

# LET SOLEMN AWE POSSESS US

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## **To Know Christ, and the Glory of His Cross, and the Power of His Resurrection**

At the center is the Lamb upon His throne; Who was slain, and yet, behold, He lives.

He is the King of Glory, the one true God in the Flesh. He is the almighty and eternal Son, begotten of the Father from eternity, but now also true Man, conceived and born of the Woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Under Pontius Pilate, He was crucified for our transgressions. But His Father also raised Him from the dead for our justification, and seated Him at His right hand. He lives and reigns to all eternity in His own glorious Body of flesh and blood. In Him, the fullness of God is embodied: His two natures, divine and human, are perfectly and permanently united in His one indivisible Person.

God and Man are perfectly reconciled and permanently united in Him, the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah in One: He is the Seed of Abraham and the Son of David. In this one Lord Jesus Christ, in His Person and His work, the Lion and the Lamb lie down and rise up together, unto everlasting life.

The transcendence and immanence of God are thus resolved and held together in His one Body, crucified and risen. For He is true God, exalted and glorified, and all things are put beneath His feet. But He is also Immanuel, the God who is with us, who is the true Man, who lives and abides in the flesh forever, closer than a brother. For He is not only like us, but He has drawn near to us, and given Himself for us, in order to save us, to make us His own Bride, to wed us to Himself as one flesh and bone, and of one blood, in such a profound and intimate way that even death shall never part us.

He is the New Adam, and we are His New Eve, given life from His wounded side, and given to Him by the Father in peace and love. He is the Husband of one Wife, His Holy Church; and He is the Head of His Body, the household and family of God, in heaven and on earth. He is our Strength and our Song, for He is our Life and Salvation. In Him, the true and only God is very present and at work, revealing and giving Himself to us: in, with, and through His own human nature, His flesh and blood.

Our foremost interest, emphasis, and concern, therefore, in approaching the Divine Liturgy and true spiritual worship, is the Person and work of Christ Jesus. Not only historically, but here and now in the Life of His Church. For He is both the Subject and the Object of the Liturgy and of worship.

That is to say, not only is He what the Liturgy and worship are about; and not only is He the Content of the Divine Liturgy and of Christian worship; but He Himself is the Liturgist (the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament Priesthood with its liturgy), and He is the first and foremost Worshiper of the Father (the true Man, who is the very Image and Likeness of God, who lives in perfect faith and love).

Having come down from the Father in love, He is lifted up and returns to the Father in peace. He has descended from heaven, even into the depths of our sin and death, in order to ascend with us in tow. He is the Apostle of the Father, who is sent to us from the bosom of the Father, in order to make God

known to us. And He is the Author, Perfecter, and High Priest of the Christian faith, who has been sacrificed and slain for us, who ever lives to intercede for us before the Throne of God. He is the one Mediator between God and Man, in whom the Father comes to us and we are brought to the Father.

Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the finish, and He loves them forever. What He has accomplished and completed by His Cross, and manifested in His Resurrection from the dead, He now distributes and bestows by His Gospel: to the ends of the earth, even to the close of the age. His High Priesthood and His Liturgy continue forever. Not only before the Father in heaven, but also in His Church, wherein He is the One who speaks and acts, who does and gives all good things.

### **Therefore, Let Us Celebrate the Feast, for Christ our Passover Has Been Sacrificed for Us**

The Lord Jesus is exceedingly rich in His grace toward us, in coming to us and giving His Gospel to us in multiple ways and means. And He is the One who is speaking and doing and giving all of this:

He preaches repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He baptizes, also, for the forgiveness of sins. He absolves sinners, in order to fulfill His good and gracious will for their salvation. He gathers nations to Himself, by His Word and Holy Spirit, in order to name them with His Name and make them His own people. So does He establish and build His Church, on earth as it is in heaven. And there within His House, at His own Table, He gives His Body and pours out His Blood: for the forgiveness of sins.

