformation had been a mistake.

Precisely this reinstating of long-discarded vestments elicited from Gallus and Flacius a stinging rebuke. Vestments are indeed adiaphora, they observed: it is a neutral matter whether the pastor wears an academic robe or surplus or chasuble. The effect of such vestments on the congregation is not, however, a neutral matter, Flacius and Gallus argued. They formulated the principle that nothing remains neutral in a situation in which the clear confession of the faith is at stake.⁴⁰

These Gnesio-Lutherans could not understand how Melanchthon failed to recognize that the liturgical expression of the faith was inseparable from Christian doctrine. Laypeople could realize that.⁴¹ The last thing the Gnesio-Lutherans wanted was to return to the former liturgical practices that would encourage the laity to think, “O, we are going back to the old ways, the Reformation must have been a mistake.”

This issue became known as the early Lutheran Adiaphoristic Controversy. A third group of Lutherans arose to resolve this conflict. Among them were Jacob Andreae, and Martin Chemnitz. Their efforts to resolve this conflict led to the writing of what eventually became known as the Formula of Concord.

In article X paragraph 2 of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, the nature of the controversy is stated this way.

The question was whether, in that situation, in good conscience, certain ceremonies that had been abolished (as in themselves indifferent matters neither commanded nor forbidden by God) could be revived under the pressure and demand of the opponents, and whether compromise with them

⁴⁰ History and Theology of The Book of Concord, 181.

⁴¹ History and Theology of The Book of Concord, 181.

in such ceremonies and indifferent matters would be proper? The one party said yes, the other said no to this question.⁴²

The Formula of Concord sided entirely with the Gnesio-Lutherans. Unlike Melanchthon, it was completely unwilling to make any compromise that infringed upon the church's evangelical freedom.

The Epitome of the Formula of Concord in Article X, paragraph 4 states:

[4] 2. We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the authority to alter such ceremonies according to its own situation, as may be most useful and edifying for the community of God.⁴³

Then in paragraphs 6 and 7 it states:

When an unequivocal confession of the faith is demanded of us, we dare not yield to the opponents in such indifferent matters. As the Apostle wrote, "Stand firm in the freedom for which Christ has set us free, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" [Gal. 5:1*]. . . . For in such a situation it is no longer indifferent matters that are at stake. The truth of the gospel and Christian freedom are at stake . . . We also believe, teach, and confess that no church (*Kirche/ecclesia*) should condemn another because the one has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other has.⁴⁴

Then to make sure there was no misunderstanding, the Epitome of the Formula of Concord stated several condemnations associated with this teaching.

Therefore, we reject and condemn as incorrect and contrary to God's Word: [9] 1. When anyone teaches that human commands and prescriptions in the church are to be regarded in and of themselves as worship ordained by God or a part of it.⁴⁵

We reject and condemn as incorrect and contrary to God's Word. . .

⁴² Kolb, Book of Concord, 515, par. 2

⁴³ Kolb, Book of Concord, 515, par 4.

⁴⁴ Kolb, Book of Concord, 516, par. 6-7.

⁴⁵ Kolb, Book of Concord, 516, par. 8-9.

When anyone imposes such ceremonies, commands, and prescriptions upon the community of God with coercive force as if they were necessary, against its Christian freedom, which it has in external matters.⁴⁶

We reject and condemn as incorrect and contrary to God's Word . . . When such external ceremonies and indifferent matters are abolished in a way that suggests that the community of God is not free at all times, according to its specific situation, to use one or more of these ceremonies in Christian freedom, as is most beneficial to the church.⁴⁷

Chemnitz and Chytraeus continued to stress this point in Article X of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concordia. In paragraph 9 they state,

We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every time and place has the right, power, and authority to change, reduce, or expand such practices according to circumstances in an orderly and appropriate manner, without frivolity or offense, as seems most useful, beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church.⁴⁸

And again in paragraph 10 they write,

We also believe, teach, and confess that in a time when confession is necessary, as when the enemies of God's Word want to suppress the pure teaching of the holy gospel, the entire community of God, indeed, every Christian, especially servants of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated according to God's Word to confess true teaching and everything that pertains to the whole of religion freely and publicly. They are to do so not only with words but also in actions and deeds. In such a time they shall not yield to the opponents even in indifferent matters, nor shall they permit the imposition of such adiaphora by opponents who use violence or chicanery in such a way that undermines true worship of God or that introduces or confirms idolatry. [11] ^bIt is written in Galatians 5[:1*]: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Galatians 2[:4–5*]⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Kolb, Book of Concord, 516, par. 8, 10.

