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What can Synod Do in Order that there Be More Uniformity in the Externals of Our Public Services?

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found valuable guides and helps, although they are entirely sectarian in their approaches. It would surely be a desirable and worthy thing if we could have a book in this same field, written with a truly Lutheran background.

The above approaches to the problem of Bible-study are only a few chosen out of an almost endless variety. The devoted pastor, in his earnest desire to reach out and bring the blessed Word close to the hearts of every member of his flock, will surely find many more ways that will meet the needs of his individual group even more closely and more thoroughly than those presented in such a brief form and condensed manner in this place. The leaders of our young people in particular will search for ever more attractive ways of presenting the precious, inspired Word to the hearts of those groups committed to their charge. Truly, no effort on our part can be too great in order that these young people may be developed into consciously redeemed moral agents and interested searchers for the way of life in the Book of God. The contributions which are made in this field for the broadening of the vision of our young people on the basis of the Word of God and its view of the world and our place in it are among the most lasting and surely the most worthy which it is given to poor sinful man to make for the kingdom of God and our blessed Savior.

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What can Synod Do in Order that There Be More Uniformity in the Externals of Our Public Service?

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Not only has the lack of uniformity been lamented for the past fifty years, especially since the majority of our congregations have regular English services, but of late, through the revival of the study of liturgics in every section of the Christian Church, there have appeared definite symptoms which seem to indicate that just when we were about to be led out of the wilderness of liturgical confusion, we are to be led back into a new liturgical chaos.

We propose to set forth four principles:

1. Liturgy belongs to the realm of adiaphora.
2. Changes in liturgy may cease to be adiaphora.
3. Uniformity in liturgy is most desirable.
4. When changes in liturgy are introduced, these should be made a) without thoughtlessness, b) without offense.

1. Ceremonies and Liturgy Belong to the Field of Adiaphora

The Augsburg Confession, Art. VII, says that uniformity in ceremonies is not necessary to ecclesiastical unity: "Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike."

Formula of Concord, *Epitome*, Art. X, § 2: "We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God in every place and every time has the power, according to circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God."

Formula of Concord, *Solida Declaratio*, Art. X, § 9: "We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the good right, power, and authority [in matters truly adiaphora] to change, to diminish, and to increase them [*i. e.*, ceremonies], without thoughtlessness and offense, in an orderly and becoming way."

Formula of Concord, *Epitome*, Art. X, § 5: "We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine."

And Luther, in his *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gottesdienstes*, wrote in 1526: "Above all things do I want to request all those in a very friendly manner, also for God's sake, who see this order in the services or care to follow it that they do not make a necessary law of it and thereby ensnare or entrap any one's conscience, but to use it according to their Christian liberty and good pleasure how, where, when, and as long as, the occasion may offer or require it." (Vol. X, col. 226.)

2. Changes in the Liturgy may Cease to Be a Matter of Indifference

Formula of Concord, *Solida Declaratio*, Art. X, § 10: "We believe, teach, and confess also that at the time of confession [when a confession of heavenly truth is required], when the enemies of God's Word desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel, the entire congregation of God, yea, every Christian, but especially ministers of the Word, as the leaders of the congregation of God, are bound by God's Word to confess freely and openly the [godly] doctrine . . . and that then, in this case, even in such [things truly and of themselves] adiaphora, *they must not yield to the adversaries* or permit these [adiaphora] to be forced upon them by their enemies." In the days of Paul the Apostle circumcision had become an adiaphoron, which at other occasions was observed by Paul; yet when the false teachers urged circumcision, claiming that it was necessary unto righteousness, Paul refused to yield. He

wrote Gal. 5: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free."

Formula of Concord, *Solida Declaratio*, Art. X, §§ 28. 29: "We reject and condemn also as wrong the opinion of those who hold that at a time of persecution we may comply with the enemies of the holy Gospel in [restoring] such adiaphora or come to an agreement with them. We likewise regard it as a sin that deserves to be rebuked when in time of persecution anything is done either in indifferent matters or in doctrine, and in what otherwise pertains to religion, for the sake of the enemies of the Gospel, in word or act, contrary and opposed to the Christian confession."

Certain rites and ceremonies may through usage have become the symbol of a definite doctrine. We speak of *Bekenntniszeremonien*, and rightly so. To baptize by immersion instead of by sprinkling certainly is an adiaphoron; to break the bread in the Holy Communion, to ask the communicant to take the cup and place it to his lips instead of the celebrant's placing the cup to his lips; to use the *Spendeformel:* "Take, eat; this is the true body, this is the true blood," etc., or to say: "Christ says: 'Take, eat,' etc., 'drink ye all of it,'" these are matters of indifference. But there have been occasions when the omitting of certain rites or the introduction of new ones would cease to be an adiaphoron.