Everything within His Church is so arranged for the forgiving of sins and the saving of sinners. That is the Gospel, on which everything depends, as upon the sure and certain Foundation of Christ Jesus. His Gospel of forgiveness is the Life-Breath of His Church, which He breathes into her through all His means of grace. And as she breathes this Holy Gospel, breathing in and breathing out His Peace, she worships Him in Spirit and in Truth by faith in His forgiveness.

As the Gospel is the breath that fills her lungs and gives her life, the Holy Communion is the beating heart of the Church, which enlivens the flesh and blood of all her members with the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus, her Lord. For the disciples who are called and gathered from all the nations by His Gospel, are given to eat and to drink the Passover Lamb in this Meal, and so to become His Israel. Here, then, is the high point and the center of the Divine Liturgy, and of true spiritual worship.

For the Word of God has become Flesh and tabernacles among us. Lo, He is with us always! And the Body of this true Lamb is the Temple of God among men: His Body, crucified and risen, and now given to His people in His Supper, is the Ark of the New Covenant, and the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies made without hands, eternal in the heavens. He is our Anchor behind the Veil, and His Chalice, now poured out for us in the Holy Communion, is the New Testament in His Blood.

The Body and Blood of Christ Jesus — on the Cross and in the Sacrament — are the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary, which God showed to Moses on the Mountain, and which served as the model for the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and so also for the Temple in Jerusalem. No longer the type or the shadow, but now, in Christ Jesus, the reality and the substance have been established. God abides with us in Him, not for condemnation, but for mercy, forgiveness, and life; and so do we dwell with God.

## **“Do This in Remembrance of Me”**

It is with His own Institution of the Holy Supper that our Lord Jesus Christ establishes the Ministry of this Sacrament for the Life of His Church. His divine command, “Do This in remembrance of Me,” is the power and authority by which the pastor acts in the place of Christ; so that each celebration of the Holy Communion, even to the close of the age, is not the pastor’s supper, but the Lord’s Supper.

Therefore, the “remembrance” of Jesus, here, is not simply (nor primarily) our recalling of the past, but it is first of all His own active remembering of us in love, and so also the Father’s remembering of Him on our behalf. And then, for us, it is not only an intellectual and emotional “remembering,” but a bodily receiving and trusting of Christ, who gives Himself bodily to us, by and with His Word.

There, on the Altar, is the Lamb upon His Throne in the midst of His Church on earth. And where He is, there is heaven, and all the company of heaven: The angels and archangels, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, the saints and martyrs of all the ages, are gathered together around Him at the Altar of His Church on earth. For it is there that the crucified and risen Lord Jesus reveals and gives Himself to His disciples in the Breaking of the Bread. Right there is *the Gospel*: in the Flesh.

So it is that everything else — in the Liturgy, in the Church’s worship, and throughout the Christian faith and life — everything else leads to and from this central high point, that is, to Christ Jesus at His Altar, to His Body and His Blood, which are given and poured out for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Catechesis aims, not only at making disciples of Jesus, but at bringing them to His Holy Sacrament, to eat and to drink His Body and His Blood in repentant faith. It brings them to and from the waters of Holy Baptism, to the Altar of the Holy Communion. Not only to begin with, to get them going on the way, but catechesis continues in pastoral care, whereby the Lord our Shepherd leads His lambs and sheep beside the still waters, and through the green pastures, to the Feast at His Table in His House.

The pastoral care of ongoing catechesis and discipleship, which is rooted in the ongoing significance of Holy Baptism, is also continued in the regular practice of Individual Confession and Absolution; so that the baptized faithful are regularly brought to the Holy Communion, by the Spirit through the Gospel, in the holiness, righteousness, and worthiness of faith in the forgiveness of Christ Jesus.

