

QUESTIONS IN LUTHERAN THEOLOGY AND CHURCH

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Christian Worship

Apology of The Unchanging Forms of the Gospel



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1. The Word of God, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Preaching Office as the Unchanging, Simple and Humble Forms of the Gospel

The Unchanging, Simple and Humble Forms of the Gospel as Criteria for Content and Form of Human Ceremonies

As we understand the argument of the Council of Presidents (CP), it is the goal of the *Theses* to halt indiscriminate changes in the orders of worship of member congregations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to promote peace and harmony within the synod. For this purpose the CP provides specific criteria under theses I, III, and V.¹ As we repeatedly stated in *The Unchanging Forms of the Gospel* (TUFOTG), the criteria provided there are not incorrect, erroneous or false. However, we maintain that these criteria do not say everything that can and must be said when the question is raised as to the theology of worship found in the Lutheran Confessions.

This is why we, based on SD X, 1 and other texts, introduced the term “the unchanging forms of the gospel,” i.e., the means of grace and the office of the means of grace in their respective forms established by Jesus Christ himself. The original *Theses*, in fact, provided the idea for the terminology reflected in the title of TUFOTG in that they, in theses II and II.A, spoke of those “forms, rites, and ceremonies” which “aid worship” or are “for worship.”² Yet while the *Theses* denied that the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions prescribe any such “forms, rites, and ceremonies,” we – based on texts such as SD X, 1 – found this not to be true. Consequently, the realization of the fact that the gospel itself comes in concrete, discernible external forms allowed us to use that form itself, in addition to the content of the gospel, as a crucial criterion for determining whether a given man-made form *conforms* to the gospel or not.

This procedure too was not our idea. In doing so we simply followed the example of Luther who not only called the Lord's Supper an evangelical “rite” commanded by Christ himself but also evaluated the

¹ These theses read:

I. Worship is not an adiaphoron.

- A. Worship is commanded by God.
- B. The highest form of worship is faith.
- C. Worship is Trinitarian, and centered on Jesus Christ.
- D. The means by which faith is created and nurtured are essential to worship.

III. The liturgy of the Church builds a framework for the worshiper to live the life of faith.

- A. Liturgy of the Church teaches the full counsel of God.
- B. The elements of liturgy, (ordo), tell the full story of salvation.
- C. The liturgy of the Church moves worshipers into the world to live for and to proclaim the Good News to others.

V. Great care is necessary in choosing forms, rites and ceremonies because they either support or hinder true worship. There are no ‘neutral’ forms.

- A. Forms of true worship are in accord with the Word of God.
- B. Forms of true worship help to preserve order.
- C. Forms of true worship do not burden the consciences of the people of God.
- D. Forms of true worship are edifying to the local congregation and therefore also to the surrounding community.
- E. Forms of true worship teach the faith.”

² **“II. The Scriptures and Confessions give the people of God considerable freedom in choosing those forms, rites, and ceremonies that aid the worship of God.**

- A. Neither the Scriptures nor the Confessions prescribe forms, rites or ceremonies for worship.”

appropriateness of later humanly devised components of the worship service by whether they conformed to this humble rite of the gospel in form and content or not (cf. AE 53:20-21, quoted on p. 49-50 of TUFOTG, but also AE 36:106-108).

While these texts will be discussed in greater detail below, we just wish to offer a brief quote from Luther's first genuinely "Lutheran" treatise on the Lord's Supper. In 1520, he wrote in the introductory paragraphs of his *Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass* (AE 35:81):

When Christ himself first instituted this sacrament and held the first mass, there was no tonsure, no chasuble, no singing, no pageantry, but only thanksgiving to God and the use of the sacrament. According to this same simplicity the apostles and all Christians for a long time held mass, until there arose the various forms and additions, by which the Romans held mass one way, the Greeks another. And now it has finally come to this: the chief thing in the mass has been forgotten, and nothing is remembered except the additions of men!

Now the nearer our masses are to the first mass of Christ, the better they undoubtedly are; and the further from Christ's mass, the more dangerous. ... Although I neither wish nor am able to displace or discard such additions, still, because such pompous forms are perilous, we must never permit ourselves to be led away by them from the simple institution of Christ and from the right use of the mass.

Luther's observations here and elsewhere can be summarized at this point simply by stating that since Christ established the Lord's Supper as a simple, humble "rite" for the distribution of the salvation he would earn on the cross, where his state of humility reached its apex, those additional "forms, rites, and ceremonies" that conform to its character as a *humble* form of the *gospel* are appropriate for the Christian worship service.

The Deficiency of the Theses: Forms without Practical Consequences

As was just stated, we found thesis II.A not to be accurate: "[n]either the Scriptures nor the Confessions prescribe forms, rites or ceremonies for worship." For the Lutheran Confessions do indeed assert that the forms, rites, and ceremonies of the means of grace are prescribed by Scripture. Already the definition of sacraments provided in Ap. XIII, 3 (and quoted on p. 24 of TUFOTG) makes this abundantly clear: "*rites which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added.*"

This being the case, what other conclusion was there left for us to draw except that, according to the *Theses*, the gospel does *not* have an unchanging external form that could serve as a norm and judge for other things going on in a Christian worship service? Some might assert here that, as asserted in thesis I.D, word and sacraments are essential for faith (i.e., "true worship") and therefore for the worship service.³ This does not refute our conclusion. Others might concede that the means of grace are indeed "forms." While the latter concession actually disproves what was asserted in thesis II, both counterarguments are of little use when no practical conclusions are then drawn out of this admission for the humanly added ceremonies.

The Alternative of TUFOTG: Humble Human Ceremonies Conform to Humble Means of Grace

We, on the other hand, are able to draw such conclusions. We do so specifically on p. 95-96 of TUFOTG. On p. 95 we wrote, "For the service to be truly Trinitarian and centered in Jesus Christ, it is necessary that [the gospel's unchanging] *ceremonies in particular*, not just 'God's Word' *in general*, inform everything else, from the NT's humanly added ceremonies of corporate and private worship to the good works done in daily life. In each case, albeit in different ways, *humble* creatures are exalted to such majesty that they are the cooperators of God in serving fellow creatures..." (emphases added).

In other words, where do the *Theses* address humility as an important essential criterion of humanly added ceremonies in the corporate worship service? Is humility itself not a criterion that is not only directly derived from the divinely established external form of the means of grace - in fact, from the humble servant form of our Lord Christ during his earthly ministry culminating on the cross (cf. 1 Cor. 1-

³ This sub-thesis reads as follows: "The means by which faith is created and nurtured are essential to worship."

4; Phil. 2) – but also that which might also put a stop to certain worship practices introduced by some today?

And here we are deliberately not just thinking of the “contemporary” side of the issue. Do we not find attempts to “dazzle” (unbelieving) visitors into returning to a given congregation in various worship styles by adopting practices expressly designed to play to the religious side of natural man and his peculiar acquired tastes? The high tech devices and theatric effects of the ones seem to function in the same way as the processional crosses, incense, ornate chasubles, and gold plated Bibles of the others. As symbols, they work in the same way as common advertisements do: They attract the uninitiated precisely because they do not require the discernment that comes with being knowledgeable about the “product” being advertized. Instead, both smoke machines and incense can represent an existing “brand” that promises a certain lifestyle and culture to which even unregenerate man can relate – depending on whether he is open either to popular or high culture, depending on whether he is attuned to youth culture and its styles or to the “oldies but goodies” of yesteryear.

However, by Christ’s institution, the humble forms of the gospel do not dazzle or attract natural man. They do not sugarcoat or gold-plate the Crucified whose *spiritual* merits they disburse. They are not an advertizing gimmick. As forms of the word of the cross, they offend unbelievers regardless of their tastes due to their foolish humility and unappealing weakness. Should the human ceremonies we add to those of the gospel not be of the same character, lest they mislead people from trusting in God’s action into relying on their own actions (cf. 1 Cor. 2:3-5)?

Christ’s Foot Washing Indicative of the Humble Nature of Christian Worship

It is as if to offer another clear and practical explanation of the humble nature of Christian service in general and of the Christian worship service in particular that on the same night when Christ instituted the simple rite of the Lord’s Supper, the Lord also humbled himself once more to wash the feet of his disciples as their slave, according to the traditional Western gospel lesson for Maundy Thursday, John 13:1-15. This was expressly designated by Christ as an example for the Christians’ humble service to each other in love (cf. John 13:15, 34-35, see also 1 Tim. 5:10).

Interesting is also the fact that Christ links this humble feet washing to the fact that, while the disciples had bathed, they still needed cleansing (v. 10). Along with Luther, we take this as a reference to the ongoing *and humbling* need of the baptized to have their sins forgiven daily by Christ’s humble service in the humble forms of the means of grace (cf. AE 32:157-159, see also LC II, 54-55 quoted in TUFOTG, p. 51, 73-74).

To be sure, Luther criticized the liturgical realizations of this example in his age, e.g., the pope washing the feet of twelve poor men (in the Catholic Church, this practice is continued to this day by every priest celebrating the “Mass of the Lord’s Supper” on Maundy Thursday). However, Luther’s criticism did not aim at the humility of serving each other expressed by Christ’s example. He merely viewed it as a sham because, due to the works righteousness that had usurped the center of the teaching and belief in the church at the time, even this humble act had become a hidden source of spiritual pride (cf. AE 7:336-337).

As far as Luther was concerned, he did not include a reformed version of this ceremony into the reformed worship service. Instead of attempting to revive this now “antiquated” ceremony with “great difficulty” (ibid.), he distinguished what was actually instituted by Christ for use until the end of this age (the unchanging ceremonies of the Lord’s Supper) from what had been added to it by men (the foot washing). While this addition once fittingly expressed the humble character of Christ’s and the Christians’ service and love, by Luther’s time it had become corrupted by works righteousness. Consequently, he pointed the Christian to the Ten Commandments as source and norm for their daily humble service to their neighbor in their vocations. In other words, humility is not discarded, but restored to its originally intended form.

The Purpose of Humble Ceremonies: Delivering the Gospel to Terrified Sinners

Once one becomes aware of the fact that the gospel actually has a particular external form in the divinely established ceremonies of the means of grace, one asks: what is this form like? Once one realizes that this form is humble, simple, even weak in nature, one can ask: why did Christ institute such humble ceremonies that do not dazzle some hoped-for audience by sugarcoating, gold-plating or otherwise beautifying the Crucified who had “no form or comeliness,” in whom there was “no beauty” that fallen man “should desire him” (cf. Is. 53:2)?

A number of answers can be given from the bible: There is, first of all, the humble nature of Christ’s life on earth. He, even though he is God by nature, only rarely displayed his divine powers. He took on a humble appearance in order to fulfill the mission given to him by the Father, namely, to die on the cross, which, without his self-humiliation, would have been impossible (cf. John 10:17-18; Phil. 2:6-8). Due to the utter humility of his death, the Lord of glory went unrecognized by those who are wise and religious according to the standards of the sinful world (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7-8).

Then there is the deliberately foolish and lowly nature of the word of the cross, which was chosen by God to destroy the hubris of man’s fallen wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-21) and thus save man, not by the utter exertion of man’s human powers as in all the world’s religions, but by God’s divine powers at work in weak created forms. For God’s “strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). As Paul demonstrates in his own life, this is true not just for the “message” but also for the messengers. They too share in Christ’s bodily weakness and spiritual strength. In fact, this is true of the entire Christian church, which is why Luther counted suffering and the cross among the seven key marks of Christ’s holy people on earth (cf. AE 41:164-165).

While this is the destructive, law-purpose of such humble ceremonies, there is also a clear edifying, gospel-purpose of such lowly ceremonies. This purpose such ceremonies also have in common with the gentle, lowly form that Christ assumed during his earthly ministry. For he was humble not only to be able to reach his goal in life, namely, death on the cross. He was humble also so that he might be able to communicate by his word the benefits of that death to sinners terrified by the law without scaring them away by a show of his full divine glory and power (cf. Matth. 11:25-30). For Christ came to save and heal only such sinners, not those who in their sinful blindness considered themselves not to be in need of his services as Savior and Physician (cf. Matth. 9:10-13).

If this was Christ’s chief purpose during his earthly ministry, it continues to be his ultimate purpose to the end of this world, to save sinners already terrified by the law. This is why he instituted the kinds of means of grace he did. Lest we give Christ the false appearance of a new majestic lawgiver who associates with Pharisees, hypocrites, and other religiously arrogant, while casting troubled sinners into hell, we need to heed these insights when it comes to the specific external form of the gospel in particular and of our worship services and churches in general.

It was Luther who had this to say about the humble, gentle forms of the gospel instituted by Christ for weak and terrified sinners (AE 41:171):

Therefore the *ecclesia*, “the holy Christian people,” does not have mere external words, sacraments, or offices, like God’s ape Satan has, and in far greater numbers, but it has these as *commanded, instituted, and ordained by God, so that he himself and not any angel will work through them with the Holy Spirit*. They are called word, baptism, sacrament, and office of forgiveness, not of angels, men, or any other creature, but of God; *only he does not choose to do it through his unveiled, brilliant, and glorious majesty, out of consideration for us poor, weak, and timid mortals and for our comfort, for who could bear such majesty for an instant in this poor and sinful flesh?* As Moses says, “Man shall not see me and live” [Exod. 33:20]. If the Jews could not endure even the shoes of his feet on Mount Sinai, that is, the thunder and the clouds, how could they, with their feeble eyes, have endured the sight of the sun of his divine majesty and the clear light of his countenance? *No, he wants to work through tolerable, kind, and pleasant means, which we ourselves could not have chosen better. He has, for instance, a godly and kind man speak to us, preach, lay his hands on us, remit sin, baptize, give us bread and wine to eat and to drink. Who can be terrified by these pleasing methods, and wouldn’t rather delight in them with all his heart?*

Well then, that is just what is done for us feeble human beings, and in it we see how God deals with us as with beloved children and not, as he surely would have a right to, in his majesty. And yet, in this guise he

performs his majestic, divine works and exercises his might and power, such as forgiving sin, cleansing from sin, removing death, bestowing grace and eternal life.

If this is, then, indeed how God chose to announce his gospel among men, veiling his consuming majesty and power in the humble, weak external forms, rites, and ceremonies of the means of grace, should not all the other ceremonies of the worship service, in fact, our whole lives as Christians, be of that very form and nature? Lest we fall into some liturgical theology of glory that points sinners to God's majesty instead of his veils, we believe we have to be consistent when it comes to form, not just when it comes to content.

Insufficiency of Stating that Ceremonies Be in Agreement with God's Word

A possible reply to this criticism regarding the absence of humility in the *Theses* might be: "The *Theses* stated that those ceremonies must be in agreement with God's Word. In that God's Word demands humility, they say exactly what you are saying. Should Lutherans not know that?"

We answer: In that God's word says everything necessary for our salvation, what need is there to write more than this *one* thesis on worship: "Christian worship takes place according to God's Word"? Can't we just "assume" that Lutherans somehow know the details? In other words, God's Word says it all, and the Holy Spirit says it all much better than we ever could. However, the point of writing theses is precisely to point out those passages of God's Word that their author deems particularly helpful on a given issue.

The Major Objection to the Theses Restated

It would be wrong to think that the objection of TUFOTG to the *Theses* was that the *Theses* do not require the unchanging forms of Word and Sacrament. We did recognize that the *Theses* required word and sacraments to be an essential part of the service (that is, after all clearly stated in thesis I.D., which TUFOTG reprinted on p. 23).⁴

The issue that we sought to address under Shortcoming 1⁵ was that we, as has been pointed out, noticed that the *Theses* did not give any weight and consideration to the fact so clearly stated in the Lutheran Confessions, namely, that the means of grace themselves exist only in specific "forms, rites, and ceremonies." In other words – and this we considered to be "the principal flaw" of the theses – we missed a clear and explicit distinction between these ceremonies of the gospel, where no freedom exists, and other ceremonies where, in fact, such freedom does exist (cf. TUFOTG, p. 52, para. 3.2).

The Pastoral Ministry as a Form Established by Christ to Serve the Gospel in Public Worship

So far, we have only discussed the means of grace and their divinely established form. However, TUFOTG goes beyond this because the Lutheran Confessions go beyond this when it comes to discussing the concrete divinely established elements of the Christian worship service. At some length we discussed therefore the pastoral ministry and the concrete form given to it by Christ's institution, based on the text supplied by the *Theses*, Rom. 10:17 (p. 26-34).

Certainly, when speaking about the means of grace in the worship service, we ought to say something about the office established by Christ himself specifically also for the purpose of administering the means of grace in public worship. Luther, for one, went so far as to count the ordained ministry among the marks of the church (cf. AE 41:154, quoted in TUFOTG, p. 29). However, the *Theses* do not address this

⁴ The sub-thesis referred to reads as follows: "The means by which faith is created and nurtured are essential to worship."

⁵ "The *Eight Theses* imply that the means of grace, the Word of God and the sacraments, do not have specific unchangeable forms, rites, or ceremonies instituted by Christ himself, but simply ought to be present in worship in changeable humanly established form, rites, and ceremonies." TUFOTG, p. 20.

important issue—even though it would have helped shed some light on what some might assert is “ambiguous” in the Confessions, which we will address briefly in section 4 below.

In defense of the *Theses*, one might adduce their character as a “discussion starter” that cannot say everything that eventually needs to be said. True enough. And since the topic of the assignment given by the Council of Presidents was “worship,” not “church and ministry,” the *Theses* stuck with that assignment. Also true. On the other hand, we have been talking about worship and “worship wars” for a couple of decades now. The *Theses* are certainly not the first foray into this important field. Even “discussion starters” should be a bit more comprehensive by now.

This is why the observation made in footnote 7 of TUFOTG still rings true to us: “One sees here how the important doctrines of the means of grace, worship, church, and the ministry are all closely interconnected. It is no accident that today, as in the 16th century, there are serious conflicts in all four areas.” One only needs to think of the ongoing disunity caused by “closed” vs. “open” communion or “lay ministry” here.

The Ceremonies of the NT Means of Grace as the NT Era’s “Ceremonial Law”

We were somewhat surprised by the fact that one of the responses to TUFOTG did not object to the use of the term “ceremonial law” for the divinely established, unchanging ceremonies of the NT means of grace (cf. TUFOTG, p. 41). That same response, however, suspected “idolatry” and “legalism” in connection with TUFOTG’s use of the term “fences” that will be revisited below. Indeed, as demonstrated in the Lutheran Confessions, the existence of a ceremonial law in the OT era in itself did not necessarily mean legalism. It was first a perverted, pagan opinion about observing ceremonies that turned the observance of ceremonies into a good work meant to merit God’s favor.

This is why the OT prophets called the Israelites to repentance and faith in the gospel. When the prophets stated that God did not want the Israelites sacrifices, they did not mean to abrogate the ceremonial laws that God himself had indeed given to Israel through Moses. They merely spoke against the wrong, legalistic and idolatrous intention out of which these ceremonies were observed (cf. Ap. IV, 206-209; XXIV, 28-29).

Given this basic approach, it is not surprising that Luther regarded Christ’s institution of the Lord’s Supper (“the holy mass”) as the establishment of a new ceremonial law for the NT church. He wrote (AE 35:80-81):

Christ, in order to prepare for himself an acceptable and beloved people, which should be bound together in unity through love, abolished the whole law of Moses. *And that he might not give further occasion for divisions and sects, he appointed in return but one law or order for his entire people, and that was the holy mass. ... Henceforth, therefore, there is to be no other external order for the service of God except the mass. And where the mass is used, there is true worship; even though there be no other form, with singing, organ playing, bell ringing, vestments, ornaments, and gestures. For everything of this sort is an addition invented by men.*

Here we again see a clear distinction between the divinely established (and hence unchanging) forms of the gospel, especially the Lord’s Supper, and the other, adiaphorous forms “invented by men.” In spite of this distinction, Luther did not urge the general abrogation of these added human ceremonies. He did, however, urge caution, as the traditional “pompous forms,” pleasing to the senses as they were, had a tendency of distracting Christians from the simple words of Christ’s institution (cf. AE 35:82 quoted above). As Luther in the coming years would move to the actual reform of the traditional orders of service, this caution led him gradually to call for, and implement, simple forms of worship in keeping with the simple institution of Christ’s Supper. More will be said about this below.