3. Uniformity in Liturgy Is Most Desirable

In the Synodical Report of the Wisconsin District, 1910, p. 24, we read: "Wenn auch jede Gemeinde Recht und Befugnis hat, ihre eigene Weise und Form des Gottesdienstes zu haben, so wird doch viel dafuer sprechen, dass Gemeinden *eines* Bekenntnisses ihre Zusammengehoerigkeit durch moeglichst gleichfoermige Gottesdienstordnung zum Ausdruck bringen, trotzdem, wie unser Bekenntnis betont, Gleichfoermigkeit der Zeremonien nicht zur wahren Einigkeit noetig ist."

Nicolaus Hausmann appealed to Luther in 1526 to compile a liturgy to be used in all the churches. Luther answered that he was too busy, but wrote: "Wollte doch Gott, dass Du eine Form entwuerfest und an mich schicktest!" These words certainly show that Luther saw the great need of uniformity in liturgy; for he says: "Wollte doch Gott!"

Yes, it is true, every congregation has authority to have its own form of service. Yet we believe that the words of Paul, which apply to every individual Christian, certainly apply also to every Christian congregation: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient," 1 Cor. 6, 12. Certainly no individual congregation would set aside usages, customs, or portions of the liturgy long established and replace them with new customs, rites,

and ceremonies, entirely irrespective of, and without consideration of, its sister congregations. Uniformity is most desirable in order that, to quote Luther again, Vol. X, 261, "the unity of the Christian people may be affirmed also by such externals as are not necessary in themselves." He maintains that by lack of uniformity "people are perplexed and displeased." Indeed, in view of the liturgical confusion in his day Luther was bold enough to write as follows: "Wherever it happens that people become offended or perplexed by such a manifold usage, we are *certainly in duty bound* [note these words] to limit our liberty and as much as possible to do all we can that the people may be bettered by us and not offended. Since these external orders are of no consequence to our conscience before God and yet may be of benefit to our neighbor, we should charitably endeavor, as St. Paul teaches, to be of one mind and, as well as this can be done, have similar rites and ceremonies." (Vol. X, 226.)

And precise as our confessions are in defending the right of the congregation to have its own liturgy, they are nevertheless outspoken on the other point, the desirability of uniformity, saying: "It is pleasing to us that for the sake of unity and order universal rites are observed." Many a story might be here related how the lack of uniformity has disturbed Christians and how today in many a congregation there are liturgical monstrosities which grate on one's nerves and certainly contribute nothing to the edifying of the worshipers. It seems to us that it is high time that everywhere everybody and especially the pastors earnestly strive for, and work towards, a uniform liturgy. By the same token alterations in, omissions of, and additions to, the liturgy should be considered most carefully, and unless convincing reasons dictate and demand a change, they ought not to be made.

We now come to the final principle:

4. Changes in Liturgy Should be Made a) without Thoughtlessness (absque Levitate, ohne Leichtfertigkeit); b) without Offense (absque Scandalo, ohne Aergernis)

(Cf. F. C., Art. X, § 9)

It may well be asked whether those who have held that it is the right and privilege of congregations to make changes in the liturgy and have quoted the Lutheran Confessions in support of their position have not read the Confessions a bit hastily or have overlooked certain statements. Explicit as the Confessions are in safeguarding the right of the Christian congregation, they are just as explicit in limiting that right, and they mention most emphatically the bounds within which it should be done. Let us read just one such statement: *"Therefore, we believe, teach, and confess that*

the 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*"; but now come these significant words, which plainly set a limitation: "*Without thoughtlessness and offense, in an orderly and becoming way, as at any time it may be regarded most profitable, most beneficial, and best for* [*preserving*] *good order, Christian discipline, and the edification of the Church*"; in the German translation: "*dieselben ohne Leichtfertigkeit und Aergernis ordentlicher- und gebuehrlicherweise zu mindern und zu mehren*"; in the Latin: "*si tamen id absque levitate et scandalo decenter et bono ordine fiat.*" (Formula of Concord, *Sol. Decl.*, Art. X, § 9.) Have not these significant words at times been overlooked? Must these words not induce a pastor and his congregation to hesitate and to deliberate before a change in the liturgy of any importance at all is introduced?

When would a congregation violate the principle here enunciated, "without thoughtlessness"? When by such changes the doctrines of the Church are in no way given a clearer expression, when by such changes concessions are made to error, or when the impression is created that these changes are merely being made because such a congregation had sacrificed a definite doctrine and yet the changes are introduced, then it is done thoughtlessly.

When does a congregation considering the introduction of changes in the externals of its worship do it "*without offense*"? When all Christians, even those weak in faith or in Christian knowledge, while they are not convinced that the proposed changes are for the edification of the Church, yet see no harm in them; when by such changes no one within the congregation is induced to have suspicions regarding its doctrinal stand. As long as even the slightest danger exists of offending a brother, such changes should not be introduced; for in the same paragraph (9), Art. X, we read: "*Moreover, how we can yield and give way with a good conscience to the weak in faith in such external adiaphora Paul teaches* Rom. 14 and proves it by his example, Acts 16, 3; 21, 26; 1 Cor. 9, 19." These words seem to us to be a plea for caution and consideration even though many convincing reasons would seem to make changes desirable.