It ought to be noted that pastoral care is the context in which the Sacrament is administered; and that the administration of the Sacrament, itself, is a fundamental aspect and exercise of pastoral care for the Church. The catholic practice of closed Communion also belongs to this context of pastoral care.

Preaching, likewise, always aims at bringing the disciples of Christ Jesus to and from His Supper. Liturgically speaking, the Sermon has for its primary task the bringing of the people from the Lectern to the Altar, from the Word to the Word-made-Flesh, by proclaiming His death “until He comes.” By the same token, the right administration of this Holy Sacrament, in accordance with the Gospel, includes and requires ongoing catechesis and the preaching of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ (which is the preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in His Name). To be specific, the pastoral care that brings people to the Supper, also belongs to the right administration of the Supper.

“Word and Sacrament” is not simply a cliché, nor a “short list” of necessary parts to be performed. Indeed, the means of grace are not “parts” and “pieces” for us to put together like some kind of puzzle, but they are the means by which the Lord Himself lays hold of us in love, and puts us back together. His Word and Sacrament are the heart and soul of the Liturgy, as well as its flesh and blood. For these are His good gifts, and His good works, which He gives and does for us by the Ministry of the Gospel.

As we then live and worship the Lord by faith in His Ministry of the Gospel, by receiving His good gifts at His Altar, our Christian faith and life is characterized by thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), which culminates in the celebration of the Holy Communion: as Christ Himself gave thanks at His Supper. From there, His Cup of Thanksgiving “runneth over” into the Christian life of love within the world.

Love for the neighbor is the fruit of Christ’s Love for the Christian in the Holy Communion. That is the priestly vocation of all the baptized faithful, as they live *to* and *from* the Lord’s Altar, into the world wherever God has stationed them. In the Divine Service, they stand in faith before the Father in Christ, hearing His Word and receiving His Gifts with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. So do they offer up themselves, their bodies and their lives, to serve their neighbors as Christ has served them.

This Divine Service is *the* sacred *Tradition* of the Church — the seat of true catholicity — namely, Christ in His “Word and Sacrament,” as the Lord’s Supper and its administration are *handed over*. For Christ is the Head of His Church, and He is actively present with all of His speaking and doing and giving, within each congregation, wherever He gathers disciples, “in His Name,” by and for the preaching of His Gospel and the administration of His Sacraments in accordance with His Gospel.

It is the Tradition that begins on the night when He is “betrayed,” or, better to say, “handed over.” Judas betrays Him, that is true, but it is the Father, first of all, who hands over His Son to the Cross. And the Son of God hands Himself over: To His voluntary suffering and death, yes, but so also to His Church, to His disciples as the first communicants, and to His Apostles as the first ministers of His Gospel. The Apostles, in turn, hand over the same Lord Jesus Christ to the Church that comes after them, in the preaching of His Cross and Resurrection, and in the distribution of His Body and Blood.

The Divine Service is not a malleable tool in our hands, to be “used” by us to achieve some purpose (no matter how noble, sincere, or well-intentioned the purpose may be). It is, rather, a sacred Tradition of the Lord, to be received from Him, and to be handed over faithfully to His Church, by His grace.

### **That Which I Received from the Lord, I Also Handed Over to You**

In harmony with the handing over of Christ in the Divine Service, there is an associated “culture” of the Church’s other traditions, many of which are truly evangelical and catholic in their character and quality. It is not the case that “anything goes,” nor that everything which has happened in the history of the Church should continue henceforth. Nevertheless, there are those customs, confessions, and ceremonies which have developed in connection with the administration of the Divine Service, and which have arisen in thankful response to the Gospel of Christ, which do in fact continue to serve the Church in subsequent generations, as a common heritage of faith and love, of peace and joy in Christ.

Okay, but, wait. Since Christ is at the center doing everything, *What does it matter what we do?* That is a good and compelling question. For us Lutherans, it is perhaps *the* practical question. We know that good works are necessary, and that sin is still sin, which is contrary to the Word and will of God. But what about that which is *free*, which God has neither commanded nor forbidden (*adiaphora*)? Does it matter, or make any difference at all, whether we do those things or not?