We also see that, after the abrogation of the Mosaic law by Christ, the “one law or order” for Christ’s NT people would be the divinely instituted ceremonies of the Lord’s Supper. As Luther taught according to 1 Cor. 11:26, these ceremonies included preaching the gospel, which he considered to be nothing “but an explanation of this testament” of Christ opened in the sacrament of the altar (cf. AE 35:87, 105-106). It alone is essential for the worship of the New Testament because it alone creates and sustains saving faith in Christ.

The Nature and Purpose of the Lutheran Confessions: Just Anti-Catholic?

Finally, it is important in this section to respond to the way some assess the Lutheran Confessions in general, saying that they are nothing but a response to the aberrations and oppressions of Rome. We were somewhat surprised by statements like these, but after reviewing which sections of the Confessions are referenced in the *Theses*, we found that this sentiment is actually reflected in the *Theses* themselves.

However, in that this assessment does not acknowledge that the Lutheran Confessions to some extent were also written against the aberrations of the “Sacramentarians” (cf. only the important article seven and eight of the Formula of Concord on the Lord’s Supper and the person of Christ, as well as Luther’s discussion of baptism in the Large Catechism), it cannot appreciate the defense there given specifically for the concrete divinely mandated ceremonies of the sacraments as such (cf. TUFOTG, p. 34-41). Moreover, in that this assessment does not acknowledge that these writings were also directed against antinomian tendencies within Lutheranism (cf. only article six of the Formula of Concord, but also the sheer length of Luther’s exposition of the Ten Commandments in the Large Catechism), it cannot appreciate the defense there given for the importance of sanctification and humble love in the Christian life. As we will demonstrate once again below, love plays a critically important part in this discussion on worship.

2. Some Things in Worship Are Adiaphora

Some respondents addressed the issue of adiaphora, explaining why the *Theses* began the way they did, and also how theses I and V are related.⁶ This issue of adiaphora was discussed on pp. 52-60 of TUFOTG where careful distinctions were introduced that are derived directly from the Lutheran Confessions (see esp. SD X, 1, quoted on p. 52).

The basic distinction between Christ's unchanging institution and man's changeable additions is also found in Luther, who wrote already in 1520 (AE 35:81):

When Christ himself first instituted this sacrament and held the first mass, there was no tonsure, no chasuble, no singing, no pageantry, but only thanksgiving to God and the use of the sacrament. According to this same simplicity the apostles and all Christians for a long time held mass, until there arose the various forms and additions, by which the Romans held mass one way, the Greeks another. ...

[I]ndeed, the greatest and most useful art is to know what really and essentially belongs to the mass, and what is added and foreign to it. For where there is no clear distinction, the eyes and the heart are easily misled by such sham into a false impression and delusion. Then what men have contrived is considered the mass; and what the mass [really] is, is never experienced, to say nothing of deriving benefit from it. Thus alas! it is happening in our times.

Even after re-reading the original *Theses* and examining the additional explanations provided by those addressing this point several times, we must say that, while we now see somewhat more clearly what was intended, we do not agree with the way chosen to accomplish this goal. Concretely, no confessional quotation was produced that supports the blanket opening assertion of the *Theses*: "worship is not an adiaphoron." While a similar quote, in awkward Latin, graces the title page of a liturgical journal with a German title published by LCMS clergy, we are just not convinced by it because the term is not used in the same way as it is used in the Lutheran Confessions.

While we wholeheartedly agree that all the elements of the worship service – both those of divine origin and those of human origin – have meaning and are therefore to be carefully considered, the Lutheran Confessions do call certain elements of the worship service explicitly adiaphora. Of course, by this they do not mean "anything goes," but they also do not mean that these elements are not adiaphora, as the Confessions define this term.

For adiaphorous ceremonies are defined in SD X, 1 as follows: "ceremonies and church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God but which have been introduced into the church with good intentions for the sake of good order and decorum or else to preserve Christian discipline." In

⁶ Once again, these two theses read as follows:

"I. Worship is not an adiaphoron.

- A. Worship is commanded by God.
- B. The highest form of worship is faith.
- C. Worship is Trinitarian, and centered on Jesus Christ.
- D. The means by which faith is created and nurtured are essential to worship.

V. Great care is necessary in choosing forms, rites and ceremonies because they either support or hinder true worship. There are no 'neutral' forms.

- A. Forms of true worship are in accord with the Word of God.
- B. Forms of true worship help to preserve order.
- C. Forms of true worship do not burden the consciences of the people of God.
- D. Forms of true worship are edifying to the local congregation and therefore also to the surrounding community.
- E. Forms of true worship teach the faith."

other words, adiaphora have a very clear and a very positive meaning. They are not simply “neutral,” as thesis V pointed out correctly. However, they still are neither commanded nor forbidden by God in the Bible. In that they are established by the church, they may be changed by the church.

To be sure, there might be those who claim that “worship is an adiaphoron,” but simply negating their wrong assertion does not result in a correct statement. What is more, of those who make this false claim, who would really disagree with what was asserted under thesis I?⁷ We venture to say: No one. What, therefore, is the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of that particular thesis?

⁷ The opening thesis reads, once more:

“I. Worship is not an adiaphoron.

- A. Worship is commanded by God.
- B. The highest form of worship is faith.
- C. Worship is Trinitarian, and centered on Jesus Christ.
- D. The means by which faith is created and nurtured are essential to worship.”

3. When Adiaphora Are no Longer Adiaphora

The “Sociopolitical” Function of Ceremonies as Identity and Boundary Markers

According to the Lutheran Confessions, there is what could be termed the “sociopolitical” function of ceremonies. The Confessions discuss this especially in their resolution of the “Adiaphoristic Controversy,” which is presented in the tenth article of the Formula of Concord. In TUFOTG, we discussed this chiefly under shortcomings 2⁸ and 4⁹: Based on the Confessions, what is always true of the *divinely established* ceremonies of the means of grace – namely, that they are the unchangeable identity and boundary markers of the Christian church (cf. only Ap. VII / VIII, 5) – is under certain conditions also true of the *humanly established* ceremonies that comprise the remainder of the service. They too can become identity and boundary markers of the true Christian church on earth.

Obviously, this is another reason as to why the humanly established ceremonies ought to be shaped in form and content according to the divinely established ceremonies of the means of grace. Otherwise, God’s and man’s boundaries will not coincide. A false impression of unity among churches with divergent confessions will be given, which, as the Lutheran Confessions clearly assert, is not just a sociological problem of “membership retention.”

Luther: Public Worship Is a Mark of the Church

Luther, interestingly, also counted public worship among the seven marks of the church (cf. AE 41:164). He includes in the pertinent paragraph the public teaching of the chief parts of the catechism, as if he wanted to reaffirm the point made in TUFOTG regarding the absence of catechesis outside public worship in the *Theses* (cf. p. 112-119).

Luther writes specifically (AE 41:164):

Sixth, the holy Christian people [is] externally recognized by prayer, public praise, and thanksgiving to God. Where you see and hear the Lord’s Prayer prayed and taught; or psalms or other spiritual songs sung, *in accordance with the word of God and the true faith*; also the creed, the Ten Commandments, and the catechism used in public, you may rest assured that a holy Christian people of God [is] present. For prayer, too, is one of the precious holy possessions whereby everything is sanctified, as St. Paul says [I Tim. 4:5]. The psalms too are nothing but prayers in which we praise, thank, and glorify God. The creed and the Ten Commandments are also God’s word and belong to the holy possession, whereby the Holy Spirit sanctifies the holy people of Christ. *However, we are now speaking of prayers and songs which are intelligible and from which we can learn and by means of which we can mend our ways.* The clamor of monks and nuns and priests is not prayer, nor is it praise to God; for they do not understand it, nor do they learn anything from it; they do it like a donkey, only for the sake of the belly and not at all in quest of any reform or sanctification or of the will of God.

As is stated here, Luther offers similar criteria to those found in the *Theses* when it comes to proper worship practices (“in accordance with the word of God and the true faith;” prayers and songs teach; etc.). However, it should be noted that this is just a brief and somewhat conventional summary of what

⁸ “Without specific, recognizable, and invariable divinely established forms, rites or ceremonies, the gospel in word and sacraments can neither function as the public mark of identification of the Church nor shape the humanly instituted rites of the worship service.” TUFOTG, p. 20.

⁹ “So without the distinction of necessary and unnecessary forms, rites and ceremonies, all forms, rites and ceremonies, *whether they be necessary, essential and mandated or unnecessary, non-essential, and free* are therefore, according to the *Eight Theses*, subject to “considerable freedom,” which can only foster the already existing misunderstandings in these matters.” *Ibid.*, p. 21.

he unfolds elsewhere in more detail, as demonstrated in TUFOTG. At any rate, our point here is this: “worship” – i.e., the amalgamation of humanly and divinely instituted forms, rites, and ceremonies – is given by Luther the rank of an outward marker of the true church on earth.

Theses Fail to Recognize this Function of Adiaphora

Given the importance some respondents give to getting the meaning of “adiaphora” right, the original *Theses* would have done a great service to the church had they spared a sub-thesis or two to harness for today’s discussions the main issue addressed in article ten of the Formula of Concord, which is precisely that inherently adiaphorous ceremonies do not merely “communicate” something in terms of “faith and love,” as some put it. Under certain circumstances, adiaphorous ceremonies also communicate something in terms of the identity and boundaries of the true visible church, which is what we discussed under shortcomings 2 and 4 on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions, especially FC X.

Considering how that article is quoted and used in the *Theses*, they do not even get close to this. Instead, *they carefully cut the pertinent sections of the article out of the quotations* (only see what is quoted under thesis II.A).¹⁰ To be sure, certain criteria are provided for what makes the individual elements of an order of service sound (normed by God’s word etc.). However, what we have been missing so far is the acknowledgement of the main thing at which FC X drives.

The Main Point of FC X in the Past and Today

One of the main points of FC X is that ceremonies that are in and of themselves adiaphorous may not be changed in order to create the appearance of theological agreement between various churches. One may not yield to superior political power even in an inherently “indifferent” matter.

Historically, the controversy was sparked by ceremonial compromises in the wake of the various interims in the 16th century between the sociopolitically more powerful Catholics and the weaker Lutherans (after the beginning of the council of Trent in 1545 and the defeat of the Smalcaldic League in 1547). What might this mean today, when Lutherans are again the social underdog in the widely Evangelicalized religious landscape of the United States (cf. TUFOTG, p. 120-127)? It appears to us that often Lutheran worship practices on the parish level are altered in order to fit in with the societally dominant religious group, which today is not Roman Catholicism but non-denominational Evangelicalism. (This is just another reason why the characterization *and predominant use* of the Lutheran Confessions by some as anti-Catholic or anti-legalistic is, while also true, not particularly helpful in today’s situation.)

As an aside, we here merely note that on the Synodical level – possibly to counteract this popular move and in keeping with the liturgical “fruits” of the ecumenical movement of the past century – one sees that, beginning with *Lutheran Worship*, Lutheran orders of service have been altered by incorporating elements rooted in Byzantine (opening litany) and Roman (“eucharistic prayer”) liturgies and theologies. This is certainly a deplorable trend, as it too is not based on prior theological agreement and thus sends the wrong signal by suggesting theological unity where it does not exist. However, due to the fact that the Eastern and Roman churches are not in synch with US pop culture (at least on a surface level; on a deeper level, they simply appeal to different preferences of natural man, as was pointed out above), these

¹⁰ Two quotes under II.A are from FC X: “We further believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church. (FC SD X, 9)

Therefore we reject and condemn as false and contrary to God's Word the following teachings: 1) That human precepts and institutions in the church are to be regarded as in themselves divine worship or a part of it. . . . 4) When such external ceremonies and indifferent things are abolished in a way which suggests that the community of God does not have the liberty to avail itself of one or more such ceremonies according to its circumstances and as it may be most beneficial to the church. (FC Ep X, 8, 9, 12)”

changes do not generate as much popular appeal as the forms originally developed based on the theology of Evangelicalism.

“We’re just like those other guys (with some Lutheran fine print we’ll share with you later on),” some congregation seems to be saying by the way they conduct their public services, often specifically designed to attract new members naturally at home in a certain culture and lifestyle that is affirmed at a given congregation. For these non-Lutherans may be familiar with Evangelical pop-religiosity, but in most cases they are not acquainted with sound Lutheran doctrine and practice.

This might be called “lowering the threshold” in current missional parlance. But is this not exactly what FC X addresses and forbids?

The Freedom to Change and the Freedom to Retain Ceremonies

The *Theses* seem to equate “freedom” with the freedom to change ceremonies (see only thesis II).¹¹ However, as FC X teaches us, at times Christian freedom is not preserved by *changing* ceremonies but by *preserving* them against the sociopolitically dominant theological spirit of the age. It is telling that, while Ep. X, 6 does quote Gal. 5:1, which is adduced under thesis II.A,¹² it also quotes in the same paragraph Gal. 2:5 about Paul resisting Peter on the by then adiaphorous matter of circumcision. For “in such a case it is no longer a question of indifferent things, but a matter which has to do with the truth of the Gospel, *Christian liberty*, and the sanctioning of public idolatry, as well as preventing offense to the weak in faith” (emphasis added).

These are clear qualifications that the Lutherans Confessions place on adiaphora – ceremonies neither commanded nor forbidden by God’s word, but designed for good purposes. It is not clear to us how some respondents or the original *Theses*, where certain criteria for evaluating the ceremonies of the worship service are indeed provided, capture this particular teaching that, at least to us, seems invaluable today.

¹¹ Thesis II reads: “The Scriptures and Confessions give the people of God considerable freedom in choosing those forms, rites, and ceremonies that aid the worship of God.”

¹² Thesis II.A asserts: “Neither the Scriptures nor the Confessions prescribe forms, rites or ceremonies for worship.”

4. The Relationship between the Highest Worship and the Worship Service

What Is Not Controversial in Today's Debates over Worship but Is Addressed in the Theses

When discussing the relationship between faith and “the liturgy,” the *Theses* rightly point out that the faith-creating and faith-sustaining means of grace are essential to any service that claims to be Christian (thesis I. D). We wonder: Where is this denied in the current debate among Lutherans?

They also point out, again rightly, that “the liturgy” is to aid the proclamation and hearing of the gospel in word and sacrament for the creation and sustaining of faith, the highest worship (thesis II.B). Again, where is this denied in the current debate, always granting that practice will always lag behind doctrine?

Some have stated that if we can only come to agree that faith in Christ is indeed the highest worship, we would be able to put the current state of worship division behind us and come to greater unity in Synod. Here again we wonder: Who denies in our circles that faith in Christ is the highest worship? We also wonder: What would this insight really yield for the concrete form of the Christian worship service, beyond the already agreed-upon importance of “word and sacraments”?

It needs to be remembered that the Lutheran Confessions discuss “faith as the highest worship” *when they talk about the doctrine of justification, not when they discuss the specific form of the Christian worship service, i.e., sanctification*. As will be demonstrated below, the worship *service* is not just about faith; it is also about *love*.

To be sure, we can quickly agree that if we believe that such faith is the highest worship of God, then the means of grace are essential. We have already touched on this. We can also agree that practices and messages contrary to this faith are ruled out.

What Is Controversial but Not Addressed in the Theses

Our question is: how would such a narrow focus restore greater unity within Synod? So often, the problem seems to be not that word and sacraments are omitted, but that they are combined with practices and forms that militate against the *humble and simple* form of the means of grace because a) this form is not recognized and b) an agreement in appearance and “feel” is sought with those who believe differently or not at all (see the discussion above). Moreover, as will be discussed below, these new practices and forms are combined with what has been given by Christ in a way that militates against humble love. That is, the very act of composing orders of worship often breaks the basic law of Christian love.

In our concluding section we will revisit the topic of faith and justification and demonstrate how it, when understood properly, confirms everything we will have said about worship and will by God’s grace indeed lead to greater unity in Synod. However, neither the *Theses* nor the responses we received show concretely how the focus on “faith” as “the highest worship” can get us there.

Focus on Faith in Christ as the High Road to Church Unity?

Some focus on faith in the gospel as the prime means to achieving unity in our church body. We wonder what this might have in common with the (failed) constitutional change proposed by the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synodical Structure for the 2010 Synodical Convention: By changing article III of the Constitution, it attempted to replace unity in the faith (“fides quae”) by unity in the faith in Jesus Christ (“fides qua”). Are we, in other words, no longer to be united by our confession of the gospel in all its articles? How would a narrow focus on saving faith be biblical when it comes to the unity of the church? How could it be confessional on the basis of AC VII?

Back in 1974, the CTCR published a document titled *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism*. Based on a 1955 article by A. C. Piepkorn, it distinguished between the unity of the church, which is said to be by

faith in Christ, and unity *in* the church, which is said to be by doctrinal agreement (p. 7, cf. also p. 5 on Eph. 4:3). As problematic and wrong as this distinction may be (cf. only AC VII, esp. the Latin text), it at least still gave doctrine some role to play for unity *in* the church. We wonder: How is this failed approach related to what is suggested by some?

The Theses Condemn the Statement: Worship Is About Giving Something to God

Here we also wonder what is meant by statements like these that are made by some: “worship cannot be about us giving something to God, it cannot be about entertainment, it cannot be about how we feel, it cannot be about singing.” Some call this the “de facto definition of worship in the popular mind” and “the cultural understanding of worship.” Apparently, the refutation of the “popular” understanding of worship is *one of the main* points of the *Theses*, as some have claimed: “The Theses equally condemn those who use human rites as a means of appeasing, or bringing something to God, and those who give human rites Divine status.”

What is more, since no one in the current debate within the LCMS, at least to our knowledge, uses “human rites as a means of appeasing ... God” – these condemnations only highlight once more how the *Theses’* understanding and use of the Confessions as exclusively “anti-Catholic” renders them virtually deaf and mute in today’s context (see already TUFOTG, p. 85-86) – we regard the refutation of worship as “giving” or “bringing something to God” to be the *only* point and *condemnation* of the *Theses*.
Agreement and Disagreement: Means of Grace as Sacrament and Sacrifice

We can quickly agree that when the worship service *only* consists of our sacrifices of praise to God, the most important thing would be missing: God’s making available unto faith the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross by means of the means of grace. It would reflect a thoroughly Zwinglian understanding of worship that is based on his understanding on the means of grace in general and of the Lord’s Supper in particular: While Zwingli would consider the means in general and the Lord’s Supper in particular to be “essential” to Christian worship, he understood the latter exclusively as a rite of congregational thanksgiving and not at all as an efficacious means of God’s giving of grace.

Having said this, however, is there no place for our “giving something to God”? Is this automatically “a means of appeasing ... God”? Is the worship service not *also* about our sacrifice of thanksgiving (see only Luther’s explanation of the Second Commandment in the Small Catechism)?¹³ The Lutheran Confessions carefully define the relationship between God’s acts and man’s acts in the Christian worship service. Melancthon, for one, carefully distinguishes the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of the worship service in general and the Lord’s Supper in particular (cf. only Ap. XXIV, 71-74). Luther does the same, e.g., in his 1530 *Admonition Concerning the Sacrament* (cf. AE 38:97ff.).

Melancthon remarks about the fact that a single act in worship can be viewed as both God’s act and man’s act that “one action can have several purposes” (Ap. XXIV, 74). In this way, he asserts, even the performance of the ceremony of the Lord’s Supper itself is used by faith “as praise to God, as a demonstration of its gratitude, and a witness of its high esteem for God’s gifts. Thus the ceremony becomes a sacrifice of praise.”