⁴⁷ Kolb, Book of Concord, 516, par.8, 12.

⁴⁸ Kolb, Book of Concord, 637, par. 9.

⁴⁹ Kolb, Book of Concord, 637, par 10.

What about in times of persecution—when the unity of the Church is needed the most? Even then one must not be coerced into giving up one's Christian freedom. The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord states,

Such coercion and command obscure and pervert the truth of the gospel . . . Forcing human commands upon the church as necessary—as if their omission were wrong and sinful . . . paves the way to idolatry.⁵⁰

Article X of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord then concludes with these words,

From this explanation, everyone can understand what a Christian community and every individual Christian, particularly pastors, may do or omit in regard to indifferent things without injury to their conscience. . . For this reason, the churches (Kirchen/ ecclesia) are not to condemn one another because of differences in ceremonies when in Christian freedom one has fewer or more than the other, as long as these churches are otherwise united in teaching and in all the articles of the faith.”⁵¹

The Formula of Concord gives us the fifth principle to apply to our understanding of the liturgy.

Principle 5: Live in your evangelical freedom to give a clear testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Live in your evangelical freedom” can easily become a cliché, or a slogan with a very hazy and unclear meaning. So it is helpful to unpack exactly what that means for us today in the context of our liturgical discussions.

First, there is no evangelical freedom without repentance.

How many times in our discussions of the liturgy have we been less than charitable with those who disagree with us? Have we called them disparaging names, talked about them behind their backs—criticized and ridiculed them to others? That is wrong. That is sinful! We are pastors! We know better. We need to stop it. For our lack of love, for our impatience with those who disagree with us, for our condescending attitude—we need to repent.

⁵⁰ Kolb, Book of Concord, 638, par. 15.

⁵¹ Kolb, Book of Concord, 640, par. 25, 31.

Second, living in the freedom of the Gospel means to receive the forgiveness Christ won for us on the cross. Our past does not define us. As ugly as our sins are, we do not need to wallow in them like a pig in the mud. The Good News is that we are washed clean by the blood of Jesus. He died for us so that we are reborn, renewed, and empowered to live a life worthy of our calling. With the power of Christ's forgiveness, we can leave the old sins behind us and live new lives that are more pleasing to God and beneficial to His kingdom.

Third, living in the freedom of the Gospel means we extend to others the same love and forgiveness that God in Christ has given us. Christian forgiveness is always—always meant to be shared. We are reminded of that every time we pray the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer saying, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Forgiveness received in Christ and forgiveness given to others in His name is the warp and woof of the Christian faith and life. Certainly, we pastors in the synod should be able to forgive one another, whatever the grievance.

Fourth, living in the freedom of the Gospel means we never sacrifice any part of our evangelical freedom—not one iota of it, if such a sacrifice impedes or obstructs giving a clear and strong testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our freedom in the Gospel should never be received or given away lightly. In the first place, this freedom cost our Savior His life on the cross. In the second place living in this freedom is a beautiful witness that shows the world in a practical and concrete way the new life that comes through Jesus Christ.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has sought to make a positive contribution to our synodical discussion concerning the proper understanding of the historic liturgy. It has laid out five theological principles.

Principle 1: To discuss the liturgy accurately it is necessary to understand that the historic liturgy is both important and an adiaphoron.

Principle 2: It is unchristian to quarrel over such things.

Principle 3: There may be times when you are called upon to sacrifice your evangelical freedom for the sake of peace and unity in the church.

Principle 4: Use that liturgy which is most edifying to your people.