The truth is that we are gathered together into Christ, by the Spirit through the Gospel, to stand before God in peace: to be and to live in the presence of the Father in the righteousness and purity of His beloved Son. In that Holy Sabbath of Christ Jesus, we are not to be “busy” with any “doing” of our own, but we are given to receive what He is doing: to hear what God the Lord is speaking, to eat and drink what He is feeding us, to rest in His forgiveness, and to bask in the presence of the Holy Triune God. It is an active passivity, this true spiritual worship of God, which is faith in the Gospel of Christ.

By contrast, it is the religion of the Law, of fallen natural reason, and of the old man, to suppose that we will somehow worship God with our own doing and giving and sacrificing. It’s not only that we can’t manage it, but that the one true God does not want to be worshiped in that way: He wants to be worshiped by faith in Christ Jesus, which is to say, by the Holy Spirit, in the truth of the Holy Gospel. For the Spirit calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies us through faith in Christ, and also keeps us in Christ Jesus, in union with Him as members of His Body and Bride, the Church. So does our Bridegroom delight in us, and He adorns us, and in this He is glorified! And so it is that, by the Holy Spirit, we worship God the Father in the beautiful righteousness and holiness of the Son.

By the Gospel, our Lord has taken us up into His worship of the Father. That is to say, He takes us up into His own doing, as our merciful and great High Priest in all things pertaining to God. *Not* into His Sacrifice for sin, which is finished and complete, once for all, by which He has reconciled the world to God in Himself. It is a grievous error to suppose that we must take part in that sacrifice, which belongs solely to the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Not only because it is already accomplished, never to be repeated; but especially because only God, the Lord, could remove our sin and reconcile us to Himself. It is His divine prerogative, and His divine glory, that He has redeemed and rescued us, and saved us for Himself, by His grace. So we do not participate in His sacrifice for sin, except by receiving and benefitting from the fruits of His Cross and Passion. That does indeed involve the suffering of repentance, whereby the Lord, by His Word and Spirit, crucifies the old man in us, in order to raise us up with Himself in His Resurrection; and so do we begin to live a new life in Him.

It is thus, by repentant faith in this Gospel of Christ Jesus, that we are taken up into His piety, into His priestly intercessions for the Church and for the world, and into His ongoing sacrifice of thanksgiving. In all of this, we are received by the Father as a sweet-smelling incense, pleasing to God in Christ. “We are caught up in the rapture of Him,” if I may risk such turn of phrase. It is in Christ Jesus that true Man, now also with His holy Bride, really lives in the presence of God, in peace and joy forever. Our Sabbath Rest is not one of inactivity, but an active resting of our hearts and minds, of our bodies and our souls, in the Love of God, which is the very Being of the Holy Trinity: We live and abide in the Spirit of the Father, in His Love for the Son, and in the Love of the Son for His God and Father.

In Christ Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, we worship and adore the Father: with hearts and hands and voices, with our minds, and with our bodies. We “take up the Cup of Salvation and call on the Name of the Lord,” which is to receive and rely upon His good gifts of the Gospel, and to do so with thanksgiving. We pray, praise, and give thanks, by confessing and proclaiming who God is, and what He has said and done. We speak and we sing, in His presence, not only to Him, but also to one another in His Name. We do all of these things in the joyful confidence of Christ, the beloved and well-pleasing Son, in whom we now stand: in whom we have already died by our Baptism into His Cross, and by whose Resurrection we are raised, and our lives are hidden with Him in God. For He remains our merciful and great High Priest, by whose ongoing priestly service we are pleasing and acceptable to God.

Now, then, as members of His Body and His Bride, we love and serve each other, and our neighbors in the world, with the gifts that we have from Him. We forgive, as we are forgiven. We speak and we sing, as our Lord speaks and sings to us by His Spirit through the Gospel. We *hand over* the faith.