Preaching as External Worship and the Internal Worship of Faith

What is stated here about the participation in the ceremony of the Lord’s Supper by administering and receiving it, is even more true about preaching the gospel. It too is a sacrifice of praise, that is, an act of love and part of the body’s *external* worship of God. In other words, it too is to be a fruit of faith, which is the heart’s *internal* worship of God (cf. Ap. XXIV, 25-27, 35). Luther discussed the relationship between the heart’s inner worship and the body’s outward worship on the basis of John 4:20-24: “[W]here worship is offered from the heart, there follows quite properly also that outward bowing, bending, kneeling, and adoration with the body” (AE 36: 293).

¹³ In that explanation, Luther stated: “We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.”

In fact, without there being anything “ambiguous” about the Confessions on this point, preaching is called “the chief worship of God” (Ap. XV, 42), as is commonly known. This terminology is chosen because it is chiefly through the external proclamation of the gospel that the highest internal act of worship, faith in the gospel, is brought about and kept alive and because in this way God’s greatest deed – saving mankind – is acknowledged and confessed, as will be explained in greater detail in the concluding section.

Ceremonies of Worship Provide Opportunity for Displaying a Fruit of Faith: Godly Praise

In fact, when we go through the original *Theses* again, we do not find it stated anywhere that the ceremonies of the worship service – both those of divine and those of human origin – also serve the purpose of affording those in attendance an opportunity to offer the godly sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving to God, which is pleasing to God due to their faith in Christ, and which is also not automatically “entertainment.”

Again, we agree wholeheartedly that there is much abuse in the worship service when its sacrificial elements are absolutized. However, we do believe that there is a legitimate place for them, as they are the beginning of the fruits of faith in the life of the believer, which corresponds to the fact that the Second Commandment about *praying, thanking, and praising* God directly follows the First Commandment about *trusting* in God above all things. And these fruits are actually mentioned in what the *Theses* quoted from Ap. XXIV, 27-28 under thesis I.B without elaborating on it, as that thesis was only about faith itself.¹⁴ If anything, according to thesis III.C, the *Theses* seem to locate “fruits of faith” (as narrow as the understanding might be there, see Shortcoming 9, TUFOTG, p. 105-107) exclusively outside and after the worship service.¹⁵

A tacit and reluctant concession seems to be made by some that there are such fruits in the service itself: “The point is that worship, being *chiefly* expressed through the faith of the believer, is *not* something that takes place *only* during the Divine Service, (or worse, as seems to be commonly held only when we sing).”

To be sure, this, again, is a valid point. We also readily concede that a “discussion starter” such as the initial *Theses* can’t be a comprehensive treatise. *However, the basic distinction between sacrament and sacrifice seems to be quite fundamental to any discussion on worship.* Our Lutheran Confessions, after all, spend a whole article (Ap. XXIV with its 88 paragraphs) on explaining and driving this important distinction home that can also be easily grasped by “the person in the pew.” In our humble opinion, it should therefore have been given some room in the *Theses*.

Criteria for Godly Ceremonies of Praise Established Based on the Ceremonies of Gospel

Here is one reason why this discussion would have been beneficial: Since the *Theses* really did not give it any room but one-sidedly focused on faith at the expense of love, on justification at the expense of sanctification, on sacrament at the expense of sacrifice, the *Theses* really do not offer much guidance as to what our praise of God should look like. The Confessions must then appear “ambiguous” on this point since one cannot correlate sacrament and sacrifice in a positive way.

Given the now commonly held antinomian attitude, the *Theses’* approach, to say the least, is vulnerable to the distortions of those who claim that the Christian need not be told what to do – be it in worship or in daily life (cf. the aberration summarized in SD VI, 2 that will be discussed below). “Faith in Christ” somehow is believed to bring to the individual believer / worship leader so liberated also the necessary insight into what we ought to do, e.g., when it comes to praising or worshipping God.

Maybe this is one reason why a Political Action Committee within the LCMS called “Jesus First” – as they believed that the *Theses* gave *carte blanche* to those who observed a few agreed-upon doctrinal basics

¹⁴ Thesis I.B asserts: “The highest form of worship is faith.” The last proof text from the confessions quoted reads: “In short, the worship of the New Testament is spiritual; it is the righteousness of faith in the heart *and the fruits of faith.* (AP XXIV, 27-28)”

¹⁵ Thesis III.C posits: “The liturgy of the Church moves worshipers into the world to live for and to proclaim the Good News to others.”

but otherwise did what seemed right in their eyes – could rejoice that the “Worship Wars Are Over”? **REFERENCE** Considered in this way, their reception of the *Theses*, while it left some aghast, is perhaps not entirely surprising.

We consider the *Theses* to be in agreement with us that such antinomianism is something that needs to be combated. We welcome this. However, when it comes specifically to praising God, the fact that the *Theses* chose not to address it at all, leaves them unable to combat antinomianism biblically and, therefore, effectively.

Of course, it can again be stated that the *Theses* did assert that the humanly created forms of worship (and hence also our praise and thanksgiving in the service) should be normed by God’s word and that therefore our praise should be in accordance with God’s word. And we, of course, again state that while this is true, it is – to our knowledge – also not really the issue that is controversial in worship today. *In other words, it is not specific enough to do what it is supposed to do.*

On the other hand, our approach – it begins, not with man’s felt needs or faith or God’s Word in general, but where faith is created by the Holy Spirit, namely, with the concrete means of grace and their specific, divinely established forms – does have something to say about how our praise to God should look like, not just in content but also in form (see above). Specifically and briefly, it should thank God chiefly for the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ and distributed in the means of grace; and it should be humble and simple in its outward form lest our exuberant, elaborate praising make us deaf to the then disappointingly quiet, humble voice of God in the means of grace (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-13).

5. Humanly Established Ceremonies as Protective “Fences” around the Ceremonies of the Means of Grace

Protective Ceremonies as Idolatrous, Legalistic Substitutes for the Power of God’s Word?

The insights gained so far also allow us to address one aspect of the use of the term “fences” in relation to humanly created ceremonies (another aspect will be addressed in the second-last section below). Some were “somewhat disturbed” by it, as they associated this terminology exclusively with the “idolatry” and “legalism” of Judaism.

We respond by pointing out that, in his Reformation hymn, Luther writes at the beginning of the second stanza: “With might of ours can naught be done, / Soon were our loss effected.” How true! And we wholeheartedly agree with all one might assert concerning the power of God and his word in the preservation of the church.

At the same time, however, Luther considered all the ceremonies of the worship service to be “iron bars” by which “the inexperienced and perverse youth” needs to be “restrained and trained” (AE 31:375, quoted in its wider context in TUFOTG, p. 82). Did Luther somehow become more “Lutheran” between 1520 and whenever he wrote *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*? After all, if God’s word does it all, what need is there for such “iron bars”? Why have any orders of worship? Because it says so in 1 Cor. 14:40? God will come through regardless, will he not? He and his saving institutions, the means of grace, surely need not be protected by what are merely human ceremonies!

Protecting the Saving Means of Grace by Human Ceremonies

Well, the same Luther who wrote his famous hymn apparently did not draw these radical conclusions. These statements are true: God preserves his church in the one true faith with Jesus Christ by the Spirit’s work through the gospel in the concrete forms of the means of grace alone (cf. SC II, 6). However, *this work can be totally obscured and obliterated by ceremonies that are not in conformity with the content and form of the ceremonies of the means of grace* (cf. LC II, 43-45; AE 41:199-202, 204, 206-208).

In other words, while only God can create and preserve faith, we surely can destroy it, in ourselves and in others. Therefore, let us adopt and abide by ceremonies that do not undermine God’s word and work in and by the ceremonies of the means of grace, but rather guard and protect these ceremonies and thereby God’s saving word and work, as much as that is humanly possible.

Wolferinus Controversy: Human Ceremonies Protect the Divine Ceremony of the Lord’s Supper

A concrete example can be given from Luther’s own pastoral practice. In 1543, he became engaged in the so-called Wolferinus Controversy (cf. the Luther letters referenced in SD VII, 87). It had to do with the emergence of Zwinglianizing *practices* in Lutheran parishes due to Melancthon’s negative influence in relation to the *doctrine* of the Lord’s Supper. Because it gave the appearance of believing in the absence of Christ’s body and blood from the sacrament’s bread and wine, Luther forcefully objected to the indiscriminate storing of consecrated with unconsecrated hosts. It had been introduced due to the belief that Christ’s presence in the sacrament occurred only in connection with the actual reception of the elements.

To combat this false belief and thus to protect the Lord’s Supper also by means of liturgical ceremonies, Luther defined the presence of Christ’s body and blood to last as long as what we would call the “service of the sacrament” which consists of both divinely and humanly established ceremonies. In other words, he “extended” Christ’s presence longer than doctrinally warranted, strictly speaking. The man-made

“service of the sacrament” thus serves as a protective framework for the shorter sacramental action which is commanded by Christ and is found at its center.

Therefore, Luther used “ceremonies” that were in keeping with the form and substance of the sacrament as protective “fences” – or, if one prefers Luther’s vintage terminology, “iron bars” – around God’s saving word and work in this sacrament. He rejected ceremonies that were not in keeping with the form and substance of the sacrament *because they*, even if the sacramental action as such remained unchanged, *threatened to dislodge the form and substance of the sacrament from the hearts and minds of the congregants.*

The True Cause of Ceremonial Legalism Is Doctrinal Legalism, not the Doctrine of the Law

We do not see us, or Luther, on the path to legalism. For the “fences” that are adduced at times from Judaism presuppose that religion’s legalistic core to become truly legalistic, *which is much different from the gospel core of the Christian faith.* In other words, we are back to the basic discussion of whether the Confessions speak against the “imposing” of any and all ceremonies, or simply against the doctrine and practice of Catholicism (another religion with a legalistic core), namely, to impose human ceremonies as conscience-binding laws with divine authority for the purpose of meriting God’s grace. In TUFOTG we have made the case that only the latter can be said to be based on the Lutheran Confessions (cf. p. 24-26, 61-86).

6. Faith and Love in the Creation and Observation of Orders of Worship

Who Creates Orders of Worship: An Unanswered Question

In TUFOTG we criticized what some now deplore as “the consumer context” of the *Theses*’ “language of choice” in that this choice of words was not dictated by the Scripture, the Confessions, or, for that matter, Luther and other orthodox Lutheran theologians after him. We truly appreciate this.

On the other hand, no further clarification is given to the issue that was behind the poor choice of words in the *Theses*, namely, how orders of service should be created, and by whom. As to the latter point, the *Theses* used terms such as “the people of God” (thesis II)¹⁶ but also “the community of God in every place and at every time” (thesis II.A, quoted from SD X, 9).¹⁷ Thesis V.D then spoke of the “local congregation.”¹⁸

To raise the important question point-blank, who is to generate the types of ceremonies for which some criteria are offered in the *Theses*? Is it the local congregation, possibly with their surrounding community in view?¹⁹ Is it the local pastor? Is it a congregation’s worship committee? Is it the Synod as a whole, perhaps by means of some commission on worship and the synodical convention?

The Answer of the Confessions: Love and Humility Resulting in Joint Action of the Church

TUFOTG provided clear information here based on the Lutheran Confessions and Luther (p. 76-86). Based on these two authorities, we stated (see p. 78-79, 85-86) that the historic practice of the LCMS – namely, the adoption of binding Synod-wide orders of service by the synodical convention – is more in keeping with them than what has now come to be the norm: local congregations going it alone, without consideration of the impact their decisions might have on neighboring congregations and the synod as a whole.

In the Lutheran Confessions and in Luther this is discussed under the heading of “love.” We are not only to be enabled by the worship service as a whole to love God and our neighbor by the creation and nurture of our faith and by being instructed in the faith. We are not only to be trained in love of God by the order of service, as it provides us the opportunity to “practice” the first three Commandments. We are not only to be trained in love of neighbor by proclaiming God’s word to one another. *We are also to be trained in love of neighbor by the very way we create and observe orders of service: jointly and in humility.*

The Use of Luther: Caricature or Hearing Out the Chief Teacher?

Here is the point at which we must criticize how some have used Luther’s various statements on worship and ceremonies. It is readily agreed that only a few writings by Luther are part of the Christian Book of Concord. However, as pointed out in TUFOTG (p. 79-80), the Confessions do recognize Luther as

¹⁶ This thesis asserts: “The Scriptures and Confessions give the people of God considerable freedom in choosing those forms, rites, and ceremonies that aid the worship of God.”

¹⁷ The quoted section reads: “We further believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church. (FC SD X, 9)”

¹⁸ This thesis reads: “D. Forms of true worship are edifying to the local congregation and therefore also to the surrounding community.”

¹⁹ See again thesis V.D.

the chief teacher of our church (cf. only SD VII, 41). This means that when he speaks on a given issue, we as Lutherans should at least listen *and hear him out*. This title of chief teacher is certainly also one reason as to why an appeal to Luther is consistently made by all parties to the present conflict on worship, as is generally known.

However, what does “consistently” really mean? Does it simply mean “all the time,” or does it mean: “correctly”? In other words, do people simply appeal to a caricature of Luther and pepper their biased contributions with their favorite quotes, or is there a genuine attempt to hear him out?

Luther as the Upholder of Freedom to Change Ceremonies or as Teacher of Love

There are certainly those who use Luther in support of opting for much freedom when it comes to devising new ceremonies. However, Rev. Sonntag, in his 2009 piece on Luther’s distinction of faith and love in liturgical matters (a printed version in LOGIA is referenced in footnote 14 on p. 79 of TUFOTG, but a somewhat longer version is available online),²⁰ provides a much more nuanced reading of Luther on forms of worship because it is based on a more representative sampling of texts, some of which were reprinted in TUFOTG, p. 80-85.

Sonntag demonstrated the following: Luther, beginning with his foundational 1520 treatise on Christian liberty, *assigns freedom to man’s relationship to God (faith), while bondage is what characterizes man’s relationship to his neighbor (love)*. And, also beginning with that treatise, *matters of creating and observing ceremonies are handled according to love, not faith*. This means that, of course, Luther articulates freedom in worship forms in a very vocal manner when it comes to man’s relationship with God – in other words, when their observance is made a matter of meriting one’s salvation. *But he is also quick to temper this freedom in man’s relationship to his neighbor by love*.

Luther wrote to the Livonians in 1525 (AE 53:47-48):

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, I Corinthians 14 [40], “All things should be done to edify,” and I Corinthians 6 [12], “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful,” and I Corinthians 8 [1], “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” Think also of what he says there about those who have a knowledge of faith and of freedom, but who do not know how to use it; for they use it not for the edification of the people but for their own vainglory.

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. By faith be free in your conscience toward God, but by love be bound to serve your neighbor’s edification, as also St. Paul says, Romans 14 [15:2], “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him.” For we should not please ourselves, since Christ also pleased not himself, but us all.

Is this not exactly what SD X, 9 says?

We further believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances [“from the viewpoint of faith”], as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church [“from the viewpoint of love”]. Paul instructs us how we can with a good conscience give in and yield to the weak in faith in such external matters of indifference (Rom. 14) and demonstrates it by his own example (Acts 16:3; 21:26; 1 Cor. 9:10).

It seems to us that too often, SD X, 9 is quoted only with a focus on “the viewpoint of faith,” because freedom (and change) is what is to be promoted today. The *Theses*, unfortunately, perpetuate what clearly seems to be a misuse of this fine text because they quote it under thesis II.A, which, according to the flow

²⁰ http://lutheranwiki.org/Luther_on_Freedom_and_Love_in_Liturgical_Matters_as_a_Challenge_for_Today.

of the theses, is about “freedom.”²¹ “The viewpoint of love” is left unmentioned, perhaps because it would truly get in the way of providing a rationale for freedom and change, but also perhaps because it does not seem to be very specific here in SD X. *However, when read in the context of Luther’s very clear advice to the Livonians, it truly regains its original depth for us today.*

In other words, hearing Luther out helps us to understand certain abbreviated expressions in the Confessions which were understood back when they were written, but which, due to their short-hand nature, are easily misunderstood today when we read them without their original theological context in mind.

It is typically granted that men abuse freedom when it comes to matters of worship (e.g., by holding that “worship is an adiaphoron”). This, perhaps, is the particular burden we as the church of Jesus Christ in the “land of the free” have to bear. *Now, the solution is not to eliminate freedom altogether, but to define its meaning and use carefully: in what relationships does it exist? Where does it need to be tempered by love’s willing bondage of service and humble restraint?* Here Luther and the Lutheran Confessions are our allies, because such abuses of freedom are really nothing new in the history of the church of children of the free (cf. Gal. 4:31; 5:1, 13).

The Two Basic Criteria for All Human Ceremonies in Christian Worship: Faith and Love

Concretely and in keeping with the basic ideas set forth in TUFOTG based on the Lutheran Confessions, the man-made ceremonies of the Christian worship service need to conform to just two basic criteria to be genuine adiaphora. The first criterion is *faith*, i.e., they need to be in agreement with the form and content of the divinely established ceremonies of the means of grace, as already briefly outlined in the last paragraph of section 4 in relation to our praise in worship. This agreement in form and content is necessary so that man’s additions to God’s means of grace do not contradict or overpower what is truly necessary for our salvation. The *Theses* have somewhat addressed *the agreement in content* by the criteria they offer.

The second criterion, however, is *love*, i.e., ceremonies need to be adopted, observed, and altered jointly among fellow Christian congregations. “Worship” is a communal exercise not just in one congregation (this is why we deplored the fact that many congregations now offer various worship services with various styles, see TUFOTG, p. 11-12), but among congregations who share the same confession of the faith (i.e., not just “faith in Christ,” which, even though it is the highest worship, is not the basis for church fellowship, as discussed earlier).

In other words, *if we can’t even agree upon and abide by common, uniform orders of service in the realm of love, how much do we really care about one another in Synod* (cf. Matth. 24:12)? Do we care that our worship practices might negatively affect our neighboring congregations, even to the point of luring away members or driving out faithful pastors? Do we also care that members are confused when they visit LCMS congregations in the same circuit or district, or when they, perhaps to visit family or to spend the winter, attend congregations in other districts where they encounter markedly different worship practices?

In general, this seems to raise the question of what it means to follow humbly the humble Christ according to Phil. 2. Based on the work we did in TUFOTG, it is not surprising at all that Luther uses this text – the traditional epistle lesson for Palm Sunday in the West – both in his booklet on Christian freedom (cf. AE 31:365-367) and to open his admonition to the Livonians to come up with uniform ceremonies in all humility (cf. AE 53:46-47).

Here the focus of the *Theses* on the local congregation in its local community seems deeply flawed. In fact, it is highly disturbing when it is found in a document adopted by the synod’s convention and its Council of Presidents, even if it is only adopted for study and discussion. Such a document should at

²¹ Thesis II and sub-thesis A read: “II. The Scriptures and Confessions give the people of God considerable freedom in choosing those forms, rites, and ceremonies that aid the worship of God.
A. Neither the Scriptures nor the Confessions prescribe forms, rites or ceremonies for worship.”

least guide the discussion in the right direction in order to serve to promote genuine peace and harmony in Synod and not offer some justification for congregational one-upmanship.

For it appears to be its position that, so long as the ceremonies used by congregation X are in conformity with the “faith”-criteria provided by the *Theses*, there is plenty of freedom, i.e., the license to disregard what the neighbor is doing or what the synod has agreed upon, or at least should have agreed upon.

But is this not a stark contradiction to the terminology introduced by the *Theses* themselves? Three times they speak of “(the) liturgy of the Church” (theses III, III.A, and III.C).²² What are they really saying here? Who or what is that “church”? Since they capitalize it, they seem to be talking about the holy Christian Church of all times and places, but then they may also be simply speaking about the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, as the capitalized word also appears when they are dealing with specific current issues of the LCMS, e.g., disunity (theses VII and VIII).²³ Regardless of who or what the exact ecclesial referent here is, the *Theses* at any rate seem to be referring to something that transcends a certain group within a local congregation and, in fact, even a local congregation.