Principle 5: Live in your evangelical freedom to give a clear testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This means we;

5A: repent for our lack of charity in past liturgical discussions,

5B: receive the forgiveness Christ won for us on the cross,

5C: give to others the same love and forgiveness that God in Christ has given us,

5D: never sacrifice any part of our evangelical freedom if such a sacrifice inhibits giving a clear testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

These 5 principles will not solve all the liturgical issues of the synod. Applying them in specific concrete situations will still be challenging. However, it is my fervent prayer that these principles will help us put the liturgical bickering behind us and encourage us to move forward in mutual love and respect—building one another up, supporting and encouraging one another as fellow brothers in the ministry, laboring together in our Lords kingdom.

Appendix 1: An Example from St. Paul

Out of the 5 principles listed in this presentation, two may be difficult to consider together.

Principle 3: There may be times when you are called upon to sacrifice your evangelical freedom for the sake of peace and unity in the church.

Principle 5D: never sacrifice any part of our evangelical freedom if such a sacrifice inhibits giving a clear testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul had to balance these two principles within the contextual framework of circumcision. He made it very clear to the Galatians that, they were not to give up the freedom they had in the Gospel. He wrote to them, “For freedom, Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). A chapter later he explained, “neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). In other words, the freedom we have in Christ sets us free from all the Old Testament ceremonial rules and regulations—including circumcision. These things no longer matter. The only thing that matters is being made new in Jesus Christ.

In Galatia when the Judaizers insisted that to be a Christian you had to be circumcised, Paul responded—absolutely not. He relates to the Galatians this story about what he did earlier in Jerusalem concerning this same point. He explained,

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. . . . But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you (Galatians 2:1-5).

Paul highly valued the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. He was not going to let the Judaizers take it away from him or Titus. He refused to have Titus circumcised when he was told circumcision was necessary. Here we see an application of **Principle 5D: never sacrifice any part of our evangelical freedom if such a sacrifice inhibits giving a clear testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

But compare that with Timothy. In Acts 16 the situation is completely different, and Paul had a different response. We read,

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. . . . Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places (Acts 16:1, 3).

Here no one was forcing Paul to do anything. No one was saying, “Paul, circumcision is necessary, you have to do it.” Rather, Paul willingly did with Timothy—exactly what he refused to do with Titus. For the sake of their proclamation of the Gospel to the Jews, Timothy was circumcised.

Here we see an application of **Principle 3: There may be times when you are called upon to sacrifice your evangelical freedom for the sake of peace and unity in the church.**

Was Paul, being terribly inconsistent with Timothy and Titus, or was he being creatively flexible for the sake of the Gospel? He explains this in 1 Corinthians 9.

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means, I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Therefore, we see from Paul’s example with Titus and Timothy that the proclamation of the Gospel in different settings requires a certain degree of flexibility. When any pastor or congregation is making any liturgical decision, (or any decision) they must view this issue (or any issue) within the framework of our

evangelical freedom⁵² and ask, “Will this help promote the Gospel we seek to proclaim or is it an infringement and violation of that very Gospel for which Christ died?” Or in other words, “Which is more edifying to our people?”

Different pastors and different congregations with different backgrounds in different locations are going to answer that question differently. That is alright; because that is part of the freedom, we have in Jesus Christ.

⁵² That is an essential consideration because that is the contextual framework of our life in Christ.

Appendix 2: Only Translocal Adiaphora?

Article X of the Formula of Concord frequently states the liturgy is an adiaphoron in the “community of God” (*Gemeinde Gottes*).

There are some who claim that these references to the “community of God” refer only to translocal (large groups of) congregations such as consistories, districts or synods and not to individual congregations.⁵³ With this understanding, only the district or synod has the right to change the liturgy and not a local congregation.

This line of thinking maintains that because Chemnitz was the superintendent of the consistory of Braunschweig, (think district president) he surely intended the phrase “community of God,” to refer only to a group of churches and not to individual congregations. However, there is nothing to justify that assumption. Surely Martin Chemnitz knew (as does any LCMS district president today) that every individual congregation is a community of God.

That is why it is better to interpret the phrase “community of God” in article X within the context of the rest of biblical theology, heeding the words of our Lord Jesus when He explained, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matt. 18:20). Every congregation—no matter how small—even two or three—is a group of people gathered around Jesus—gathered around God. They are called to be His people and His community.