Let us make the application: The Formula of Concord certainly permits, even encourages, pastors and congregations to acquaint themselves with the rites, customs, and liturgies that have been in use in the Christian Church during the past centuries. It commends the efforts of those within our Synodical Conference who have made it a hobby to delve into the field of liturgics, in the hope that much that is good in the field of liturgics, but is now dis-

carded or out of use might be resurrected and eventually adopted by our congregations for the edification of the Church, that is, for a better expression of the Church's doctrines and confessions. But it does not commend, no, it passes judgment upon, those who, when convinced in their own minds that such customs and rites, fallen into disuse, are an improvement, adopt them forthwith. Granting, for the sake of argument, that the familiar pulpit gown worn by 90 per cent. of our pastors is not even Lutheran, but Genevan; granting that the Gregorian chants were those used by the Church for centuries; granting that Luther wore the cassock, surplice, stole; granting that it is typically Lutheran to elevate the host, to break it, to self-commune; granting that celebrating the Holy Communion under the setting, custom, and rites of the ancient Church contributes to a greater solemnity and a higher regard for the Lord's Sacrament; yet when these customs, rites, and ceremonies, while strictly churchly and Lutheran, have not been in use in our Church for nearly a hundred years, are introduced, it is violating the spirit and the letter of our Confessions. In CONCORDIA THEOL. MONTHLY Dr. Fuerbringer wrote in 1934 a series of articles on *"Die rechte Mitte in der Liturgie und Ordnung des Gottesdienstes,"* which deserves being read by every Lutheran pastor. On page 424 he says, in speaking of vestments: "Nachdem diese Gewaender meistens gefallen sind und die lutherische Kirche Amerikas jahrhundertelang ohne sie bestanden hat, waehrend andererseits die roemische Kirche ihr Gepraenge und ihren Missbrauch damit fortsetzt, wird man es sich wohl ueberlegen, ehe man die hergebrachte Amtskleidung ablegt und durch eine andere ersetzt und dabei Gefahr laeuft, die Aufmerksamkeit auf etwas Aeusserliches zu lenken. Und wenn man bedenkt, was insonderheit die Casula fuer eine Bedeutung in der roemischen Kirche hat, wird *gesunde* [note that word] lutherische Ueberzeugung jeden abhalten, sie wieder einzufuehren."

And now we venture also to give an answer to the question: Can Synod not do something in order that there be greater uniformity also in the externals of worship? Our answer is: Yes, it can. It *can* encourage the study of liturgics. It *can* appoint a committee which shall acquaint itself with every phase of liturgics, past and present, with instructions to submit its findings to Synod and through Synod to every congregation for adoption. It can, through its officials, in public and in private, remind pastors and congregations how desirable uniformity in the externals of worship is and that therefore changes in the liturgy should not be made thoughtlessly and without giving consideration to other congregations. It can through its Visitors approach individual pastors who either have made, or are considering, such changes which amount to a

radical departure from those now generally in use and read to them § 9 of Article X from the Formula of Concord; it can resolve that every District President instruct his respective Visitors to impress upon every pastor the second and third questions of the ordination vow, which read: "Dost thou hold and profess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as laid down in the Book of Concord of 1580 to be the true doctrine of the Holy Scriptures?" to which the answer was given: "I do so hold and profess."

"Art thou determined to discharge faithfully the duties of the holy ministry in this congregation in full accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the said Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church?" Answer: "I have so determined by the grace of God."

More than this Synod *cannot* do. Less it *ought* not to do.

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Sermon Study on Heb. 12, 18—24

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity — Eisenach Selections

In keeping with the general purpose of this letter the author exhorts his readers to remain steadfast in spite of all temptations to disloyalty and apostasy and to strive after patience, brotherly love, and holiness lest like Esau they sell their birthright, only to rue it too late, chap. 12, 1—17. For the New Testament covenant into which they have entered far exceeds in excellency the Old Testament covenant, vv. 18—24. If, therefore, they reject this covenant, they shall repent too late on the day when the New Testament kingdom alone remains, while all other things, those things which they preferred to the immovable kingdom, shall be removed finally and forever, vv. 25—29. Hence our text, though thoroughly didactic, serves a very practical purpose. This practical viewpoint shall determine our treatment of this beautiful passage.

Vv. 18. 19. Very vividly the author describes the unique manifestation of God's majestic holiness on Mount Sinai. So thoroughly is his mind imbued with the phraseology of the Pentateuch that he reproduces the very words which Moses uses in his various records of this awesome scene, Ex. 19; Deut. 4, 10—13; 5, 4—27. Moses had been told to sanctify the people, so that they would be ready to meet the Lord on the third day. In the early morning of that day the manifestation of God's majesty began, Ex. 19, 16. That was the signal that Israel was to appear before God, Ex. 19, 13. Hence we read: Ex. 19, 17—19; Deut. 4, 11—13. Coming out of the camp into the open, Israel saw Mount Sinai towering before them, the whole mountain burning with fire, the flames shooting up to the very heart of heaven, Deut. 4, 11 (marginal reading). And