If the phrase just cited is more than a churchly-sounding formality, it seems to suggest that the liturgy somehow “belongs to” the whole church. *How then are individual groups within a congregation or even local congregations allowed to alter **unilaterally** what belongs to all members of the church or Church?* While this terminology was first introduced by the *Theses*, not by us, it does point to the important corporate nature of our orders of worship that affects more than groups within congregations and individual congregations.

Frankly, while some have expressed surprise at the fact that the CP adopted the theses, we find it not surprising at all, given that the important “tooth” of love has been pulled from the traditional Lutheran teaching on worship. This allows one major cause of dissention in the synod to continue to go unchecked: liturgical parochialism. More will be said about this in the second last section.

²² These theses read as follows:

“**III. The liturgy of the Church builds a framework for the worshiper to live the life of faith.**

A. Liturgy of the Church teaches the full counsel of God.

C. The liturgy of the Church moves worshipers into the world to live for and to proclaim the Good News to others.”

²³ These theses assert:

“VII. The polarization that is affecting the Church concerning the issue of forms, rites and ceremonies is sinful and hinders the proclamation of the Gospel.

VIII. The people of God are commanded by God to keep talking with each other, under His Word, so that divisions are healed and the Church is united in doctrine and practice.”

7. Worship Before and After the Fall

The Importance of Gen. 3:15 for Christian Worship

Some have responded to Shortcoming 8²⁴, where we had criticized what we perceived to be a failure to situate properly the Christian worship of the age of the NT in the continuum of true *Christian* worship. Some said that focusing on Gen. 3:15 (the “proto-evangel”) instead of Num. 6:22-27 (the “Aaronitic Blessing”)²⁵ means to “quibble.”

We do not think so because Gen. 3:15 actually makes the case that “the highest worship is faith” better than the somewhat more theologically obscure, albeit more familiar, text from Numbers. Since some expressed some interest in the question as to why we chose Gen. 3:15, we’re happy to elaborate. What is more, discussing the similarities and differences between worship in the first Paradise and now, adds further insight into the nature of Christian worship today.

While the assertion that there was some “faith relationship” between man and God due to man’s being created by God’s Word may or may not be correct, when the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions speak of faith, they mean *normally* faith in the promise of forgiveness of sin for Christ’s sake; for it is by this faith that we are justified (cf. Ap. IV, 48-59). It is this faith that is called “the highest worship” (cf. Ap. IV, 49, 57, 59, 154, etc.).

Strictly speaking, therefore, Christian worship prior to Gen. 3:15 was impossible, because God had not made his promise to Adam and Eve concerning the future Christ, the Savior from sin, death, and the devil. Obviously, Adam and Eve were originally created in a proper relationship with the Trinity, which, however, is biblically expressed in the terminology of “image of God,” not “faith.” Faith in its proper sense belongs to the time of the promise, that is, after man’s fall into sin.

Worship in Paradise Before the Fall: The Tree of Knowledge

As to the worship of our first Parents in paradise before the fall, Luther offers a few interesting remarks here in his lectures on Genesis. Luther discusses worship in the state of innocence first based on Gen. 2:3, the setting aside of the Sabbath day (AE 1:79-80):

... if Adam had remained in the state of innocence, he nevertheless would have held the seventh day sacred. That is, on this day he would have given his descendants *instructions about the will and worship of God; he would have praised God; he would have given thanks; he would have sacrificed, etc.* On the other days he would have tilled his fields and tended his cattle. Indeed, even after the Fall he kept this seventh day sacred; that is, on this day he instructed his family, of which the sacrifices of his sons Cain and Abel give the proof. Therefore from the beginning of the world the Sabbath was intended for the worship of God.

Unspoiled human nature would have proclaimed the glory and the kindnesses of God in this way: *on the Sabbath day men would have conversed about the immeasurable goodness of the Creator; they would have sacrificed; they would have prayed, etc.* For this is the meaning of the verb “to sanctify.” This is then further elaborated based on Gen. 2:10, the planting of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Luther goes so far as to state (AE 1:94-95):

[T]his statement about the tree is put before Adam in order that he may also have *some outward physical way of indicating his worship of God and of demonstrating his obedience by an outward work.* ...

²⁴ “The *Eight Theses* also fail to locate the Christian worship service at this point in time in the historical continuum of genuine Christian worship that has been ongoing ever since the enunciation of the promise of the proto-evangel in Gen. 3:15.” TUFOTG, p. 20.

²⁵ These verses were quoted under Thesis I.C: “C. Worship is Trinitarian, and centered on Jesus Christ.”

This tree of the knowledge of good and evil was Adam's church, altar, and pulpit. Here he was to yield to God the obedience he owed, give recognition to the Word and will of God, give thanks to God, and call upon God for aid against temptation. ... If, therefore, Adam had not fallen, this tree would have been like a common temple and basilica to which people would have streamed.

This is why Luther can state concerning Gen. 2:16-17, where God's command to Adam concerning the tree of knowledge is recorded (AE 1:103, 105-106):

Here we have the establishment of the church before there was any government of the home and of the state; for Eve was not yet created. Moreover, the church is established without walls and without any pomp, in a very spacious and very delightful place. ...

Here the Lord is preaching to Adam and setting the Word before him. Although the Word is short, it is nevertheless worth our spending a little time on it. For if Adam had remained in innocence, this preaching would have been like a Bible for him and for all of us; and we would have had no need for paper, ink, pens, and that endless multitude of books which we require today, although we do not attain a thousandth part of that wisdom which Adam had in Paradise. This brief sermon would have brought to its conclusion the whole study of wisdom. It would have shown us, as if written on a tablet, the goodness of God, who had created this nature without those familiar inconveniences which followed later on because of sin. ... If they had not fallen into sin, Adam would have transmitted this single command later on to all his descendants. From it would have come the best theologians, the most learned lawyers, and the most expert physicians. ...

[T]his tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or the place where trees of this kind were planted in large number, would have been the church at which Adam, together with his descendants, would have gathered on the Sabbath day. And after refreshing themselves from the tree of life he would have praised God and lauded Him for the dominion over all the creatures on the earth which had been given to mankind. Psalms 148 and 149 suggest a kind of liturgy for such thanksgiving, where the sun, the moon, the stars, the fish, and the dragons are commanded to praise the Lord. Yet every one of us could have composed a better and more perfect psalm than any of these if we had been begotten by Adam in innocence. Adam would have extolled the greatest gift, namely, that he, together with his descendants, was created according to the likeness of God. He would have admonished his descendants to live a holy and sinless life, to work faithfully in the garden, to watch it carefully, and to beware with the greatest care of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This outward place, ceremonial, word, and worship man would have had; and later on he would have returned to his working and guarding until a predetermined time had been fulfilled, when he would have been translated to heaven with the utmost pleasure. ...

God gave Adam Word, worship, and religion in its barest, purest, and simplest form, in which there was nothing laborious, nothing elaborate. For He does not prescribe the slaughter of oxen, the burning of incense, vows, fastings, and other tortures of the body. Only this He wants: that he praise God, that he thank Him, that he rejoice in the Lord, and that he obey Him by not eating from the forbidden tree.

"Faith" at that time, since no promise (of forgiveness) had to be given, was included in the explicit commandment given to our first Parents (AE 1:153-155):

This command about not eating from the tree, which was given them by God, is a convincing proof that even if his nature had remained perfect, Adam, together with his descendants, would have lived in faith until he would have been translated from this physical life to the spiritual life. Where the Word is, there necessarily faith also is. Here is the Word that he should not eat of this tree; otherwise he would die. Therefore Adam and Eve ought to have believed that this tree was detrimental to their welfare. Thus faith is included in this very commandment. ... For just as a promise demands faith, so a threat also demands faith.

In other words, the first church in paradise was founded specifically based on God's commandment given in Gen. 2:17. Its worship, without any pomp, contained the following simple but important elements: God's commandment is proclaimed as man's Bible and most perfect wisdom; this commandment is to be *believed* as God's word because it transcended even Adam's superior mind in the state of innocence (cf. AE 1:154); men praise God for his goodness and his blessings, the greatest of which

was man's being made in God's likeness; and men, to express their faith by some outward work in obedience to God's word, do not eat from the tree of knowledge.

All True Worship after the Fall Is Christian because it is Based on the Promise of the Christ

These items are very similar to the basic elements of today's worship, which Luther outlines in his 1544 sermon at the dedication of the first "Lutheran" church building in Torgau (AE 51:333): "the purpose of this new [church] may be such that nothing else may ever happen in it except that our dear Lord himself may speak to us through his holy Word and we respond to him through prayer and praise." The importance of simplicity in today's ceremonies of worship is emphasized in a 1539 comment on worship ceremonies likening them to baptismal gowns (AE 41:175): "Here too one must exercise moderation and not use too many of these garments, lest the child be smothered. Similarly, moderation should also be observed in the use of ceremonies, lest they become a burden and a chore. They must remain so light that they are not felt."

However, what is different now is that due to man's fall into sin God could no longer maintain his church based on the first commandment given to man explicitly which, as seen and as all the other commandments, contained implicitly also the First Commandment and faith (cf. LC I, 41-42, 329-330, and the Small Catechism's "We should fear and love God so that we ..."). This commandment would only continue to condemn man into hell instead of leading him to greater wisdom for this life and the next. This is why God had to speak a radically new word, the gospel's promise (Gen. 3:15). This is then also where, as shown above, a different faith, faith in the promise, comes about.

All this agrees very well with what Luther wrote when he defined faith as the highest worship of God for the first time. The quote is found, perhaps not surprisingly, in the 1520 treatise on Christian freedom already mentioned several times before. Luther wrote there (AE 31:350):

It is a further function of faith that it honors him whom it trusts with the most reverent and highest regard since it considers him truthful and trustworthy. There is no other honor equal to the estimate of truthfulness and righteousness with which we honor him whom we trust. Could we ascribe to a man anything greater than truthfulness and righteousness and perfect goodness? On the other hand, there is no way in which we can show greater contempt for a man than to regard him as false and wicked and to be suspicious of him, as we do when we do not trust him. So when the soul firmly trusts God's promises, it regards him as truthful and righteous. Nothing more excellent than this can be ascribed to God. The very highest worship of God is this that we ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else should be ascribed to one who is trusted. When this is done, the soul consents to his will. Then it hallows his name and allows itself to be treated according to God's good pleasure for, clinging to God's promises, it does not doubt that he who is true, just, and wise will do, dispose, and provide all things well.

Is not such a soul most obedient to God in all things by this faith? What commandment is there that such obedience has not completely fulfilled? What more complete fulfillment [sic] is there than obedience in all things? This obedience, however, is not rendered by works, but by faith alone. On the other hand, what greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise? For what is this but to make God a liar or to doubt that he is truthful? — that is, to ascribe truthfulness to one's self but lying and vanity to God? Does not a man who does this deny God and set himself up as an idol in his heart?

In other words, it is certainly correct to say that "true worship has been ongoing from the creation of Adam and Eve." As Luther explained it, it at first took place based on the clear commandment which God gave to Adam and Eve; which was "Gospel and law" for them (AE 1:146); and which they were to accept in true faith as God's Word. On the other hand, we are also correct in stating that first with the proclamation of the promise of the future Christ in Gen. 3:15 "genuine Christian worship (faith in Christ, the God-man) began" (TUFOTG, p. 92, emphasis added).

It is by this last type of worship that we are united with Adam and all the saints that have come after him because God, ever since man's fall into sin, terrifies secure sinners by the law and comforts terrified sinners by the gospel (Ap. XII, 53-55, quoted in TUFOTG, p. 92):

These are the two chief works of God in men, to terrify and to justify and quicken the terrified. One or the other of these works is spoken of throughout Scripture. One part is the law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sin. The other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace granted in Christ. This promise is repeated continually throughout Scripture; first it was given to Adam [Gen. 3:15], later to the patriarchs, then illumined by the prophets, and finally proclaimed and revealed by Christ among the Jews, and spread by the apostles throughout the world. For all the saints were justified by faith in this promise, not by their own attrition or contrition.

These two parts also appear in the lives of the saints. Adam was rebuked and terrified after his sin; this was contrition. *Then God promised grace and said there would be a seed that would destroy the kingdom of the devil, death, and sin [Gen. 3:15]; this was the offer of the forgiveness of sins.* These are the chief parts.

Only as a brief reminder we reemphasize here that, from the way Luther describes worship, it is evident that it, from the beginning of the true church in Paradise even before the fall, contained both “sacramental” and “sacrificial” elements. That is to say, it always included God’s Word and actions toward us and our words and actions toward him; both elements are joined by faith in that Word.

8. Christian Worship in the History of the Church: When Is a Difference in Worship Rightly Perceived as a Difference in Theology?

Disunity in Worship Creates the Impression of Disunity in the Faith

Having now revisited the theological foundations for a history of Christian worship, laid by God in Paradise after man's fall, we will now address a few other matters of a historical nature to provide a reply to what some perceived to be "the major premise of [TUFOTG]," namely, that "a difference in the forms, rites, and ceremonies of worship *has always been understood* by Christians – and even non-Christians! – to be indicating a difference in theology" (TUFOTG, p. 13, emphasis added).

What we were driving at here were, first and foremost, *perceptions*, in other words, appearances that are given by the public worship service, especially by differences among congregations said to confess the same faith. A good deal of this has already been discussed above in section 3 on the sociopolitical function of adiaphora. Specifically, our statement is simply based on what Luther wrote near the end of his life in 1544 (AE 38:317):

[W]here it can be done without sinning and endangering the conscience or without giving offense, *it is indeed fine for the churches to agree in external matters, which are in any case voluntary, even as they agree with one another in the Spirit, in the faith, in the word, and in the sacrament; for such agreement makes a fine impression and pleases everyone.*

Agreement is also good because *such dissimilarity, since it is unnecessary, looks very much like a schism or disunion and discord.*

So, at least to the Christian Martin Luther, who is also the chief teacher of our church (SD VII, 41), dissimilarity in worship looked "very much like" a schism or even genuine discord in the faith. On the other hand, uniform ceremonies make "a fine impression" in that they express the doctrinal unity of those churches. This is why we, in TUFOTG, made the case that change in the order of worship should not only be done jointly but also be theologically warranted.

Changes in Worship that Are Theologically Warranted

As some have agreed with the latter point, we rejoice. Of course, this agreement prompts us to ask: which of the changes to our agreed-upon orders of service we can so readily observe in so many congregations all across Synod would be considered to be "theologically warranted"? We are therefore asking: where are the theological defects of the agreed-upon orders that would make such changes not just possible, but necessary or, well, "warranted"? Do these ceremonies not undergo an extensive review process so that no change should actually be theologically necessary?

The question can also be raised as to why we've apparently been in need of a new hymnal in every generation after the adoption of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Do we get bored more quickly now? Is boredom or "monotony" a theologically legitimate reason for the necessity to reform worship? Which doctrine might be involved here? Should boredom and perceived monotony not be combated first by the kind of instruction in the faith that lets people understand what truly happens in a given service?

The case can be made that the latest hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book*, with its many different orders for the main service, actually already defeats its purpose as a *synodical* hymnal. However, people still clamor for more, not less, diversity, diversity no longer bound by any concrete services agreed upon by the synod as a whole, but patterned after what is promoted as the sure-fire recipe to missional success by any number of mega churches around the country!

Perhaps the *Theses* just meant to say: The agreed-upon orders need not be theologically deficient, but due to the freedom given a congregation by God in these matters, they might still want to go ahead and

change things in view of their local situation. The *Theses* have simply given them a number of criteria so that they can do so and still remain within theologically acceptable parameters.

Then our question would be: what – if not theological necessity – drives change in matters of worship? The ever-changing tastes of those leading worship or of those one wishes to reach? Or perhaps the selections played by a powerful Christian radio station in the area? Does not constant change in the human rites of worship reflect a bad educational philosophy that was demonstrably *not* shared by Luther (cf. TUFOTG, p. 116-117)?

What is more, is frequent change not also more akin to the Reformed belief that man's word cannot ultimately contain all of God's word (the infamous *extra Calvinisticum* applied to scripture, preaching, and human ceremonies)? This shows itself in the Reformed approach to their own historic confessional documents: not wrong when they were written, but always in need of improvement because man's word cannot fully contain God's word. Constant tinkering ensues. Nobody ever gets it quite right, because "God" cannot ever be gotten right by man.

Lutherans, obviously, do not believe this, which is why their confessional writings, once they have been found to be in agreement with the bible, are settled "dogma." Should our orders of service not reflect this "trust" in man's word's ability to contain God's word fully, just as Christ's human body contained the divinity fully (Col. 2:9)? In other words, should they not display more stability growing out of this trust than their Evangelical counterparts? Even a brief look into article eight of the Formula of Concord on the Person of Christ shows the critical importance of this issue.

Uniformity or Compatibility in the Ceremonies of Worship?

If our interpretation of what is written in the *Theses* is indeed accurate, then they seem to be of the opinion that uniformity in ceremonies is not really a goal for which we should strive. *But then how does the "desire" for uniform ceremonies of which thesis VI spoke become concrete?*²⁶ What is more, how would this thinking be in keeping with Ap. XV, 51-52? After all, we read there:

Nothing should be changed in the accustomed rites *without good reason*, and to foster harmony those ancient customs should be kept which can be kept without sin or without great disadvantage. This is what we teach. In this very assembly we have shown ample evidence of our willingness to observe adiaphora with others, even where this involved some disadvantage to us. *We believed that the greatest possible public harmony, without offense to consciences, should be preferred to all other advantages ...*

Clearly, while Ep. X, 4 allows for a congregation to change human ceremonies according to "circumstance," this is qualified right away in the following paragraph by stipulating that offense not be given.

At any rate, here would then lie a major disagreement between the Theses and TUFOTG: We provided the rationale for why services should be uniform; how that form should look like based on the form of the means of grace; and how this conformity should be achieved by the church's joint action. The Theses seem to provide the rationale for why they need not be uniform in order to be genuinely Lutheran, so long as they meet a list of doctrinal criteria. The Theses, in other words, seem to strive for no more than "compatibility" between various forms of worship. We, however, strive for uniformity.

Luther's Approach: Ending Diversity Instead of Providing Parameters for Compatibility

Given the 1544 text from Luther just quoted, and others, we believe to have the Confessions and the Reformer on our side: Diversity in worship was a given for Luther and the early Lutherans. As Luther saw it, due to some perceived "freedom" it was, first of all, already in place even before the Reformation. At that time, it had the very negative results of leading via priestly greed to the sacrifice of the mass (cf. AE 53:21). Another negative result of such diversity and dissimilarity in worship was, in Luther's view,

²⁶ This thesis asserted: "VI. Uniformity in forms, rites and ceremonies while desirable, is not essential to the unity of the Church."

the proliferation of bylaws and ultimately the strengthening of the papacy, the epitome of the unbridled rule of men in the church of God (cf. AE 38:318). *Certainly, one cannot read these evaluations of diversity by Luther as anything but negative.* Things did not improve after the Reformation had in many areas dislodged canonical church authority (cf. AE 53:61-62), which also regulated the ceremonies of worship (cf. AC XXVIII, 34-38).

Yet, while never denying faith's liberty in this matter, Luther did not come up with a rationale or certain basic doctrinal parameters of compatibility to channel this explosion of "creativity," but sought to push it back for the sake of love and humble service to the neighbor – also so that the neighbor would not be given the wrong impression of schism, discord, or non-existent agreement with those who believe differently or not at all.

Responsible Use of Freedom Fosters Destruction, while Non-Use of Freedom Fosters Edification

One might point to Resolution 2-04 of the 2004 LCMS convention where the "responsible use of freedom in worship" and "respect for diversity in worship practices" are demanded without providing a sufficient basis for such demands in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. The report of the Commission on Worship in the 2010 *Convention Workbook* (p. 43-45) shows where the journey has been going in most recent years: more diversity, more complexity, more "sensitivity" to local conditions and purposes, but that means also: less uniformity and, *as we must sadly add, less love.*

The slogan "responsible use," therefore, seems to have the same effect as ad campaigns for alcoholic beverages urging consumers to "drink responsibly."²⁷ While it *appears* to put limitations on the use of freedom/alcohol, it *actually* has the opposite effect because it allows users of freedom/alcohol to distance themselves from the destructive effects of their practice. As a result, more freedom/alcohol, not less, is used. Is this paradoxical "success" surprising? We think not. After all, those paying for such ads are in the business of selling more of the product advertized, not less.