Which brings us back to what we do with the freedom God has given us, in our relationships with one another, not only as individual Christians within our own stations in life, but also as congregations of one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Here, for the sake of mutual love and respect, and for the sake of practical logistics, we limit our freedom in order to live and work together in common cause.

So, too, in order to worship together in the faith of the Gospel, in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, we make use of Rubrics, Rites, and Ceremonies, of some kind or another. “Rubrics” are the agreed-upon “rules of conduct,” which are necessary to corporate activity, so that everyone knows what is going on, and everyone knows what to do. “Rites” are the words that are prayed and confessed, whether spoken, chanted, or sung, by the pastor or the congregation, by the choir or the assisting minister. And “Ceremonies” are the movements that are made, the actions that are carried out, the postures that are taken, and the positions that are held, in the course of the Liturgy. Collectively, such Rubrics, Rites, and Ceremonies guide the Church in her coming together before the Lord to worship Him by faith.

We don’t start from scratch, nor operate with a blank slate, nor proceed in a vacuum, with respect to Rubrics, Rites, and Ceremonies. There is no need, nor should we desire, to reinvent the “alphabet” and “language,” the “grammar” and “vocabulary” of the Liturgy. We speak with the pattern of sound words, and we follow the patterns of sound practice, which we have heard and received, observed and learned, from our fathers and mothers in the household and family of faith. We practice the traditions of the churches, since the Gospel did not originate with us.

Some broad and basic examples would include the gathering of the Church on Sunday; the use of a common lectionary; and the following of the Church Year with its Sundays and Seasons, its Festivals and Feasts of Christ. Martin Chemnitz likewise cites the customary ceremonies of Holy Baptism.

Regarding these and other evangelical traditions, which Lutherans have historically retained and practiced, it has sometimes been argued that our Confessions identify these things only as *descriptions* of what they were doing then, but not as *prescriptions* for what we Lutherans should be doing now. There is obviously some truth in that observation, as the Confessions specifically state that human rites and ceremonies do not have to be the same in all times and places; and, in fact, the Lutheran practice

was not identical from one territory to the next, although there was much that was held in common, even across territories, and neighboring territories did make an effort to be in harmony with each other. In any case, what our Confessions *describe* as the practice of “our churches” belongs to our family heritage and culture, which should not be despised, nor lightly cast aside; just as those same godly Christian customs were not despised or cast aside by our Lutheran fathers and mothers, but were in fact gladly received from the Church catholic, and continued in their day, and handed over to us. It is generally more in keeping with the nature of the Gospel to *receive* what has been handed over in this way, than to invent and perform some brand new thing for ourselves. Not always, but generally.

I’ve already mentioned Martin Chemnitz, the great “Second Martin” of the Lutheran Reformation, who deals with the question of traditional rites and ceremonies in several different places, especially within his magisterial *Examination of the Council of Trent*. It is instructive to consider his points.

Against the abuses of Rome, Chemnitz certainly insists that adiaphorous traditions are free, and not to be imposed upon anyone’s conscience, since they are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. Such things have no absolute or necessary value. They may be modified, or set aside; though they should not be despised or manipulated by individuals in isolation from the fellowship of the Church. Positively, they may be received and used to reinforce teaching, and as a confession of divine gifts.

Like Luther before him, Chemnitz notes the dangers and temptations involved in the use of impressive traditions, because people are so easily led astray from the Gospel and attracted to their own works. Nevertheless, the dangers of idolatry, legalism, and works righteousness are not to be found in that which is free, but in the sinful heart of fallen man, which tends either to idolize or to demonize God’s good gifts of creation: Addressing that sinful heart is where care and correction must be focused.