This was the interpretation of Dr. William Dau (professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis from 1905-1926) and Dr. Gerhard F. Bente (professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis from 1893-1926) when they translated the Formula of Concord into English for the Triglot version of the Book of Concord in 1921. Thus in the Concordia Troglotta, Bente and Dau have passages that read,

We believe, teach, and confess, that the congregation of God of every place and time has the power, according to its circumstances, to change such

⁵³ “This article has in view territorial churches, not simply individual congregations, when it talks about making changes in the Church’s ceremonies.” Paul McCain, *Concordia: the Lutheran Confessions: A Readers Edition of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2005), 514.

ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God⁵⁴

Again Dau and Bente write in the Triglotta,

Accordingly, we reject and condemn as wrong and contrary to God's Word . . . When these external ceremonies and adiaphora are abrogated in such a manner as though it were not free to the congregation of God to employ one or more [this or that] in Christian liberty, according to its circumstances, as may be most useful at any time to the Church [for edification].⁵⁵

Again they write,

Therefore we believe, teach and confess that every congregation of God of every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, the good, right, power, and authority [in matters truly adiaphora] to change, to diminish, and to increase them, . . . Paul teaches [this] in Rom. 14, and proves it by his example. Acts 16,3; 21, 26; 1 Cor. 9. 10.⁵⁶

This interpretation of article X, emphasizing that every congregation is a community of God is biblical, and it is an honorable part of our Lutheran heritage that should be respected and appreciated.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, *Concordia triglotta: die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, deutsch-lateinisch-englisch* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1921), 829 par 2.

⁵⁵ Bente, 831 par. 4.

⁵⁶ Bente, 1055 par. 9.

⁵⁷ One of the other authors of the Formula of Concord, Jakob Andreae, was the superintendent of the churches in Goeppingen. In an effort to explain this adiaphoristic controversy to the laypeople he wrote a sermon explaining that it was every individual Christian's duty to stand firm in the freedom of the Gospel, when others try to take it away. He wrote,

The first question concerns purely indifferent matters, which in themselves are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. When someone wants to impose them upon him with force—and he must suffer if he does not acquiesce—what should a layman do?

A layman should look at the Ten Commandments in his catechism and take to heart the First Commandment, which says: 'I am the Lord your God,' etc. 'You shall have no other gods before me.' The Lord himself has explained this commandment through Moses: 'Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it or take away from it' (Deut. 12:32).

From that a layman can conclude that in his word God has commanded us whatever is necessary; what he is not commanded is not necessary. When someone wants to impose something on me contrary to my freedom as a Christian, as something that has

Appendix 3:
A Closer Look at
Lex Orandi Lex Credendi ⁵⁸

Lex orandi lex credendi. (The law of praying the law of believing) This phrase is used time and again in liturgical discussions. It is often attributed to St. Prosper of Aquitaine (390-455) in his Official Pronouncements of the Apostolic See on Divine Grace and Free Will (*Praeteritorum sedis Apstolicae Episcoporum Auctoritates de gratia Dei et libero voluntatis arbitrio*⁵⁹) written around 433. It is usually quoted to show there is a venerable, ancient, and respected relationship between the liturgy (what you pray) and doctrine (what you believe). Yet, exactly how Prosper understood that relationship varies greatly among his interpreters.

With just these four simple words there is not much to go on. Does the liturgy inform and shape our doctrine? Does the liturgy simply teach our doctrine? Perhaps the phrase means that doctrine shapes and informs the liturgy. Perhaps there is a cyclical relationship where liturgy and doctrine shape each other? With

to be done, I have this command: I am not supposed to add anything to God's command or to take away anything from it either. Therefore just as he does wrong who wants to burden me with human commands through the use of force in his ardor, so I also do wrong when I offend someone else by letting myself be burdened.

Therefore even though what is being demanded of me may in itself be a free and indifferent thing (for example, I may or may not eat meat on Friday or in Lent without harming my conscience), I neither can nor should tolerate it when in such a situation it is no longer free but becomes a command and an obligation. Then the truth of the holy gospel stands or falls with the matter. Robert Kolb, *Andreae and the Formula of Concord: Six Sermons on the Way to Lutheran Unity* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 94-95.