By now it should be clear that we believe that the approach behind this particular resolution is deficient in that it leaves out any consideration of love for the neighbor. Luther, to say it clearly, did not strive for more understanding among Lutherans with diverse practices that were confusing the people, also by giving the appearance of schism and discord. He, the pastor and reformer of the church's life and worship, strove for uniformity without sacrificing the basic gospel insights afforded by his work as teacher and reformer of doctrine.

Love, for Luther, was not demonstrated by letting the other guy do whatever he felt spoke best to the people he ministered to, so long as it met certain basic doctrinal standards. Love did not mean respect for those who use freedom responsibly, one could say pointedly. *Love, for him, was demonstrated by doing the hard work of actually coming together around common forms of worship.* This was what he considered to be most "consistent" with his theology focused on faith and love. In other words, he did not urge the responsible use of freedom. He told people intoxicated by their freedom that, "from the viewpoint of love, you are not free to use this liberty, but bound to consider the edification of the common people" (AE 53:47).

In order to explore the issues of "warranted" and non-warranted change in the history of worship in conjunction with the issue of appearances further, a few sub-points need to be addressed.

The Shift from Worship before the Fall to Worship after the Fall

As we see it, there have been, in the history of worship two major warranted changes in worship, both of which express a major difference in theology. The first one has been discussed in the preceding section: **Who would deny that when God himself based worship and the existence of the church, not on a word that can be characterized as both Gospel and law for sinless man (Gen. 2:17), but on a word that is clearly**

²⁷ Cf. <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/releases/180300.php>.

gospel for sinful man (Gen. 3:15),²⁸ a major change in worship—leading to the *correct* perception of a “different theology”—is warranted? Even if one concedes that there would have been sacrifices offered by man in his state of innocence (cf. AE 1:80, 274), would they not take on a new meaning when they become sacramental signs of the future suffering of the Messiah in accordance with Gen. 3:15 (cf. Ap. XXIV, 21)?

Of course, this does not mean that the gospel and the reinterpretation of the meaning of sacrifices come from a different God than the original commandment to man. It also does not mean that there were not elements that remained, at least on a surface level, unchanged: man still proclaimed God’s word; people were still to believe it; they were still to praise God for the benefits he offered to them; and they were still to live a life that showed their heart’s faith in external obedience to God’s word. However, law and gospel are in stark contradiction after the fall, to the point that Marcion (d. 160) and others (e.g., A. v. Harnack, d. 1930) were led to believe that they in fact represented two different gods.

Worship in the Age of the NT

The second major change in the history of true worship is the transition from the kind of worship after the fall commanded *by God* in the OT to the kind of worship after the fall established *by Christ* in the NT. *At that point, all the ceremonies formerly commanded by God became “adiaphora,” that is, they were no longer commanded but, because they were also not forbidden by God, could still be observed for the sake of good order and instruction (cf. AC XXVIII, 59).* The Lutheran Confessions, as was pointed out in TUFOTG (p. 76-77), attribute, e.g., the origin of the first festivals of the NT church year to the apostles who adapted certain OT festivals to the change in theology that had been brought about by the fulfillment of Gen. 3:15 in the birth and death of the promised Messiah (cf., e.g., Ap. VII/VIII, 40).

At that point also, and *by divine command*, new ceremonies and forms were established, namely the NT sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, while the proclamation of God’s word in law and gospel (the proto-evangel now fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth) was now explicitly commanded beyond the confines of the descendants of Abraham (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24).

One could even say more specifically that just as the worship of our first parents before the fall was based on Gen. 2:17, just as worship after the fall in general is based on Gen. 3:15, *so the worship of the NT era in particular is based on Christ’s institution of the rite of the Lord’s Supper (cf. AE 53:20-21).*

Based on this brief analysis, we cannot fully agree with the broad statement of some: “We do not worship using the forms, rites or ceremonies of the Old Testament. ... We do not use the forms, rites and ceremonies, (apart from Word and Sacrament), that Jesus used.” We still use at least some of them. In addition to the festivals already mentioned, there is, e.g., the Aaronitic blessing referenced under thesis I.C, but also simple words such as “amen,” “hosanna,” and “hallelujah” in addition to the Psalter which (along with the rest of the OT) is a thoroughly Christian book in that it speaks of Christ (cf. Luke 24:44) and which Luther called “a little Bible” (AE 35:254). Then there is also an altar in the sanctuary of most congregations. We also have a lesson from the OT, as in the synagogue worship at the time of Jesus (cf. Luke 4:16).

To be sure, all these are no longer used by divine command, but based on a free mutual agreement among Christians in love and in accordance with the divinely instituted ceremonies of the means of grace. Yet one could say that, to some extent, the ceremonies reflect what Paul says about the relationship between Gentiles and Jews in the one church: the new ones are grafted in among the old ones (cf. Rom. 11:17-24).

In fact, if, as actually happened during the time of the rule of the Nazis in Germany, some group (within the church) would claim that we, for some reason, could no longer use these “OT” ceremonies as (German) Christians, we would have to resist such endeavors to excise OT ceremonies from the worship of the NT church in defense of Christian freedom, based on FC X, as was discussed above.

Reformation of Worship Based on the First Commandment: Ceremonies no Longer Serving Faith and Love

²⁸ Evidently, Gen. 3:15 was not gospel for the serpent to which God is speaking here. Yet this condemnation was pronounced *for man’s sake and benefit*, as Luther noted (cf. AE 1:189-190).

Within the two post-fall eras of true worship (OT and NT), one finds occasionally what could be described as “reformation of worship” that aims at the elimination of various abuses and deformations that have crept into the worship service due to superstition. Either older ceremonies are given a new meaning at variance with faith or love, or new ceremonies counter to faith or love are introduced.

E.g., the Mosaic laws concerning sacrifices themselves can be described as such a reformation (cf. AE 1:247). Other biblical examples from the OT are well known, e.g., the destruction of the bronze serpent made by Moses that had become necessary because it had become an object of the idolatry of the Israelites at the time (2 Kings 18:4, cf. AE 22:346-347) [other examples: the destruction of the golden calf at Sinai; the designation of the service of the Levites; the return of the ark after it had been captured; the changing of the high priest after Absalom’s rebellion; the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem by Solomon; rediscovery of the book of the Law [Hezekiah?]; the rereading of the law to those returned from Babylon [Nehemiah?]]; The Lutheran reformation itself secondarily also became a reformation of worship, as was pointed out in TUFOTG, p. 48. Like all other true reformations of worship, it began with the reassertion of the First Commandment; in other words, it began with the reformation of doctrine (cf. AE 6:228-229).

This is then also the context of Luther’s remark from the conclusion of his work on the German Mass, which some adduce in this context: Luther there expressed his recognition of the fact that *ceremonies and orders of worship can be abused to promote things other than faith and love*. If they become altered or reinterpreted like the bronze serpent to serve faith in one’s own accomplishments and self-love, then obviously a reformation of worship needs to take place after a reformation of doctrine has once more asserted the First Commandment.

The “popish services” – including the washing of the feet according to John 13 referenced in the first section – are examples of services no longer serving the promotion of faith, as Luther wrote in his introduction to the German Mass (AE 53:62):

For this is the damnable thing about the popish services: that men made laws, works, and merits out of them – *to the detriment of faith* – and did not use them to train the youth and common people in the Scriptures and in the Word of God, but became so engrossed in them as to regard them *as inherently useful and necessary for salvation*. That is the [work of the] very devil. *The ancients did not institute or order them to that intent*.

The proliferation of countless worship services which Luther witnessed in his day is an example of worship services no longer serving the promotion of love, *although* their authors might “have the best intentions.” And these many services even put a question mark behind the unity in the faith, as Luther observed in the same introduction (AE 53:61-62):

For this is being published not as though we meant to lord it over anyone else, or to legislate for him, but because of the widespread demand for German masses and services and the general dissatisfaction and offense that has been caused by the great variety of new masses, for everyone makes his own order of service. Some have the best intentions, but others have no more than an itch to produce something novel so that they might shine before men as leading lights, rather than being ordinary teachers – as is always the case with Christian liberty: very few use it for the glory of God and the good of the neighbor; most use it for their own advantage and pleasure. But while the exercise of this freedom is up to everyone’s conscience and must not be cramped or forbidden, nevertheless, we must make sure that freedom shall be and remain a servant of love and of our fellow-man.

Where the people are perplexed and offended by these differences in liturgical usage, however, we are certainly bound to forego our freedom and seek, if possible, to better rather than to offend them by what we do or leave undone. Seeing then that this external order, while it cannot affect the conscience before God, may yet serve the neighbor, we should seek to be of one mind in Christian love, as St. Paul teaches [Rom. 15:5–6; I Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2]. As far as possible we should observe the same rites and ceremonies, just as all Christians have the same baptism and the same sacrament [of the altar] and no one has received a special one of his own from God.

Here one can also see what type of reforms in worship we should consider “theologically warranted” and which not: Warranted (i.e., necessary) are those that eliminate forms of worship that militate against

the central article of *faith*, the doctrine of justification by faith, in form and content. Yet warranted are also those that, e.g., reduce an offensive variety of worship forms for the sake of *love*.

And while we rejoice that there is the common desire to halt change that is not of this kind, the *Theses* really only address those forms that might militate against faith. As important and laudable as this is, it does not tell the whole story as told by the Lutheran Confessions and Luther. For that account includes several chapters on love, as noted above already.

*“The Practice of the Apostles and the Ancient Church:” Legitimate and Illegitimate
Growth of Worship Ceremonies in the NT-Era*

Within the NT-era of worship after the fall there is also what can be described as legitimate growth in worship and ceremonies. That is, adiaphorous ceremonies, as defined above, are added by men to the simple rite of the Lord’s Supper instituted by Christ himself on the night when he was betrayed. It is remarkable how Luther, in his brief overview over the history of the NT worship (cf. AE 53:20-21, quoted on p. 49-50 of TUFOTG), makes a clear distinction between those common ceremonies that were added before the Lord’s Supper became a sacrifice and those added after this “idol” had been set up in God’s house.

Those ceremonies created before this illegitimate change, on the one hand, are approved by Luther because they were in keeping with the evangelical form and content of the sacrament and therefore with the ancient purity of the church and its worship (cf. Ap. VII / VIII, 33 about the Lutherans’ desire to follow the ancient “universal ceremonies”).

Even though Luther in the context traces these additions to the fathers of the church, it is also clear that he does not make this reference as a historical pedant, liturgical archaeologist, or as one committed to the figment of “the historic liturgy” (cf. AE 53:37). Consequently, his approach of retaining those ancient ceremonies *that were still used by his parishioners* is very different from the (modern) practice, also observed in recent LCMS hymnals, of adopting ceremonies that are at home in church bodies claiming (*against* the Lutheran Church) to be in continuity with the ancient church or that have not been used in living memory. Luther explicitly distinguished the early time of the church when worship was still uniform from that time when the Roman and Greek rites began to evolve (cf. AE 35:81).

As he demonstrates in the following quote, the following issue is decisive for this retention: Uniformly observing these ancient ceremonies (“with united ... voice,” cf. Rom. 15:5-6) is important also in that this practice gives the *correct* impression of doctrinal agreement among Lutherans today (“united heart,” cf. 1 Cor. 1:10) and of doctrinal agreement between the Lutheran Church and the ancient church (AE 41:196):

Sixth, nobody can deny that we have the same prayer as the ancient church, the same Lord’s Prayer. We have not invented a new or different one; we sing the same psalms and praise and thank God *with united heart and voice according to the teaching of Christ, the practice of the apostles and the ancient church, and their command to us to follow their example*.

As an aside, we wonder how “their command to us to follow their example” is observed in those contemporary orders of service that purposely contain very few, if any, of those ancient universal ceremonies. This question is all the more urgent in light of possible ecumenical endeavors of our church body. Even as we confess that these ceremonies are not essential for church unity from “the standpoint of faith,” what are, e.g., Roman Catholics to think of us if we carelessly squander more and more of what is sound in our common liturgical heritage? How seriously will they take our desire to work toward church fellowship with them (cf. TUFOTG, p. 121)? How seriously will they take our claim that we indeed confess the doctrine of the early church if we do not at all worship like the early church? Must they not consider us to be a newfangled sect?

On the other hand, the newer ceremonies which were created after the change of the Lord’s Supper into a sacrifice were rejected by Luther because they were in keeping with the legalistic deformation of form and content of the sacrament. They were not just speaking the old truths in a new style; they proclaimed new truths, which are, in fact, old errors. The impression of difference in theology based on a difference in the ceremonies of worship is correct in this case.

Not surprisingly, given that the mass was now about man's service to God – something which natural man understands all too well (cf. Ap. XXIV, 23, 28) – it also became a dazzling spectacle for the senses other than that of hearing. Thereby, in Luther's terminology, the church became part of the world, in that the church is supposed to be the realm of hearing, not that of seeing (cf. WA 51:11: *hör reich* vs. *sehe reich*). As Luther describes it, humble and simple forms in conformity with the humble and simple forms of the gospel become replaced by more elaborate and ostentatious ones that are in conformity with man's attempt to placate God by especially glittery works (cf. also AE 36:75-76).

Making God: Insignificance of Christian Worship according to the Insignificance of God's Word

It is very telling how Luther contrasts the simplicity of true Christian acts of worship, again drawn out of the words of institution (i.e., the command "Do this in remembrance of me," Luke 22:19) with what at the time had become the norm of Christian worship. The following lengthy quote from 1530 not only explains what Luther meant when he wrote, in his 1529 Large Catechism, "the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol" (LC I, 2). It also clearly makes the point we have been making from the beginning: true forms, rites, and ceremonies of praise and worship are not only normed by God's word in general. They are specifically also of a simple and lowly form – just like Adam's worship in Paradise – precisely because "God's works and words are initially always of a lowly appearance." Yet, when judged according to God's word (i.e., by believers, not by unbelieving "seekers"), such humble acts of worship are of utmost greatness and glory because they are the fruits of the heart's faith in Christ. Luther writes (AE 36:106-108):

Such remembrance may appear to be an insignificant worship because there is not much external display with vestments, gestures, buildings, and so forth, that the eyes and the ears might have their fill; rather, it is accomplished solely by the spoken word which has a lowly appearance for eyes here on earth. But no eye can see nor ear hear nor heart comprehend how lofty and glorious it is for God and his angels! God's words and works are initially always of a lowly appearance. For this reason they have to be considered with diligence and earnestness. Whoever does that, discovers how great they are. He himself says, Psalm 50 [:23]: "Thanksgiving honors me." Is that not the same as saying: Thank offering confers upon me my divine glory; it regards me as God and lets me remain God? On the other hand, sacrifices of human works rob him of his divine glory, make an idol out of him, and do not let him remain God. For whoever does not give thanks but wants to earn merit has no God; rather, internally in his heart and externally in his works, he makes a different God out of the true God, and he does this in the name of the true God. God often complains about this in Isaiah and other prophets and strictly forbids it in the First Commandment, saying that we should not devise other gods, and should not make him other than he is.

If you want to be a maker of God, come here and listen. He wants to teach you the art so that you do not err and make an idol but make the true God as he really is. Not that you are to create his divine nature, for it is and remains eternally uncreated; rather, you are to make him God for you, so that he might also be for you a true God, as he is for himself a true God. The art of doing this is set forth briefly and surely in these words: "Do this in remembrance of me." Learn to remember him, that is, as has been said, by preaching, praising, honoring, listening, and giving thanks for the grace revealed in Christ. If you do that, behold, you are confessing with heart and mouth, with ears and eyes, with body and soul that you have given nothing to God, nor are able to, but that you have and receive each and every thing from him, particularly eternal life and infinite righteousness in Christ. When this takes place, you have made him the true God for yourself, and by means of such a confession you have upheld his divine glory. For this is a true God who gives and does not receive, who helps and does not let himself be helped, who teaches and rules and does not let himself be taught or ruled. In short, he does and gives everything, and he has need of no one; he does all things freely out of pure grace without merit, for the unworthy and undeserving, yes, for the damned and lost. This kind of a remembrance, confession, and glory he desires to have.

It is true that such worship takes place devoid of all splendor and does not appeal to the eye according to the flesh; but it fills the heart, which otherwise neither heaven nor earth could fill. If the heart is filled, then

also eyes and ears, mouth and nose, body and soul, and all members must be filled. For the way the heart behaves, so all the members behave and act, and each and every thing you do is nothing but an expression of the praise and thanks to God. That is then a different ornament and embellishment from the golden chasubles, yes, from imperial, royal, papal crowns; the ornaments and glitter of all churches and all the world are as refuse compared with this glorious remembrance of Christ. A single expression of this divine worship rings clearer, sounds better, chimes further than all drums, trumpets, organs, bells, and whatever else on earth may produce sounds even if they were all in one place and would all simultaneously ring out with all their might. That is indeed a different sound and song from all songs and sounds on earth, and yet it sounds insignificant as it enters the ears; but coming from within, from the heart, it sounds so mighty that you think all living creatures are making the same sound and all external human song is by comparison altogether silent.

In summary, Christ is remembered and therefore worshiped “by preaching, praising, honoring, listening, and giving thanks for the grace revealed in Christ.” This, as it is done by “the spoken word” alone, is devoid of all worldly splendor and appealing glitter. Yet it fills the heart with faith and thus guides all of man’s actions which then all become acts of praise and thanksgiving to God. By combining these insights with the earlier-discussed theses of “faith as the highest worship” and “preaching as the highest worship,” it is now clear that because the heart’s true internal worship of faith is based on the spoken word alone, the believer’s true external worship consists in simple spoken words alone. External splendor does not compensate for, or contribute to, invisible faith. It distracts from it.

It is true that Luther, in his 1526 work on the German mass, assigned a simple order of worship without many elaborate ceremonies to the services of those who desired “to be Christians in earnest” because the rest first had to be brought up to speed by careful instruction during and after the (more elaborate) services (cf. AE 53:63-64). *However, when considering Luther’s statements on worship over the years, one does notice a clear tendency toward simplification and concentration on the ceremonies instituted by Christ himself* (cf. only his 1539 comments likening ceremonies to a modest baptismal gown that must not suffocate the infant, AE 41:175). This, for one, lets Christian worship once more correspond to the simplicity of the church’s worship in paradise, as noted above (cf. only AE 1:103). And it certainly went hand in hand with the greater Christian maturity among his congregants brought about by consistently teaching the faith in sermons and by the introduction of the catechisms and similar things.

Worship in the NT and Our Worship Today: 1 Cor. 14

So, someone asks, considering that there was “speaking in tongues” in the worship services of the New Testament era (e.g., 1 Cor. 14), would not having no such thing today give the impression of a “different” theology from that of the NT?

Regarding 1 Cor. 14 we note only this: Paul, after teaching that love is greater than even faith and hope (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13), appeals to his hearers to “pursue love” (v. 1), which is to manifest itself in a form of worship that is not about spiritual self-realization in a “ruthless” display of whatever gifts a person might have, but about humbly serving and edifying the believer, and converting the unbeliever (vv. 24-25), by God’s word. In that same text Paul also forbids women from public speaking in the service (vv. 33-38). He also demands that all things are done decently and in order (v. 40).

Therefore, if a given worship service is not about serving the neighbor in love by God’s word, it would not be worship according to 1 Cor. 14. If women are teaching the church as and like pastors, then, again, definitely, the impression of a different theology is given – and rightly so! Furthermore, if sermons and worship practices in general are not normed by God’s word but by some other authority, then a different theology is rightly perceived to be at work again.