The temptations and the dangers involved in the use of ceremonies are therefore to be guarded against and resisted and avoided, not by a disavowal of ceremonies (as Zwingli and other radicals had done), but by the preaching and teaching and catechesis of the Word of Christ. Once it is clearly expressed and established that human works and ceremonies do not justify before God, they can be used freely in good and positive ways: to confess the faith, to praise God, and to love the neighbor in the world.

Chemnitz notes, in particular, that, within a context of catechesis and pastoral care, traditional rites and ceremonies may also be a kind of catechesis and confession, which honor and highlight the means of grace, and call attention to the gifts of the Gospel. Ceremonies may thus be used for the edification of the Church, by expressing that serious and weighty matters are under way, and that God the Lord is present and active. In this way, Chemnitz summarizes, these adiaphorous traditions can actually help to encourage piety and reverence, decorum and devotion, in the people of God.

### **For Freedom Christ Has Set You Free: Therefore, Stand Fast in Your Freedom**

The right understanding and use of “adiaphora” goes hand-in-hand with the orthodox teaching and confession of the Gospel. That which God has not commanded cannot be required, nor should it be recommended for righteousness before Him. Neither should that which God has not forbidden be decried or rejected, as though it were sinful or contrary to the righteousness of faith in Christ. One sins

against this glorious freedom of the children of God, as Luther writes against Karlstadt, either by demanding what God has not demanded, or else by denying and destroying what God has graciously provided and permitted to faith and love. Either way, legalism violates the liberty of the Gospel.

Luther writes eloquently, and from early on, about the correct use of freedom in love for the “weak” and unlearned, also with specific reference to the use of rites and ceremonies. By the “weak,” he has in mind those who are accustomed to think of such outward rites and ceremonies as necessary. They should be accommodated and dealt with gently, and outward things not abruptly changed on them.

The recognition of freedom is not a flattening of all adiaphora into an undifferentiated mess of neither here nor there. It is broad and evangelically gentle, because it affirms two clearly defined parameters on the basis of the Holy Scriptures: On the one side, what God has commanded, and on the other side, what God has forbidden. Everything in between is “free,” in itself, with respect to God the Lord. That does not make adiaphora suspect, but *ordinary*, belonging not to the Law but to the grace and mercy of God. Across that broad terrain, there are hills and valleys, deserts and gardens, sunshine and rain, evenings and mornings. To everything there is its own season. Context and occasion call for different sorts of behavior and discourse, and freedom allows such “life and conversation” to follow pace.

In faith before God, all things are free, and all things are lawful, for Christ is our righteousness and peace. To deny that freedom is demonic. However, in the world, in relation to the neighbor, all things are not equally beneficial, edifying, or salutary to all times, places, and situations. So, for example, when it comes to the Liturgy, it is not the case that anything goes, even aside from explicit prohibitions in the Holy Scriptures. Excluded from liturgical “adiaphora” are irreverent and frivolous practices.

Various rites and ceremonies may contribute to the catechesis and confession of Christ, when they are received and practiced in continuity with the catholic consensus of the Church, and when they are exercised with care and concern for the contemporary context, conditions, and circumstances. Other practices may distract from and deny the chief and central thing. Freedom thus requires pastoral discernment, discretion, and care. The same freedom likewise allows for and facilitates such care.

Adiaphora ought to be received and used in faith and love, in the confession of Christ and His Gospel, in the service and support of continuity with the past and consistency from one week to the next. For the entire life of the Church, also in the Divine Liturgy, is lived in the faith and love of Christ Jesus.

Above all, faith in Christ will adhere to, and insist upon, that which the Lord has commanded and given by His Word: both the Law and the Gospel, but with the Gospel predominating.

Faith will also rejoice and give thanks for those things which the Lord has given and allowed to His people in the freedom of His good creation. For we proceed with confidence in the authority, power, and sufficiency of Christ and His Gospel; and His Gospel does not confine or restrain us, but sets us free to live before the Lord our God in peace, and to love both God and our neighbor without fear.