⁵⁸ Technically, the axiom consists of two nouns in the nominative case, each with a gerund in the genitive. The gerund is a verbal noun with an active meaning—corresponding to the English gerund. So *lex orandi* can be translated simply but accurately as “the / a law of praying,” and *lex credendi* as “the / a law of believing.” Standing alone, the entire phrase demands the implied copulative verb *est* (is), so that *lex orandi* is *lex credendi*. Stating the phrase as a hermeneutical principle entails translating it with the definite article “the” rather than the indefinite article “a.” Daniel G. Van Slyke, “Lex orandi lex credendi: Liturgy as Locus Theologicus in the Fifth Century?” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 11, no. 2 (2004) 138-139.

⁵⁹ Also known as, *Praeteritum episcoporum sedis apstolicae auctoritates de gratia Dei*. J.-P. Migne and J. B. Pearson, J.P. Migne: Index alphabeticus omnium doctorum, patrum, scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum quorum opera scriptaque vel minima in *Patrologia Latina* reperiuntur. J.B. Pearson: *Conspectus auctorum quorum nomina indicibus Patrologiae Graeco-Latinae a J.P. Migne editae continentur*, vol. 51 (Farnborough, Hants., England: Gregg, 1965), columns 202-212. Hereafter abbreviated as Migne.

just those four words, the phrase is rather cryptic. Taking a closer look at the context from which this phrase supposedly came proves to be quite enlightening.

First, Prosper never said *lex orandi lex credendi*. The closest he ever got to saying that was, “*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*.”⁶⁰ There is nothing in this phrase referring to the liturgy. “*Supplicandi*” can refer to any supplication by the priest, public or private. If Prosper were referring specifically to the liturgy he would use the words, “liturgia,” or “latria.” He possibly could have used “munus,” “ministerium,” “servitus,” “cultus,” or “officium.” But these words are nowhere in the text.

A reading of his entire essay shows that this is not a treatise about the liturgy but a collection of arguments against semi-pelagianism. In this work he simply argues that the prayers of the church (both private and public) for God to convert nonbelievers are proof, that the church believes that nonbelievers cannot come to faith on their own.⁶¹ He is saying that both the prayers of every Catholic church

⁶⁰ “Praeter beatissimae et apostolicae sedis inviolabiles sanctiones, quibus nos piissimi patres, pestiferae novitatis elatione dejecta, et bonae voluntatis exordia, et incrementa probabilium studiorum, et in eis usque in finem perseverantiam ad Christi gratiam referre docuerunt, obsecrationum quoque sacerdotalium sacramenta respiciamus, quae ab apostolis tradita, in toto mundo atque in omni catholica Ecclesia uniformiter celebrantur, **ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi**. Cum enim sanctarum plebium praesules mandata sibimet legatione fungantur apud divinam clementiam, humani generis agunt causam, et tota secum Ecclesia congemiscente, postulant et precantur ut infidelibus donetur fides, ut idololatrae ab impietatis suae liberentur erroribus, ut Judaeis, ablato cordis velamine, lux veritatis appareat, ut haeretici catholicae fidei perceptione respiscant, ut schismatici spiritum redivivae charitatis accipiant, ut lapsis poenitentiae remedia conferantur, ut denique, catechumenis ad regenerationis sacramenta perductis, coelestis misericordiae aula reseretur. Haec autem non perfunctorie neque inaniter a Domino peti, rerum ipsarum monstrat effectus: quandoquidem ex omni errorum genere plurimos Deus dignatur attrahere, quos erutos de potestate tenebrarum transferat in regnum Filii charitatis suae (*Coloss. I, 13*), et ex vasis irae faciat vasa misericordiae (*Rom. IX, 22*). Quod adeo totum divini operis esse sentitur, ut haec efficienti Deo gratiarum semper actio, laudisque confessio, pro illuminatione talium vel correctione referantur.” Migne, 51: Capitulum VIII, Columns 209-210.