As for speaking in tongues, the absence of this practice is of course an obvious difference between our worship services and the worship services of the apostolic age. It might lead a person to think that we’re no longer apostolic churches. However, does it truly indicate a genuinely different theology? Actually, it does not, because the phenomenon of speaking in tongues is described in the NT itself as temporal because it was attached to the living apostles themselves (cf. Acts 19:6).

Only Pentecostals (and members of the now defunct *Renewal In Missouri* which, according to a *Lutheran Renewal* newsletter from 2006,²⁹ set out to share the gospel “through word and wonder,” not word and sacraments) would consider the absence of speaking in tongues to be a genuine theological difference between us and the NT. We believe, however, that if we still did what Paul here discusses (i.e., speaking in tongues), we would have a different theology than the NT. In other words, the absence of tongue-speaking is a change that was and still is theologically warranted.

When Different Ceremonies Give the Appearance of a Different Theology: Current Examples

What instances of current worship practices did we have in mind when we wrote that changing the forms, rites, and ceremonies gives the appearance of a different theology? Obviously, there are first and foremost the divinely instituted forms, rites, and ceremonies: If these are changed, then definitely the appearance of a clearly different theology is given. Examples include women’s ordination; open communion (often made worse by weak or wrong communion statements in the worship folder); “lay ministers;” the use of juice in the sacrament; changes in the formulae of administration of the sacraments; the omission of the words of consecration in the Lord’s Supper; the mere “blessing” of infants; a service without preaching.

Then there are ceremonies that in and by themselves militate against the humble nature of the means of grace by offering a dazzling spectacle to those in attendance. Here one might think for instance of major musical productions during the service (regardless of the preferred style used) that for some, at least in part due to the major emotional “lift” derived from them, have come to be the only reason why they attend church, and have come to be what they seek in a church, regardless of that church’s actual teaching and confession (which is then why they, when they move away, do not necessarily rejoin an LCMS congregation). Furthermore, the usage of praise choruses to begin the service, or to introduce a sermon, “to pump up” the crowd.

Then there is also the usage of “worship leaders” who do not simply sing, or lead singing, but must speak as well. And these “leaders” (they are *not* pastors) and musicians – all of them preferably young and esthetically pleasing to the eye to communicate the vitality and viability of a given congregation to prospective new members – are placed in the front of the church to be seen by all (and thus quite in keeping with Luther’s diagnosis of the appealing services of the papacy that belong to the visual kingdom of the world, not to the aural kingdom of God). However, one also needs to include elaborate vestments at variance with the customarily simple ones in current use among us as another example.

What perhaps best captures this “progress” from simple and insignificant to elaborate and pompous is the simple yet odd example of the simple hymn, which was first sung from memory, then from a hymnal, then printed in a bulletin, then projected on a screen, then projected line by line on a screen, then projected line by line on a screen in front of a beautiful picture. And now it is displayed on a large digital television line by line in front of a movie or video of whatever else is deemed to capture the attention of those singing long enough to get them to the end of the hymn. In keeping with this visualization of the hymn’s words, a more emotionally appealing arrangement of the hymn’s tune is often used as well.

Clearly, these and other things seem to be introduced mostly with the casual visitor or the lukewarm Christian in mind, not with what Christ has given his church in the means of grace as standard. At any rate, the impression is given that a different theology is driving these decisions: After all, why do other pastors / congregations not do things in this way? Perhaps because the changes betray a different theology not shared by those other pastors and congregations?

There are other ceremonies that, today, have taken on the character of “confessional ceremonies,” that is, of ceremonies that, while free in and by themselves, have come to be perceived as being associated with a certain controversial theological position. Observing them or not observing them is a case of confession, as outlined in FC X. Examples include the omission of the general confession and absolution at the beginning of the service; the removal of the pulpit and preaching from the aisle; the removal of a fixed altar; the removal of a baptismal font; the refusal by the pastor to wear any traditional vestments.

²⁹ Cf. <http://www.lutheranrenewal.org/newsletters/0206.pdf>.

Again, the impression of a different theology is given, here even to the point of suggesting far-reaching agreement with those who clearly do not believe as we do.

Then there are, as a general violation of Christian love, major changes that are introduced here and there without seeking agreement with (at least) the neighboring congregations of our Synod. Is this not also indicative of a different theology, one which no longer teaches, let alone practices, loving concern for the fellow believer?

Given that for Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, doctrinal agreement should ordinarily be expressed by uniformity in worship, it seems to us that the burden of proof lies with those who wish to deviate from the once-enjoyed uniformity in our Synod. They need to show not just *that* doing things differently is theologically possible (the *Theses* do offer a rationale for this), but that *what they are doing differently* is actually theologically warranted, i.e., necessary and not just possible. And if they are right, then all of us should do likewise! In most cases, however, a clear public theological justification is not provided. Requests for such are regularly denied with an attitude of “well, who made you my keeper?” or “the Confessions aren’t the Bible.”

In summary, it is clear that the technological possibilities that are readily available at the local parish level today (internet, computers, printers, copy machines, large screens, projection devices, stage lighting, etc.) facilitate and accelerate change in an unprecedented way. However, this acceleration is not just a result of technological change. *To us, it appears to be driven chiefly by a theology that is markedly different from that of our father and mothers in the faith.* Having pondered these issues for several years now in light of the Scriptures, the Confessions, and Luther’s pertinent writings, it seems to us that one of the major factors in the current proliferation of change is indeed a lack of understanding of the importance of love when it comes to worship in particular and being the church in general.

In this, to be sure, our time is no different than Luther’s or Paul’s: we know freedom but we, puffed up by this knowledge, do not use it properly in our relationship with fellow Christians, that is, tempered by love and for their edification.

We believe, however, that the problem today does not simply lie in not translating what is clearly confessed and believed by all into an equally clear practice. Lutherans have always acknowledged that there will always be unfortunate shortcomings of this practical kind in this life (cf. only AE 41:216-217). Consequently, also the uniformity in our worship practices will never be complete on earth.

Yet when reading through various materials on worship, the glaring absence of any mention of love in this context (that is, on a theological/ doctrinal level) points to a different theology that is afoot among us. This theology allows the resultant absence of uniformity in worship to be affirmed. In this sense, then, we must say that the *Theses*, even though there naturally was “no desire” to do so, do provide or at least strongly endorse “a new theology of worship.”

The LCMS Orders of Service Are not the Only Christian Forms of Worship

It is a standard concern that is raised with regularity against this position by some: “I am not sure if you are saying this but some seem to be saying that the liturgy as it is expressed in the current or former hymnals of the LCMS is the only proper form of worship for Christians.” We are not sure why this concern is expressed. For if we said or believed that, why would TUFOTG contain a lengthy section dedicated explicitly to “devising *new* ceremonies” (p. 76-86, emphasis in original)? Since this speaks for itself, this cautiously voiced concern almost sounds like the “concern” voiced by others who assert that our emphasis on distinguishing orthodoxy from heterodoxy or our practice of closed communion somehow means that we believe that LCMS Lutherans will be the only people in heaven.

So, to reiterate, the past or current LCMS orders of worship are not the only Christian forms of worship. In fact, if one reads our publication and this apology carefully, one will find that many things in our current (and past) orders of service should be improved. However, with equal clarity we reaffirm what we wrote in TUFOTG and in this apology: Any changes to those current orders will have to be in agreement with the already existing divinely established ceremonies of the means of grace themselves; and they will have to be undertaken jointly for the sake of love. If they are undertaken by congregations

and pastors unilaterally, it is fair to say on the basis of what has been discussed so far that, despite their best intentions, the impression of a different theology is given, whether people want this or not.

As we also noted in TUFOTG, orders of service are very similar to the catechism in that they teach the faith. The *Theses* agree with this, obviously. Of course, we also agree that Luther's Small Catechism is not the only way to teach the unchanging faith. Like our current orders of service, it is not mentioned in the Bible. There are other ways to teach basic Christian doctrine, to be sure. However, we currently use it along with the Large Catechism because these writings are highly commended by the Lutheran Confessions as "the layman's Bible" (Ep. RN, 5) and because they, in a very concrete way, teach not only the profound content of the means of grace correctly but also share their simple form.

This latter fact, as in the case of the humble "forms" of teaching in worship, does not work in their favor (cf. only Luther's own remarks on "boredom" from the Longer Preface of the Large Catechism, quoted by us on p. 114, esp.: "Many regard the Catechism as a *simple, silly teaching* which they can absorb and master at one reading. After reading it once they toss the book into a corner *as if they are ashamed to read it again.*"). Therefore, would we not want to ask questions of those who, again unilaterally, go their own way in Christian instruction, either by not using the Small Catechism at all or by using it with material that does not seem to be compatible with it?

Given the importance Luther's catechisms themselves attribute to continuity and avoiding change in order to maximize the texts' impacts on the hearts and minds of the students (also across the generations), would we not, as we did (TUFOTG, p. 116), say this also of the ceremonies of worship? Should they not also be used continuously with as little change as possible? It is not surprising to us that those who promote (responsible) change and freedom in the sanctuary are often also the ones who no longer use the Small Catechism in their classrooms.

9. Observing Uniform Ceremonies of Worship out of Love Preserves the Unity in the Faith

Uniformity in Worship Preserves the Unity in the Faith

One reply to what we wrote under shortcomings 5 and 6 (TUFOTG, p. 61-86) stated:

I am reluctant to go so far as to say that they contribute to “the preservation of the essential unity of faith in the Church.” (emphasis added.) I have read the texts you supply under this section many times and I must confess I am missing something. I can’t find a text that supports this contention. My concern is based on a fear that by attributing such power to human action we may be treading into the Divine prerogative.

The specific texts from the Lutheran Confessions and Luther we had in mind when we made this claim were quoted in TUFOTG. But we do not mind repeating these if it makes things clearer (cf. Phil. 3:1). There is, first of all, the quote from Ap. XV, 51-52:

[L]iberty in these matters should be used moderately, lest the weak be offended and become more hostile to the true teaching of the Gospel because of an abuse of liberty. Nothing should be changed in the accustomed rites without good reason, and *to foster harmony* those ancient customs should be kept which can be kept without sin or without great disadvantage. This is what we teach. In this very assembly we have shown ample evidence of our willingness to observe adiaphora with others, even where this involved some disadvantage to us. We believed that *the greatest possible public harmony*, without offense to consciences, should be preferred *to all other advantages*.

Here Tappert’s translation of “harmony” is misleading. The point here is not just some “harmonious” or “nice” togetherness of people who’ve learned to live with their differences. As we purposely pointed out in TUFOTG, p. 63, the Latin word here is *concordia*, concord, or the unity of hearts in the faith. The German word *Einigkeit* points in the same direction. *Public* concord is the external side of this, namely, the joint confession of the common faith.

Therefore, what Melancthon is saying here is that the common and joint observance of the unchanged ancient ceremonies fosters unity in the faith. If this is not the correct meaning, then we do not know why this should “be preferred to all other advantages.” What greater advantage than the preservation of a joint (public) confession based on a unity of hearts in the faith could there be in the church?

This is confirmed by the negative side, the disadvantages that go with giving up unity in worship: people become more hostile to the gospel due to the abuse of liberty. In other words, the unity of the faith is shattered or at least becomes significantly more brittle. People might even fall into apostasy due to a loss of faith (“the highest worship”).

It is furthermore confirmed by the fact that *concordia/Eintracht* are the very words used in SD RN, 1, where they are translated correctly as *concord*. The fact that there a “summary formula and pattern” of sound doctrine is mentioned as the *primary* requirement for lasting concord in the church, should not be misconstrued as being the *only* requirement for this.

Two Nurseries of True Unity

This is why we reprinted, in footnote 10 on p. 68, a quote from 16th/17th-century Lutheran theologian F. Balduin which we found in C. F. W. Walther’s book, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*. Balduin there speaks of “two nurseries of true unity: to speak the same thing and to believe the same thing.” This, it appears, is a summary of 1 Cor. 1:10: “Now I plead with you ... *that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (NKJV).

Balduin then goes on to draw the following conclusion: “We should therefore *seek to preserve agreement in expressions and thoughts, in endeavors and customs*; thus we may be easily kept from divisions.”
Worshiping in the same, uniform way (“agreement in customs”) was thus seen as a way to ward off divisions in the faith and therefore in the church. Yet Christians worship in the same way out of free love. Therefore, if love is absent, people will not only worship in different and diverse ways. The church will disintegrate.

A Church Focused on Faith without Love Will Disintegrate

This is pointed out in another important text we adduced (p. 66-67), namely, Ap. IV, 231-235. We just quote a few salient sentences from the longer section which deals with the correct interpretation of Col. 3:14: “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (NKJV). While the Catholic opponents believed that the text speaks about the individual’s virtue of love/charity perfecting all the good works of the Christian, including faith (justification), Lutherans confess that the text is about Christians living with each other in the church (sanctification).

First we take a look at Ap. IV, 233:

So [Paul] is talking not about personal perfection but about fellowship in the church. He says that *love is a bond and unbroken chain linking the many members of the church with one another*. Similarly, in all families and communities harmony should be nurtured by mutual aid, for *it is not possible to preserve tranquility unless men cover and forgive certain mistakes in their midst*. In the same way Paul commands that *there be love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear, if need be, with the crude behavior of the brethren, to cover up minor mistakes, lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and the hatreds, factions, and heresies that arise from such schisms*.

Here again the word “harmony” mistranslates the German *Einigkeit*, which is, as seen above, the same as the Latin equivalent *concordia*. If love is absent, this unity disintegrates. And this means that schisms arise, which lead to worse things: heresies, that is, false teachings that destroy the unity of the joint public confession and the unity of the hearts in the faith.

Obviously, the text is specifically speaking of the need to cover up minor sins of the brethren, not about setting one’s freedom aside out of love for the sake of liturgical uniformity. However, it is telling, and not surprising based on what we have written so far, that the next two paragraphs apply “love in general” directly to the specific issue of ceremonies of worship when they deal primarily with the ceremonial burdens imposed by the bishops on the weak, but then also with the strong dealing with weak in general. They read as follows:

For harmony will inevitably disintegrate if bishops impose heavy burdens on the people or have no regard for their weakness. ... On the other hand, *perfection (that is, the integrity of the church) is preserved when the strong bear with the weak, ... when the bishops take into account the weakness of the people*.

We just note again, as done in TUFOTG, p. 67, that both “harmony” and “integrity” are insufficient translations of *concordia* and *Einigkeit*. As we have repeatedly seen above (e.g., in SD X, 9; AE 53:47-48), the theme of “the strong bearing with the weak” was an important theme in the early Lutheran discussions and decisions on worship. It was used as shorthand for the call to the strong who can handle liturgical change and diversity easily to curb their use of freedom in changing the ceremonies in worship for the sake of the weak.

In other words, it was the call to act “from the viewpoint of love,” not “from the viewpoint of faith,” to use again Luther’s clear terminology. For forgoing the use of freedom in matters of ceremonies builds up the church. On the other hand, using it with a narrow focus on some “dead orthodoxy” of the ceremonies without concern for the neighbor destroys the church because it causes schisms and heresies which destroy the very *concordia* that also serves as the title of our Lutheran Confessions, the collection of writings which define what we jointly teach, believe, and confess.

What is more, the meaning of “heavy burdens” had been explained by Melancthon already in AC XXVIII, 67-71. Specifically, he has in mind certain ancient canons which, even though no longer consistently observed, might still burden Christian consciences. He also thinks of the administration of

the Lord's Supper "in one kind" (bread only for the laity), clerical celibacy, and an oath not to preach pure doctrine, especially given that all these human traditions had been introduced into the church as God's law.

Based on the conclusion of the first, doctrinal part of the AC (articles I-XXI), one could even say that all the "abuses" addressed in the second part of the AC (such as the clerical celibacy, monastic vows, confession, the distinction of foods, the sacrifice of the mass) can be counted as heavy burdens, which is why the Lutherans had done away with them to begin with. In that transitional section they stated (according to the Latin text), firmly based on AC VII:

Since this is so, those who insist that our teachers are to be regarded as heretics judge too harshly. *The whole dissension is concerned with a certain few abuses which have crept into the churches without proper authority. Even if there were some difference in these, the bishops should have been so lenient as to bear with us on account of the confession which we have now drawn up, for even the canons are not so severe as to demand that rites should be the same everywhere, nor have the rites of all the churches ever been the same. Among us the ancient rites are for the most part diligently observed, for it is false and malicious to charge that all ceremonies and all old ordinances are abolished in our churches.* But it has been a common complaint that certain abuses were connected with ordinary rites. Because these could not be approved with a good conscience, they have to some extent been corrected.

The dissimilarity of customs and traditions does not destroy the unity of the church which is based on the agreement concerning the doctrine of the gospel and concerning the administration of the sacraments. This doctrine had been set forth in articles I-XXI. The reasons of the Lutherans for their changes in traditions and abuses are then set forth in articles XXII-XXVIII.

What is important for our discussion at hand is the assertion that "[a]mong us the ancient rites are for the most part diligently observed." This is unfolded in greater detail in art. XXVIII in the context just referenced. For there the text notes that none of the controversial items, in addition to the fact that they cannot be observed without sin, can claim any support in the ancient church's traditions (cf. AC XXVIII, 72). They, being of relatively recent origin, are therefore not part of the universal ceremonies, which apparently were not controversial between Lutherans and Catholics, which is why they were "for the most part diligently observed" by the Lutherans.

And, while firmly maintaining that (as Luther put it: "from the viewpoint of faith") agreement in even the ancient universal ceremonies is not necessary for the church's unity (cf. Ap. VII / VIII, 31), the Lutherans were more than ready, as shown above, to abide by those universal ceremonies *still in current use* out of love. As also seen above, this was what they perceived to be the scriptural way to ward off schisms and heresies and to preserve thereby the unity of the church in the faith.

In the Absence of Love Doctrine Cannot Remain Pure

All this is nicely summarized in Luther's famous words on John 15:9, Christ's admonition to his disciples to abide in his love. Luther wrote (AE 24:246):

A trivial cause may dispel love and separate those who should really be bound with the firmest ties; it turns them into the worst and bitterest enemies. That is what happened in Christendom after the days of the apostles, when *the devil raised up his schismatic spirits and heretics, so that bishops and pastors became inflamed with hatred against one another and then also divided the people into many kinds of sects and schisms from which Christendom suffered terrible harm. That is the devil's joy and delight.* He strives for nothing else than to destroy love among Christians and to create utter hatred and envy. For he knows very well that *Christendom is built and preserved by love.* In Col. 3:14 Paul speaks of love as "binding everything together in perfect harmony." And in 1 Cor. 13:13 he calls love the greatest virtue, which accomplishes and achieves most in the Christian realm. *For in the absence of love doctrine cannot remain pure; nor can hearts be held together in unity.*

Remarkably, Col. 3:14 is referenced here as well as in the quote from Ap. IV we adduced above. To apply this profound text to the discussion at hand, if the absence of love shows itself, e.g., by unilaterally changing common forms of worship, the devil rejoices because the destruction of *love* among Christians is his *only* goal. Because if love is gone, then no amount of "dead orthodoxy" in our ceremonies will be able

to maintain the church in concord for any length of time. In other words, hoping that the acknowledged ongoing destruction of doctrinal unity (and this means: *actual church unity*) among us can be halted or even reversed, if only our ceremonies meet certain merely doctrinal criteria without also being uniformly observed in love, is clearly not what we have come to learn from Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. And since this is not what we learn from them, we are so bold as to say that this is then also not what we learn from the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Such a hope is therefore misguided and false.

Love in the Church Means Uniformity in Worship

In other words, love in our dealing with one another does not only show itself in the exact observation of the Eighth Commandment, which seems to be the chief concern of the *Theses* as far as love is concerned. Replying to shortcoming 11³⁰, some have said that the *Theses* explicitly do not condemn divisions in worship, but only divisions in the church which are mainly due to breaches of the Eighth Commandment.

This, however, is a fairly general issue which, while always applicable and very true, has nothing to do with worship ceremonies as such, the actual topic of the original *Theses*. Here, in the realm of worship and ceremonies, love shows itself primarily by not going it alone, by patiently and intentionally seeking church-wide agreement on concrete orders of service, lest the neighbor be confused and offended and even caused to hate the gospel.