It should perhaps be noted, in this connection, that love for the neighbor is *especially* concerned with the gift of the Gospel for the neighbor. It is in continuity with the grace, mercy, and peace of the

Gospel, that Christians also love and serve the neighbor in the needs of this body and life: feeding, clothing, sheltering, and visiting, as opportunity arises. Again, freedom allows room for a lively faith in Christ to express itself, to be embodied and exercised, in love for God and for the neighbor, through the numerous abilities and gifts, time, treasures, and talents, that He has generously distributed among His people in a wide variety of ways. For all the gifts of God's creation are good, and they are not to be despised or demonized, but received with thanksgiving, and sanctified by His Word and prayer.

### **Let Us Offer the Sacrifice of Thanksgiving: The Fruit of Lips that Praise His Holy Name**

At this point, in speaking of love, we have moved from the sacramental to the sacrificial aspect of Christian worship, which is offered in the Spirit and in Truth, inasmuch it is offered by faith in Christ.

Christian sacrifice rises up in repentance and culminates in thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), as previously mentioned; because, when everything is done for us and given to us, by the Lord, as a free gift of His grace, there is nothing else for us to do for Him, or give to Him, but to return thanks. So, too, it is with thanks to God that we love and serve our neighbor in His Name, with His Word, and with good works.

The meet, right, and salutary eucharistic sacrifice comprises faith itself, and the fruits of faith, which is collectively the true spiritual worship of the Holy Triune God. For the worship of faith in the heart is also confessed with the lips, and it is shown forth in our lives. With words and signs and actions, thus, we show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous Light.

Indeed, the true worship of God *by faith* in the Gospel will necessarily manifest itself in Christian conduct and conversation. By faith, we offer up ourselves in heart and mind, in spirit, soul, and body, as a living sacrifice, to the glory of God in Christ.

Though the words and actions will obviously differ, to varying degrees, from one person, pastor, and place, to others, there will also be commonalities rooted in the common "pool" of the Gospel itself. We all drink from the same spiritual Rock, and so it is that the same River of living water that flows from His innermost being also springs up in us, and pours forth the same Spirit in what we say and do.

As we are catechized by Christ, by the preaching and teaching of His Word, so do we pray and confess His Word, speaking back to God, and speaking to each other, as God has spoken to us. In confessing what the Father has spoken to us by His Son, therefore, we call upon His Name with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. This confession of Christ, the fruit of lips that praise His Name, is the foremost fruit of faith, which worships and adores the Father with His own Word, by His own Holy Spirit.

Yet, again, faith and love and thanksgiving are expressed and exercised, not only with holy words, but also with holy bodies. In this paper we are especially concerned with the ways that we comport and move our bodies in the Liturgy, in the presence of God and our neighbor, by which we honor and adore, worship and glorify Christ, and, in so doing, we confess Him to our neighbor. What we do with our bodies belongs to the witness of faith that shows forth His praise. Even the fact that we go up to the House of the Lord, to seek Him in the Temple of His Church, testifies to our faith in Christ Jesus.

Good works of love and the fruits of faith do belong to life in the body. For you are a new creation in Christ Jesus, recreated in the Image of God, and your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you. To affirm that newness, that righteousness and holiness, is not to deny the fallenness and frailties of your flesh, but it is to confess that your body has been redeemed and sanctified by the Lord.