⁶¹ “Besides the inviolable sanctions of the most blessed and apostolic see, with which the most pious fathers, having cast down the pride of the pestilential novel teaching, taught us to ascribe to the grace of Christ the origins of good will, the growth of commendable efforts, and perseverance in them to the end, let us also consider the sacraments of priestly prayers that, having been handed down by the apostles, are uniformly practiced throughout the whole world and in every Catholic church, ***ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi***. For when the bishops of the holy peoples observe the mandates committed to them by office in the presence of divine mercy, they plead the cause of the human race, and while the whole Church sighs deeply with them, they entreat and pray that faith may be given to unbelievers, that idol

(public and private) along with the teaching of the church proclaim the necessity of God's grace. However, he is saying nothing here about their relationship or how one influences the other. Nor is he saying anything specifically about the liturgy. "Prosper is clearly not the man that the liturgical theologians have taken him for."⁶²

Some might be inclined to maintain that regardless of what Prosper meant or wrote, "lex orandi lex credendi" is still an accurate expression of an honorable and ancient tradition of the church. But it is not. In "*Mediator Dei*, Pope Pius XII emphatically admonishes that the Church does not teach, the Church does not command, that axiom *lex orandi lex credendi*."⁶³

This four-word phrase has become a piece of wax that can be formed and shaped in different ways to prove different points. One of the more despicable misuses of this phrase becomes evident when it is used to support the spurious claim that—since we all believe in the same doctrines, we should all worship in the same way. This line of thought ignores the role of adiaphora in liturgy and contradicts Luther's statement when he says, "For if the heart and mind are one in the Lord, one man will readily allow another's ceremonies to be different."⁶⁴ It also contradicts Chemnitz when he writes, "For the doctrine is universal and perpetual, but the ceremonies can be freely changed according to circumstances."⁶⁵

worshippers may be freed from the errors of their impiety, that the light of truth may appear to the Jews, the veil over their heart having been removed, that heretics may regain their senses by perception of the Catholic faith, that schismatics may receive the spirit of revived charity, that the remedies of penance may be granted to the lapsed, and finally that the court of heavenly mercy may be opened to catechumens when they are led to the sacraments of regeneration. The effect of these very things demonstrates that they are not asked from the Lord either vainly or in a perfunctory manner: seeing that God deigns to draw many out of every kind of error, whom delivered from the power of darkness he might transfer into the kingdom of the Son of his charity (Col 1:13), and from vessels of wrath he might make vessels of mercy (Rom 9:22). This is so much thought to be entirely divine work, that to the God accomplishing these things thanksgiving and praise are always rendered for the illumination or the correction of such people." This English translation taken from Daniel G. Van Slyke, "Lex orandi lex credendi: Liturgy as Locus Theologicus in the Fifth Century?" *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 11, no. 2 (2004): 130-131.

⁶² Michael Church, "The Law of Begging: Prosper at the End of the Day," *Church* 73, no. 5 (1999): 450.

⁶³ Slyke, 130.

⁶⁴ Martin Luther. *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Vancouver, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 1960), 312-313.

⁶⁵ Chemnitz, Martin. *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol.1, trans. F. Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 270.

This is not to say there is no relationship between our doctrine and our worship. There certainly is—as the Gnesio-Lutherans insisted. That is an important relationship worthy of serious study. However, the phrase *lex orandi lex credendi* obfuscates more than it clarifies.

After looking closer at this phrase *lex orandi lex credendi*, this author is forced to agree with Dr. Daniel G. van Slyke (Associate Professor of Church History at Kenrick-Glennon Roman Catholic Seminary in the Archdiocese of St. Louis) who wrote,

The axiom as it is commonly worded (“*lex orandi lex credendi*”) and understood is not a tradition handed down from early Christianity, but rather a recent theological invention of dubious merit.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Slyke, 138 .

Appendix 4: Dr. Eugene Klug on The Authority of the Local Congregation

Our Lord Jesus assures us, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20). Surely this applies to each congregation of believers. With Christ, each congregation has all it needs to do the work the Lord has called them to do (Matthew 28: 18). Dr. Klug explains.