So Much Power to Human Action

Some worry “that by attributing such power to human action we may be treading into the Divine prerogative.” Now that Luther and the Lutheran Confessions do attribute such power to human action (i.e., love), what shall we say? First, to account for that worry, a text from the Confessions is quoted that rejects the notion that by our actions – e.g., by observing ceremonies jointly out of love – we merit God’s grace and our salvation, even though the text we quoted from Ap. IV, 231-235 *explicitly* distinguished between hoping to merit one’s salvation by doing works of love and love preserving the unity of the church, that is, between justification and sanctification.

Then the fear is specified: We should not “suggest that by our actions we are doing something for God that He could not do for Himself by the power of His Word.”

First of all, in Ap. IV, 232, Melancthon also mentions families that cannot be preserved intact without love and forbearance. Would we say that when husbands and wives love and honor each other according to the Sixth Commandment to keep their marriage intact, they “are doing something for God that He could not do for Himself by the power of His Word”? Is a Christian marriage or any family conceivable where it is just “the power of His Word” and not also love that keeps them together? Is not their love – wrought “by the power of His [gospel]” as it is – one of the secondary causes that God has chosen to use for the preservation of their marriage and family?

Secondly, it is difficult, even dangerous to speculate about what God *could* do “for Himself” (cf. AE 36:343-345). Could he not also redeem us without the incarnation of his Son, just by the power of a divine sentence from his heavenly judgment seat? Could he not also feed us, just by the power of his word without actual food? Could he not create new human beings without the perils and pains of childbirth, just by the power of his word? And would it not be so much more pious to ascribe all these things simply to the power of his word, and not also to secondary created means?

But such seems to be God’s wisdom of the cross (cf. AE 36:336-337): to hide the power of his word in humble, created things, such as Christ’s human body, such as the means of grace, such as even our own imperfect love, a fruit of Spirit-wrought faith as it is. Christians, after all, are called to be Christs for one another (cf. AE 31:368), hands and masks of God (cf. AE 14:113-115), channels of his love to their fellow

³⁰ “The concluding analysis of the problem offered by the *Eight Theses* addresses the symptom, but not the real underlying cause of strife, division, and polarization in the church, which is an increasing disunity in doctrine that – according to the prediction of the Lutheran Confessions and the reformers – has resulted from a decreasing uniformity in the external rites of the corporate worship service, both in those essential ceremonies established by Christ himself and in those non-essential ceremonies established by the church.” TUFOTG, p. 22.

creatures (cf. LC I, 26). If we do not do what God has called us to do in our vocations, people die, both spiritually and physically. If we do what he has commanded us to do, people live – by God’s power and grace at work through earthen vessels such as ourselves.

It seems to us that, as seen in the preceding sub-section, often much is attributed to the power of love when it comes to man’s breaking and keeping the Eighth Commandment, which, according to the analysis set forth by some, brings about the creation and healing of divisions in the church. Would it not be only consistent with this recognition to apply it also to the exercise of love when it comes to creating and observing joint orders of service? In this way, clear guidance would be provided not only about how we should talk to or about each other, important as that is. It would also be providing clear input as to the concrete acts of love we should be employing when it comes specifically to worship.

The Anthropological Realism of the Lutheran Doctrine on Worship

At any rate, what we do have is the clear commandments of Scripture in this matter. We could quote Eph. 4:3, which is referenced also in the above-mentioned art. III of the Constitution of the LCMS, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Yet at this time, we want to return to the words of Col. 3:14 one last time: “above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”

In the context Paul speaks about putting off the old man and his respective works and putting on the new man and his respective works (vv. 9-10). The works of the new man are mentioned there: patience, mercy, forgiveness, forbearance, and as the summary of the law: love itself (v. 13-14). These works the Christians are called to practice in their daily lives. The works of the old Adam, however, are also mentioned: anger, malice, wrath, foul language, fornication, lying, etc. (v. 5-9). These works they are called to discontinue.

Obviously, some of the works of the new man are specifically necessary because the old Adam is still a reality in the lives of the Christians: Because they still live as sinners among sinners, they ought to practice forgiveness, patience, and forbearance out of love. Because they still live as sinners among sinners, they must be warned not to abuse their freedom, but to serve each other in love (cf. Gal. 5:13). To apply this to the discussion at hand, because they in their weakness are offended by change and dissimilarity in worship, there ought to be loving uniformity of worship’s ceremonies to preserve the unity of the church in the faith, which, without love, would be quickly lost, given that the Christians often succumb in their battle against sin, world, and devil out of weakness.

In other words, due to the biblical realism of their “two-nature” anthropology, the Lutheran reformers did not expect perfection of the Christian’s daily living. They did not harshly demand – e.g., by holding the Eighth Commandment over peoples’ heads or by making “faith” the only standard in creating orders of service – that variety be accepted, even though most Christians could not realistically be expected to handle such variety well due to their weakness. They knew and acknowledged that people would be offended by dissimilarity. And while calling for patience and tolerance for some dissimilarity in ceremonies based on “the viewpoint of faith,” they did not promote dissimilarity, but called for it to be curbed based on “the viewpoint of love.” In this way, they showed that the weak Christian still needed to grow and mature in his faith, while not losing sight of the fact that the Scriptures commend the weak brother to our special care and concern.

To put it differently once more, the early Lutherans and their followers did not just criticize the people who bickered over adiaphora. They did their part to eliminate the reason for such bickering, and they did so also by promoting the observance of uniform ceremonies. What is more, and here Luther’s term of “iron bars” and fences comes back into good use, they also self-imposed sturdy ceremonies so that the old Adam, fickle and self-indulgent as he is by nature, does not simply flutter from one pretty flower to the next without providing much nourishment to the new man, but is tied down at the trough of the gospel for the sake of the new man.

What is avoided in this way is the simplistic, naïve, and wrong focus on either of man’s “natures.” Christian worship is not guided by the new man and his requirements alone. In this case, provided the orthodoxy of the ceremonies, freedom could be limitless, as the new man is perfect in faith, love, patience, and understanding, and freely does what is required of him (cf. SD VI, 6). Lutheran worship is also not

guided by the old man and his requirements alone, as the old Adam simply must be coerced to do good by temporal threats and promises (cf. SD VI, 7, 9), so that the dazzling ceremonial legalism would ensue, as actually happened in the papacy.

As it is, however, both the old Adam and the new man are powerful, warring realities in the Christian for as long as he lives on earth. Our preaching and teaching must be accordingly, as Luther demonstrated especially in his theses and disputation against the Antinomians, which we referenced in footnote 11 on p. 74. Yet it seems clear to us that also the way we worship needs to be shaped accordingly. That is, it needs to be shaped by the means of grace in form and content, and it needs to be created, adopted, and observed jointly. It needs to be shaped by both faith and love.

The Antinomian Fallacy: Faith without Love

While Luther's early years were spent battling the legalistic deformation of the biblical doctrine of justification that resulted in a plethora of pompous worship ceremonies decreed as conscience-binding laws, his later years were spent battling an equally dangerous foe, antinomianism, that would result in the disintegration of all commonly observed orders in worship. The main issue in the 1530s was the so-called second use of the law, that is, the use of God's moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, to convict man of his sins in order to lead him to repentance. However, the resulting Lutheran writings (e.g., Luther's antinomian theses and disputations and the sixth article of the Formula of Concord) also addressed what can be called the third use of the law, that is, the use of God's *written* moral law as a universal guide for the common life of the believers and as a safeguard against drifting into spiritualistic individualism and sectarianism.

For this use had become controversial as well, as this quote from the Formula of Concord demonstrates (SD VI, 2):

[O]ne party taught and held that *the regenerated do not learn the new obedience (that is, in what good works they should walk) from the law; nor should this doctrine in any way be urged on the basis of the law, since they have been liberated by the Son of God, have become his Spirit's temple, and hence are free, so that just as the sun spontaneously completes its regular course without any outside impulse, they, too, through the inspiration and impulse of the Holy Spirit spontaneously do what God requires of them.*

This is then contrasted with the position defended by the Formula of Concord itself (SD VI, 3):

The other party taught that although true believers are indeed motivated by the Holy Spirit and hence according to the inner man do the will of God from a free spirit, *nevertheless the Holy Spirit uses the written law on them to instruct them, and thereby even true believers learn to serve God not according to their own notions but according to his written law and Word, which is a certain rule and norm for achieving a godly life and behavior in accord with God's external and immutable will.*

The article then (VI, 15-17) goes on to distinguish between the "works of the law" (i.e., the merely outward and hence unwilling obedience to God's law rendered by unbelievers) and the "fruits of the Spirit" (i.e., those works in accordance with the Ten Commandments that flow from the willing hearts of the believers). It also states (VI, 20) that the guidance of the written law is needed due to the fact that there is still the old Adam active in the believers. Otherwise, the reliance on the *direct* "inspiration and impulse of the Holy Spirit" will result in the kind of "self-elected," pompous works and piety that characterized not only life before the Reformation but also the newer ideals of the Anabaptists who had fallen back into works righteousness (cf. SD XII, 10).

Such self-chosen works, as Luther had observed two generations before the writing of the Formula of Concord, were by their very nature inimical to the common simple way of Christian life according to God's unchanging commandments. He wrote (AE 41:124-125):

[W]hen a weak Christian hears or sees a holy hermit or monk leading a *special kind of life*, more austere than that of *the ancient, ordinary Christian way and vocation*, he stumbles over this and supposes that the life of all the ancient Christians was nothing, or even worldly and dangerous, in comparison with that of this new saint. That gave rise to the abomination throughout the world of a Christian burgher or peasant who believes in Christ with a true and pure faith and

practices the genuine, ancient good works commanded by God in Holy Scripture – such as humility, gentleness, patience, chastity, charity, and faithfulness toward his neighbor, industry, and application to his work, office, calling, and station – thinking such a man a true old saint and Christian, whereas he himself is a stench and a cipher compared to the new saint with his special garb, food, fasting, bed, mien, and other similar new good works, who is a conceited, ambitious, angry, impatient, hateful, lustful, presumptuous, false Christian. St. Paul himself calls such people arrogant and egotistic saints who choose a new mode of life for themselves and a new way of serving God not commanded by God, over and above the Christian church’s old, true, common way of life and service to God, ordained and commanded by him.

Ultimately, as will be shown below, such special, prideful works chosen against and beyond the humble “old, true, common way of life ... ordained and commanded” by God in the Ten Commandments, will destroy Christian love and thereby, as seen, the Christian church’s unity in the truth of God’s word. The terminology of choice, which Luther and the Lutheran Confessions employed in this context for a clearly bad practice, demonstrates once again why the *Theses’* original choice of language (“considerable freedom in choosing...,” thesis II)³¹ is not appropriate.

Law, Liturgy, and Life: Christian Discipline

In the Lutheran Confessions, then, we see how the biblical realism of the Lutheran approach to worship that was discussed earlier in this section is part and parcel of the biblical realism of this approach to the Christian life in general. What is also interesting for the discussion at hand is that the concluding paragraph of article six of the Solid Declaration states that the false doctrine summarized in SD VI, 2 (quoted above) is condemned “as pernicious and contrary to *Christian discipline* and true godliness.”

The promotion of discipline, however, is also part of the purpose of godly ceremonies, according to the Lutheran Confessions. Pertinent texts have been quoted in the *Theses* (II.A, V.B, and VI),³² e.g., Ap. VII/VIII, 33 and SD X, 9. Yet what was missing there was further explanation of what might be meant by that term that has become uncommon today in churches that speak much of (making) disciples and even “discipling” but never seem to get quite around to talking about the promotion of Christian discipline by God’s moral law and the order of Christian worship.

Luther, however, clearly recognized this functional identity of the unchanging law of God and the changing order of Christian worship. We only need to recall Luther’s terminology of “iron bars” for the ceremonies of Christian worship that was explained and defended above. Here we want to offer another text from Luther that was quoted in TUFOTG, p. 65-66 (AE 41:131):

Tenth, a council has the power to institute some ceremonies, provided, first, that they do not strengthen the bishops’ tyranny; second, that they are useful and profitable to the people and show fine, orderly discipline and conduct ... as St. Paul says, I Corinthians 14 [40], “All things should be done decently and in order.” Such items do not serve the bishops’ tyranny, but only the people’s need, profit, and order. In summary, these must and cannot be dispensed with if the church is to survive.

But if someone is occasionally hindered by some emergency, sickness, or whatever it may be from observing this, it need not be sin. For it is done for his benefit and not for the bishops’. If he is a Christian, he thereby will not harm himself. What difference does it make to God if someone does not want to belong to such a group or participate in this way? Everyone will find out for himself. In summary, he who is a Christian is not bound to such order; he would rather do it than let it go if he is not forced into it. Here, therefore, no law can be laid down for him; he would want to do and would prefer to do more than such a law demands. But he who haughtily, proudly, and wilfully [sic] despises it – let him go his way, for such a person will also despise a higher law, be it divine or human.

³¹ The complete text of this thesis reads: “II. The Scriptures and Confessions give the people of God considerable freedom in choosing those forms, rites, and ceremonies that aid the worship of God.”

³² Thesis II.A asserted: “A. Neither the Scriptures nor the Confessions prescribe forms, rites or ceremonies for worship.” In Thesis V.B one reads: “B. Forms of true worship help to preserve order.” Thesis VI, finally, asserts: “VI. Uniformity in forms, rites and ceremonies while desirable, is not essential to the unity of the Church.”

The quote is taken from Luther's writing on the nature of the church in which he also discusses the powers of a council, that is, of an assembly of representatives of local congregations. Before penning the paragraphs just quoted, he, as also reprinted in TUFOTG, had clearly stated that a council does not have the power to adopt ceremonies that are on the same level as God's law, reaching into man's conscience, so that their breaking would be sin (cf. AE 41:130). And while he does not take any of this back in the above quote, he does point out that the same Christian, who – because “[h]ere ... no law can be laid down for him” – may *occasionally* (due to *force majeure*, as it were, i.e., due to some insurmountable hindrance beyond the control of the Christian) not observe such ceremonies without sinning, *normally* “would want to do and would prefer to do more than such a law demands.”

A Christian, in other words, gladly abides by the common orders of worship that have been jointly adopted by a church council – not because he believes in their performance for his salvation (justification), but because he (insofar as he has been renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit) voluntarily submits to them out of love, for the benefit of himself and his neighbor (sanctification).

The Christian who humbly and meekly and willingly submits to these orders is sharply contrasted to the person who proudly refuses to abide by them out of principle, not merely when he is unfortunately forced to do so. That person will then stubbornly go his own ways when it comes to worship, which is really counter to its communal nature, as Luther likened it to a common wedding banquet in the writing at hand (cf. AE 41:173-174). Such a person, Luther wrote significantly, “will also despise a higher law, be it divine or human.”

The ceremonies of the worship service, jointly and freely adopted by congregations already united by their confession of the faith, thus serve to discipline man in that they contribute to make him more disposed toward abiding by the laws he must obey, God's and the state's. They function like the law, as “iron bars” that train and restrain, especially for those new to the faith, as was shown above. The fact that their joint observation is *voluntary* evidently does not mean that such observation is *optional* for those seeking to be or become Christians.

The reason why we address this powerful text here is that in this 1539 treatise Luther also addressed the issue of antinomianism that had come up two years earlier in the sermons of John Agricola. Luther accused his antinomian opponents of being mere “Easter preachers” as they focused merely on the forgiveness of sins by Christ without also teaching the actual ceasing of sins granted by the Holy Spirit at work through the means of grace, which results in increasing holiness in the Christian. In Luther's terminology, “Easter preachers” also need to be “Pentecost preachers” (cf. AE 41:113-115). In that the antinomians denied that a Christian needs to lead a new life according to the Ten Commandments, a life of becoming more and more “gentle, patient, and meek,” they also denied baptism (cf. SC IV, 10-14; LC IV, 64-73).

In other words, we consider it to be significant that Luther, in the same writing that addressed antinomianism, also spoke about worship in the way he did. To state it again, the laws of God and man and the orders of worship have the same function and purpose, namely, the promotion of (Christian) discipline among people who are not fully renewed yet.

Heavenly Worship: Love as the Freedom of the Spirit and Freedom as Servitude of Love

When studying what Scripture has to say about our worship in heaven, one thing stands out in the context of our current discussion: Even the heavenly worship, when we will be perfectly renewed, does not seem to be characterized by the kind of “freedom of choice” that is demanded and justified today at the expense of uniformity and, therefore, love. It is also not individualistic in nature. Such is the nature of the perfect love of the fully renewed Christian for his heavenly neighbors that he, even when this will be no longer necessary to protect their faith (for faith will have given way to sight), will still gather together with them in one big joint worship service or wedding feast (cf. Luther's above terminology with Matth. 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Rev. 19:7, 9) around the throne of the Lamb to sing his praises forever. In other words, when we will be perfectly renewed, we will no longer even desire such freedom of choice.

This tells us that the demand of freedom to do away with humbly serving one's neighbor by observing the same ceremonies he observes – even when this is disguised as the demand for a “responsible use” of such freedom – is certainly not a demand of the new man in the Christian. It is a demand of the old Adam. As such, it should not be justified and promoted in the Christian church. It should be resisted and overcome, and born in patience where it cannot be overcome – until that Day when the Spirit's fire of love will have finally and fully consumed it.

Then the chief fruit of the Lord's humble Supper – humble, selfless love – will have reached full maturity (cf. AE 36:352-354). Then finally the true nature of Christian love will be recognized as what it truly has always been, namely, “the freedom of the Spirit” (AE 29:41-42). Then also the true nature of Christian freedom will finally be recognized as what it truly has always been, namely, “a servitude of love” (AE 27:347).

Conclusion: Faith and Love, Justification and Sanctification

The Doctrine of Justification as the Core of Christian Doctrine

Repeatedly Luther spoke of the doctrine of justification as the doctrine by which the church stands and fall: If it is kept pure, then all will be well and Christendom will remain united. In his 1530 exposition of Ps. 117, Luther wrote (AE 14:36):

My main reason [for treating scripture in a fourfold way based on 1 Cor. 14:6] is to move and instruct all who need it, *to search out and deal with the core of our Christian doctrine, wherever it may be found throughout the Bible. And the core is this: that without any merit, as a gift of God's pure grace in Christ, we attain righteousness, life, and salvation, and that there is no other way or path, no other means or effort, that can help us to attain it.*

A few years later, Luther would incorporate this notion into the Smalcald Articles, concluding their article on Christ and faith as follows (II, I, 5):

Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. ... *On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory.*

Clearly, the fact that this doctrine is the “core” or the foundation does not mean that it is the only doctrine the church teaches, or even that it is the only teaching necessary to achieve the church’s unity. This fact rather presupposes that there are also other teachings and practices, just that these must be taught and practiced so as to be in agreement with the central article of the faith. In what follows we want to demonstrate what this means for the question of Christian worship and thereby conclude this reply to both *Theses* and various responses to TUFOTG.

Faith and Love in Luther and the Lutheran Confessions

In his seminal 1520 treatise on Christian liberty, to which we have referred frequently already, Martin Luther wrote (AE 31:372-373):

Our faith in Christ does not free us from works but from false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works. Faith redeems, corrects, and preserves our consciences so that we know that righteousness does not consist in works, although works neither can nor ought to be wanting; just as we cannot be without food and drink and all the works of this mortal body, yet our righteousness is not in them, but in faith; and yet those works of the body are not to be despised or neglected on that account.

It is worth remembering that it was in this treatise that Luther called ceremonies “iron bars,” used to train and restrain those new to the faith from rushing headlong into sin (cf. AE 31:375). It was also in this writing that he wrote (AE 31:372): “As a man is not righteous because he keeps and clings to the works and forms of the ceremonies, so also will a man not be counted righteous merely because he neglects and despises them.” The proper understanding and use of ceremonies – and works of love in general – is gained by the proper understanding of how man is justified before God.