Different from the congregations which exist with a called pastor by divine right, *jure divino*, at various places, for the ministry of the Word, larger groupings, organizations, church bodies, synods, originate through and by human planning, devising, or wisdom, *jure humano*. They exist normally under covenants, constitutions, or church orders voluntarily agreed upon by member churches. They may indeed serve a good purpose, especially in cultivating and maintaining a godly fellowship of faith, safeguarding pure teaching, training faithful and able clergy, pooling resources in educational and mission pursuits, and many other salutary programs. However, Holy Scripture nowhere indicates a mandate of God for the creation of such organizations, or such super-churches, nor does He dictate or indicate a particular form of polity or government or structure or nomenclature. Thus while such groupings into larger church entities may under the exercise of Christian freedom provide efficient structures for doing church work, there is no divine command that they must exist, nor that a congregation must be affiliated with them. . .

The congregation is complete in itself, as Scripture teaches; for it is the gathering of believers around the word, under a qualified pastor who it has called in accord with the will of God, for the sake of ministering the Word in all its fullness to those in its care. In fulfilling its God-given ministry, the congregation is sovereign; it does not derive its authority nor its task from a larger church organization, but from Christ directly.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry: the role of church, pastor, and people from Luther to Walther* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1993), 70-71. Concerning Dr. Klug, Dr. David Scaer writes, “Long time Concordia Theological Seminary professor . . . He was called in 1960 as professor of systematic theology and . . . for many years he was the chairman of the department and the faculty representative on the Commission on Theology and Church Relations . . . His numerous writings are a living memorial to him and his contribution to the synod. Articles on a wide range of subjects can be found in *Concordia*

Appendix 5: Jaroslav Pelikan on Luther's View of Unity and Succession in the Church

Jaroslav Pelikan (December 17, 1923 – May 13, 2006) joined Yale Divinity School in 1962 as a professor of Ecclesiastical History. He became emeritus professor at Yale in 1996. Pelikan wrote over 30 books on history and theology. He was the president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and founder of the Council of Scholars at the Library of Congress. He once clarified the difference between tradition and traditionalism by explaining that,

Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition.⁶⁸

For most of his life, Pelikan was an ordained Lutheran pastor. However, in 1998, he joined the Orthodox Church in America. In his book, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luthers' Reformation* (1964), he explained Luther's view on unity and succession in the church.

Against those who insist that liturgy follow the example of the fathers, Luther declared in the *Formula of the Mass* that this was impossible because in so many cases one could not know what the example of the fathers actually was. Many of the liturgical sources available to us today were

Theological Quarterly, *The Springfielder*, *the Lutheran Witness*, and other journals, domestic and foreign. He contributed to *Church and State Under God* (1965), *Anden Og Kirken (Spirit and the Churches*, 1973), *Von der wahren Einheit der Kirche (On the True Unity of the Church*, 1973), *Theology of the Formula of Concord* (1978), *Church and State Under God* (1964), and *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (1978). Among his books of which he is the sole author are *Church and Ministry and the role of Pastor and People: From Luther to Walther; From Luther to Chemnitz, on Scripture and the Word; Lift High the Cross; Lord I've Been Thinking The Military Chaplaincy under the 1st Amendment* (1967), *Getting into the Formula of Concord* (1977), *Word and Scripture in Luther Studies since World War II* (1985), and *Church and Ministry*: In addition, he was the translator of Luther's sermons, *The House Postils* (Baker Books, 1996).” David Scaer, “Eugene F. A. Klug.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* vol. 67: 3/4 (2003), 195-196.

⁶⁸ Joseph Carey, "Christianity as an enfolding circle: A Conversation with Jaroslav Pelikan", *U.S. News & World Report*, (June 26, 1989), 106 (25), p. 57.

unknown to the Reformers, and there are many parts of liturgical history about which we are still as ignorant as they were. Liturgical uniformity was therefore impossible, and it had never existed anyway.

But even if this were so, Luther was prepared to argue that liturgy was not the locus of the church's continuity. ... He claimed to stand in the 'succession of the faithful' for he proclaimed the apostolic faith of the church; and the true continuity of the church with the apostles lay there. It was in the church's proclamation and confession of faith, rather than in the forms of its liturgical life, that Luther found the continuity of the people of God, a continuity older than Christianity, because the faith of the patriarchs and the faith of the church were essentially the same.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Jaroslav, Pelikan. *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 99-100.

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