The Lutheran Confessions take up this theme, clearly distinguishing faith and love when it comes to the sinner’s justification before God, while also not separating the two in an antinomian manner when it comes to the sanctification of those justified. We cite just one example (Ap. IV, 189-193):

Good works should be done because God has commanded them and in order to exercise our faith, to give testimony, and to render thanks. For these reasons good works must necessarily be done. They take place in a flesh that is partly unregenerate and hinders what the Holy Spirit motivates, fouling it with its impurity. Because of faith they are nevertheless holy and divine works, sacrifices, and the reign of

Christ, whereby he shows his rule before the world. For in these works he sanctifies hearts and suppresses the devil. And in order to keep the Gospel among men, he visibly pits the witness of the saints against the rule of the devil; in our weakness he displays his strength. The dangers, labors, and sermons of the apostle Paul, Athanasius, Augustine, and other teachers of the church are holy works, true sacrifices acceptable to God, battles by which Christ restrained the devil and drove him away from the believers. David's labors in waging war and in governing the state are *holy works, true sacrifices, battles of God to defend the people who had God's Word against the devil, that the knowledge of God might not perish utterly from the earth.*

We feel the same way about every work done in the most humble occupation and in private life. Through these works Christ shows his victory over the devil, just as the distribution of alms by the Corinthians was a holy work (1 Cor. 16:1), a sacrifice, and a *battle of Christ against the devil*, who is determined that nothing happen to the praise of God. *To disparage works like the confession of doctrine, afflictions, works of charity, and the mortification of the flesh would be to disparage the outward administration of Christ's rule among men.*

This text is particularly interesting for the topic at hand in that it not only clearly distinguishes between faith and love, between the old Adam and the new man in the Christian, and between justification and sanctification. It also again attributes great importance even to the Christians' humble works of love. They not only serve the neighbor. They not only are the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise of the believers. They are "the outward administration of Christ's rule among men." In other words, by them as secondary causes Christ beats back the devil and displays his victory over the old evil foe. By these works of his Christian people, Christ "keeps the Gospel among men."

To the extent of the renewal of their hearts and minds, effected by the Holy Spirit through the gospel in word and sacraments, Christians cooperate with Christ in the performance of these works, and they do so willingly, not as mindless robots (cf. SD II, 65-70): They, according to the new man in them, delight in God's law, earnestly wish to do it, and daily take up the battle against sin, the world, and the power of the devil.

The Lord's Prayer is the Christians' battle cry: On the one hand, it expresses the Christians' great need as it confesses that what is asked for is not yet fully present among Christians (cf. LC III, 26-34, see also Luther's Brief Exhortation to Confession appended to the Large Catechism, para. 9). On the other hand, it asks God to strengthen the Christians' faith in the gospel and obedience to the Ten Commandments and to remove all that gets in the way of such faith and love, namely, the devil, the world, and our sinful nature (cf. LC III, 1-2).

Shortcomings of the Theses and Various Responses in this Matter

Clearly, then, insisting on faith alone and God's word alone has its proper place in Christian theology, namely, when we speak about the doctrine of justification, about how we are converted, and about what should be normative for the church's faith and life. Accordingly, it has a solid basis in the Lutheran Confessions when the *Theses* as well as the various responses place a strong emphasis on faith, on the fact that the observance of ceremonies can save a sinner as little as the performance of any other good work.

However, as has been pointed out repeatedly already, both the *Theses* and various responses – in keeping with misunderstanding the Lutheran Confessions exclusively as a "response to the aberrations and oppressions of Rome" – fail to give any weight to love in the doctrine on worship and, hence, to the joint creation and uniform observation of orders of worship for the preservation of peace and tranquility in the church and, moreover, for the purity of doctrine and therefore for the unity of the church in the truth.

Even if an exclusive "anti-Rome" reading of the Lutheran Confessions were justified, it should have been noted that the Confessions do spend considerable time and effort to debunk various Catholic polemics against the doctrine of justification as taught by Scripture. In this context (the above-quoted texts from Ap. IV, 189ff. and from Ap. IV, 231ff. are from just this context), they do speak at great lengths about the importance of good works of love in the life of the Christian and of the church. Since the

worship service is also part of the life of the Christian, it is addressed under the head of sacrifice and love, not just in the category of faith.

The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone Does not Abrogate but Distinguishes Sacrifices

The quote from Luther's exposition of the shortest psalm in the bible given above is particularly important for the topic of worship. For Ps. 117:1 (NKJV) reads: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" Consequently, Luther wrote (AE 14:32):

The psalmist admonishes and instructs us how to serve the Lord. He urges us to give praise and thanks. Since of ourselves we are nothing but have everything from God, it is easy to see that we can give Him nothing; neither can we repay Him for His grace. He demands nothing from us. The only thing left, therefore, is for us to praise and thank Him. First we must recognize in our hearts and believe that we receive everything from Him and that He is our God. Then out with it, and freely and openly confess this before the world – preach, praise, glorify, and give thanks! This is the real and only worship of God, the true office of the priest, and the finest, most acceptable offering – as St. Peter says (1 Peter 2:9): "You are a royal priesthood, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Faith in God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17-18, First Commandment) leads to love and praise of God (Second Commandment), which is here described as "the real and only worship of God" and explained properly in terms of the spiritual priesthood and sacrifices of all believers (cf. also AE 31: 335).

Clearly, then, being justified by faith does not end real sacrifices. To the contrary, it makes them first happen. It furthermore also allows them to be properly distinguished from false sacrifices, that is, from sacrifices that are offered with the wrong idea of appeasing God by them. Luther explained it this way in the context (AE 14:33):

This offering of praise, this thank offering, fulfills all that is meant by worship and service in the Old Testament, and we no longer need them. This psalm requires of the heathen no other offering to God than to praise and thank Him, confessing and preaching God's grace and faithfulness. Yes, even the offerings of the Old Testament were nothing; they were condemned and cursed if they were made with the intention of serving God with them in the sense of giving Him something through the offering or work. ... Since, however, [the Israelites] would not give up their sacrificing, God thoroughly destroyed them and instituted throughout the world the true sacrifice, the offering of praise, as He says in this psalm and in Mal. 1:10-11: "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hands. For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name is great among the heathen, and in every place incense is offered to My name and a pure offering." This is the offering of thanks, when by preaching and confession in all the world the name of the Lord is magnified and glorified. To make His name great is the fine, pure offering of which the psalmist is speaking here.

Sacrifices are condemned, not as such, but if and when they are made with the intention "of giving Him something through the offering or work." Due to the heart's unbelief, even a sacrifice to the one true God then becomes the worst kind of idolatry, as Luther explains in the Large Catechism (I, 22-23), as it is the unwillingness to receive anything from God – even though, as Luther pointed out in the previous quote, in reality "of ourselves we are nothing but have everything from God." This is how the doctrine of justification by faith teaches the distinction between true and false sacrifices, just as justification by faith alone first brings about true sacrifices.

What is also remarkable about this quote is that Luther here, in 1530, references Mal. 1:10-11, according to which the "true sacrifice" and the "pure offering" is "the offering of thanks." And that this thank offering is the "preaching and confession" of "the name of the Lord." The 1531 Apology of the Augsburg Confession not only references these two verses, but also counts preaching the gospel as well as the reception of the Lord's Supper among the sacrifices of thanksgiving offered by Christians to God (cf. Ap. XXIV, 31-33). This has been pointed out above already in section 4. We just wanted to restate it here in the context of the concluding discussion of the doctrine of justification by faith.

The Practical Benefit of the Doctrine of Justification for Hymns and Human Ceremonies

What this means for the concrete humanly devised ceremonies and hymns used in worship is quite in keeping with what had been stated in the *Theses* concerning the teaching function of the liturgy, even though, due to their exclusive focus on faith, it could not be made explicit there. It means, first of all, that Lutheran services, due to their dual focus on faith and love, are “praise services” by their very nature. No prior “retooling” according to non-denominational precepts is necessary. Secondly, it means that Lutheran services are therefore what could be called praise services in the indicative. They not only demand that God be praised by featuring songs and ceremonies that contain nothing but the imperative: “Praise the Lord!” or, in Hebrew, “Hallelujah!” as important as this is as a restatement of the Second Commandment. They also actually praise God by proclaiming and confessing God’s great gospel deeds in word and sacrament.

Because these gospel hymns and ceremonies actually provide spiritual nourishment to those present – by delivering salvation and thereby creating faith in Christ – and because they do so according to the manner of the ceremonies of the gospel instituted by Christ himself, they need not give much to the body, e.g., in terms of a powerful direct emotional impact resulting in bodily enthusiasm achieved by tapping into natural man’s natural tastes and predilections. Their indicative nature allows them to be also of a humble nature.

This is quite analogous to the Lord’s Supper itself: it does not nourish the body by offering a wholesome meal, but feeds the soul by offering Christ’s body and blood under simple bread and wine. In other words, they do not need to fill the spiritual void left by an exclusive focus on the law – even if it is the Second Commandment: Praise the Lord! – by an overwhelming emotional or bodily appeal to the old Adam.

The Doctrine of Justification, Worship, and the Preservation of Christian Unity

Also from Luther’s work on Ps. 117 is this comment on the doctrine of justification by faith (AE 14:37):

If this one teaching stands in its purity, then Christendom will also remain pure and good, undivided and unseparated; for this alone, and nothing else, makes and maintains Christendom. Everything else may be brilliantly counterfeited by false Christians and hypocrites; but where this falls, it is impossible to ward off any error or sectarian spirit.

What Luther was driving at here, especially in view of worship, is exemplified by his observation that once the doctrine of justification by faith is replaced by a belief in justification by good works, laws and orders of service will proliferate, each one promising to be the one that truly gets the job of appeasing God done, whereas faith makes one content with the one simple law and order given by Christ, the Lord’s Supper.

In fact, as Luther summarized his own reading of church history, if one believes in ceremonial justification (for which the constant tweaking of orders of service towards ever greater sensory impact can be an indicator) one will also love and cherish one’s own order of worship at the expense of one’s love for one’s neighbor. Works righteousness, therefore, leads not only to undue growth in the number of orders of service that are increasingly appealing to the old Adam. Yet by appealing to the old Adam, who cannot ultimately live in peace with anybody because he ultimately will not be subservient to anybody and must therefore cling to those orders of worship devised by himself (cf. only Gal. 5:15, 19-21), it will also lead to the destruction of Christian love, which, as seen above, will lead to the destruction of the unity of the church in the faith.

Luther wrote in the opening paragraphs of his 1520 writing on the Lord’s Supper we already referenced in the opening section of this apology (AE 35:79-81):

1. *Experience, all chronicles, and the Holy Scriptures as well, teach us this truth: the less law, the more justice; the fewer commandments, the more good works. No well-regulated community ever existed long, if at all, where there were many laws. ... all the laws cannot make one really righteous without the grace of God. Instead they inevitably produce only Pharisees, hypocrites, pretenders, and haughty saints, such as have their reward here [Matt. 6:2] and never please God.*

2. Another result of many laws is that *many sects and divisions in the congregations arise from them. One adopts this way, another that, and there grows up in each man a false, secret love for his own sect, and a hatred, or at least a contempt for and a disregard of the other sects. Thus brotherly, free, and mutual love perishes and selfish love prevails. ...*

So we observe today that through the [canon] law very little justice and righteousness have arisen in Christendom. ... *And they daily devise new ways and methods (as they think) of serving God, until it has come to this, that priests, monks, and laity have become more hostile toward each other than Turks and Christians. Yes, there are deadly enemies among the priests and among the monks. They wrangle about their self-contrived ways and methods like fools and madmen, not only to the hindrance, but also to the very destruction of Christian love and unity. Each one clings to his sect and despises the others; and they regard the laymen as though they were no Christians at all. This lamentable condition is only a result of the laws.*

3. *Christ, in order to prepare for himself an acceptable and beloved people, which should be bound together in unity through love, abolished the whole law of Moses. And that he might not give further occasion for divisions and sects, he appointed in return but one law or order for his entire people, and that was the holy mass.*

Luther stated a few sentences later in the same treatise (AE 35:81):

When Christ himself first instituted this sacrament and held the first mass, there was no tonsure, no chasuble, no singing, no pageantry, but only thanksgiving to God and the use of the sacrament. According to this same simplicity the apostles and all Christians for a long time held mass, until there arose the various forms and additions, by which the Romans held mass one way, the Greeks another. And now it has finally come to this: the chief thing in the mass has been forgotten, and nothing is remembered except the additions of men!

4. *Now the nearer our masses are to the first mass of Christ, the better they undoubtedly are; and the further from Christ's mass, the more dangerous. For that reason we may not boast of ourselves, over against the Russians or the Greeks, that we alone celebrate mass properly, any more than a priest who wears a red chasuble may boast over against him who wears one of white or black. For such external additions or differences may by their dissimilarity produce sects and dissension, but they can never make the mass better. Although I neither wish nor am able to displace or discard such additions, still, because such pompous forms are perilous, we must never permit ourselves to be led away by them from the simple institution of Christ and from the right use of the mass.*

As already observed earlier, diversification in worship is not a good thing, in Luther's view. Based on this quote, it could be said to be a direct result of forgetting the core of Christian doctrine, justification by faith alone, and the means of grace. Therefore, the ancient uniformity of the rites which was also in conformity with the simplicity of the rite of the Supper instituted by Christ appears to please him most.

It could then be said that the doctrine of justification by faith alone turns sinners away from justifying themselves by ever more spectacular, dazzling (but *highly diverse and hence divisive*) ceremonies that are in conflict with the humble ceremonies of the gospel instituted by Christ on the levels of both content and form. At the same time, it centers them in the simple rites of Christ themselves: Through them alone, Christ distributes his saving grace. Therefore, the Christian cherishes them above all else and desires that all human additions to these be not in conflict with those rites as to both their content and form.

Moreover, due to the all too real dangers of sects resulting from differences in the humanly added ceremonies, love born of faith will constrain the Christian, as demonstrated above, to forgo the use of his freedom and observe simple and uniform ceremonies to serve his neighbor in love's humility. This is in keeping with the ways of Christian love in general, as was pointed out in TUFOTG (p. 95-96). For such love, as shown above, will also constrain the Christian to serve the neighbor humbly by performing the simple, common old good works commanded by God's Ten Commandments instead of choosing special newer, seemingly better and "holier" works for himself which *do not serve, but humble the neighbor* (cf. LC I, 311-318; AE 41:124-130, 131, 173-174).

It is in this concrete way, then, that the doctrine of justification by faith provides a fundamental contribution to Christian unity, namely, by teaching genuine faith begetting selfless love. Clearly, this

seems to be more than the “sincere” but ultimately vague “desire” expressed by some for “greater unity in our beloved Synod through a clear understanding of the highest expression of worship as faith.”

Summary of *Christian Worship: Apology of The Unchanging Forms of the Gospel in Theses*

1. Christian worship – that is, worship after man’s fall into sin and after the giving of the promise of the Savior in Gen. 3:15 – is fundamentally rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. For every Christian activity, in order to be truly pleasing to God despite man’s sinfulness, must flow from faith in this gospel.
3. Such faith is created by this gospel itself.
4. In that this faith rightly acknowledges God as truthful and Savior, and thus lets God be God, it is the highest worship (First Commandment).
5. Genuine faith is active in love of God and neighbor.
6. Praying to God as well as praising and thanking God in worship, as well as studying and following his Word, are the chief works of love of God after faith itself (Second and Third Commandments).
7. Serving the neighbor in one’s vocations according to the remaining Ten Commandments is, because it is a fruit of faith in the gospel, also part of the Christian’s worship and thanksgiving to God.
8. In the age of the New Testament, the gospel has been instituted by Christ in the specific forms, rites, and ceremonies of the NT’s specific ceremonial law, namely, the means of grace: the word, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.
9. The pastoral office has been established by Christ to administer the gospel in these forms also in the public worship service.
10. Administering and partaking of the gospel according to these forms are acts of love which, when proceeding from genuine faith in the gospel, are also acts of worship pleasing to God.
11. When considered as God’s saving work for us, the means of grace take on a “sacramental” meaning.
12. When considered as our serving actions for God and neighbor, the means of grace take on a “sacrificial” meaning.
13. Due to the alone-saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, the only legitimate function for sacrifice in the Christian worship service is to express the Christians’ praise and thanksgiving for their being saved by Christ.
14. The forms, rites, and ceremonies of the gospel have a specific God-given character in that they are not only unchanging but also humble and simple in nature.
15. For they offer God’s almighty grace and power under the simple, humble, weak forms of human words, water, as well as bread and wine.
16. When considered by the old Adam without God’s word, this humility and weakness is despised as utter foolishness.
17. When considered by the new man according to God’s word, this simplicity and weakness is recognized as God’s wisdom and power.
18. The pastoral office shares in this humble form in that it faithfully and simply proclaims the word of the cross in its divinely instituted forms, the means of grace.
19. The humble nature of the gospel and the pastoral office reflects the humility of Christ’s life on earth.
20. While he always possessed all the attributes of his divine nature, he only rarely used them openly.
21. For the most part, he kept them hidden under his servant form.
22. His humble external form as well as the humble external form of the gospel serve the key purpose of his mission: to bring his forgiveness to sinners terrified and humbled by the law.
23. For such sinners need to be approached in a humble, gentle manner lest they be terrified further.
24. After the end of the comprehensive ceremonial law of the OT, Christians are free to add humanly devised ceremonies (“adiaphora”) to the ceremonies of the gospel Christ has established already.
25. Lest these ceremonies contradict the ceremonies of the gospel itself, they must conform to the gospel in both content and form.
26. This means, they need to proclaim the gospel and be humble and simple in nature.
27. By doing so, they agree with the Christian faith (doctrine) and further faith in Christ as the highest worship.
28. By doing so, they also agree with the simplicity of worship in paradise before man’s fall into sin.

29. However, these ceremonies also need to be in agreement with Christian love, the chief fruit of faith and the fulfillment of the law, as one of their chief purposes is to serve the neighbor.
30. These ceremonies will be in agreement with Christian love when they are created and observed jointly by churches sharing the same confession.
31. In that such is the way of humility and service, ceremonies created and observed in this way conform to the humble form of the gospel also by the very way they are created and observed.
32. In that such humility is also in keeping with Christ's humble life of service on earth, they are part and parcel of the Christians' humble way of life and service that puts the needs of the neighbor first.
33. In this way love restrains the freedom that is indeed ours by faith in the gospel.
34. For the Christian is not only by faith a free lord over all things in his relationship to God; he is also by love a most dutiful servant in relation to his neighbor.
35. Such an approach to worship does full justice to the fact that the Christian is both saint and sinner, both new man and old Adam.
36. For the fact that the Christian is not fully renewed in this life makes love, patience and humility necessary, also and especially when it comes to the joint creation and observing of orders of worship.
37. The fact that the Christian is beginning to be renewed in this life by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace makes incipient love, patience, and humility a reality, also and especially when it comes to the joint creation and observing of orders of worship.
38. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone does not result in antinomianism because it does not militate against such humble works of love and service, but only against the belief that such works contribute to man's justification before God.
39. The doctrine of justification, therefore, does not negate the necessity of Christian love for keeping Christian doctrine pure, which exists due to the Christians' ongoing sinfulness.
40. It therefore does not negate the necessity of love for keeping the church united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.
41. For where the purity of doctrine has been lost, there the unity of the church in the truth has been lost.
42. In heaven, when the Christian will be fully renewed, worship will still be corporate and uniform.
43. For then the Spirit will have fully consumed old Adam's desire to be an individual and do his own thing.
44. In that ceremonies of worship traditionally have been observed jointly by those sharing the same confession, ceremonies of both human and divine origin play a role as boundary markers of those communities.
45. Differences and changes in ceremonies therefore always give the impression of a changed and hence different confession.
46. This is why changes in (humanly devised) ceremonies must be theologically warranted lest the wrong impression of theological agreement is given where no such agreement exists.