As your body has been baptized; and as your ears have heard the Gospel; and as your lips confess the Gospel; and as you eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus with your mouth, and so receive Him into your body of flesh and blood; so does your body participate in your Christian faith and life, even as it shall be raised up in the glory of Christ in the Resurrection of all flesh. In each and all of these means of grace, your body receives and rejoices in the good gifts of the Gospel, and therefore responds in thanksgiving and praise, in faith and love, in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

In the crucified and risen Body of Christ Jesus, all things are made brand new, including your body and all of creation. For the curse of sin and death has been defeated by His sacrifice upon the Cross, and His own resurrected Body is the Firstfruits of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Everything has already been accomplished, completed, and established forever in Christ Jesus, and it is already given and pledged to you in the Gospel—Word and Sacraments. But, of course, it is not yet seen, nor fully sensed and experienced in this fallen world. Here you bear the Cross, and you live under the Cross. Nevertheless, although it seems to stand in utter contradiction of the Resurrection, and it appears to be the very opposite of who and what God is, yet, the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the mysterious revealing of the hidden Glory of God. We have this treasure in earthen vessels.

When it comes to the Liturgy, outward adornment does not save anyone, nor does it constitute divine glory or life. Even so, it is able to acknowledge, confess, and give thanks for what is hidden from the eyes under the humility of the Cross. So do we craft beautiful crosses, and we make chalices a work of art. I have noticed that a crucifix, in particular, holds a powerful attraction for young children.

What you see is not all that you get, but what you see may speak more than a thousand words could say or express. In other words, there is a place for “the Mystery of the faith,” for the great “Mystery of godliness,” in the celebration of the sacred “Mysteries of God.” Not “mysticism,” mind you, but the genuine Mystery of the Incarnate God, the Crucified and Risen God, who reveals and gives Himself to His people, both body and soul, by the external ways and means of His Cross. This Mystery of Christ is humble and hidden, and yet, it is truly divine and life-giving.

That which Christ our Lord did not assume, He did not redeem. So said the early fathers in confessing the Incarnation of the Son of God. But, in point of fact, the same fathers rightly insisted, the Lord our God has become one with us, of one blood and flesh with us, of the same human nature as we are, with both body and soul. Not only that, but He has also lived through all the stages of human life, from conception in the womb, even to His death upon the Cross. For He became, not simply human, but mortal: He came in the likeness of our fallen flesh, although He had no sins of His own. He was also tempted in every way that we are tempted, save only without sin. Though He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. He grew up as true Man.

Therefore, having assumed the entirety of human nature, human flesh, and human life in both body and soul, and having redeemed humanity in Himself, by His Cross and in His Resurrection from the dead, He also fully engages all of the senses of man, and the body and emotions, as well as the mind and intellect. So it is that, in the celebration of the “Mysteries of God” in the Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper, there is also an ambiance, if you will, an almost intuitive interaction with the means of grace. By that I mean to say that, *along with* the preaching and hearing of the Lord’s Word, there is *also* a non-verbal, non-academic, bodily and emotional participation in the holistic and comprehensive scope of the Gospel of Christ. Not as the source of faith and life, but as an aspect of the faith and life that derive from the Spiritual Food and Drink of Christ, who embraces us in full.

### **The Place on Which You Stand Is Holy Ground**

The Mystery of the Incarnation is the point at which ceremonies are taken up in faith and love, in the freedom of the Gospel, but also with humility in the presence of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. For ceremonies, too, are integral to human life in the body, located in (and moving through) time and space, in relation to other bodies in the world around you.

It is *not* only the “weak” who live and worship in the body with ceremonies. As human beings, of body and soul, redeemed and sanctified by the Body of Christ, by the external Word and Sacraments, Christians live before God and engage one another with ceremonies. To expand upon the simple definition previously given, “Ceremonies” here include the postures and movements of the body, as well as furnishings and vessels, architecture, artwork, and other outward adornments, paraments and vestments, music of all sorts, candles, and all such tangible accouterments.

To begin with, the Lord has commanded a few simple ceremonies that are constitutive of the Divine Service: These divine ceremonies are the gathering of the Church in the Name of Jesus, by and for the preaching of the Gospel; as well as the washing of water with His Word in Holy Baptism; and of course, the celebration of the Holy Communion, which includes the setting apart of bread and wine, blessing and consecrating these elements with the Word of Christ, distributing the same, the Body and Blood of Christ, to His disciples, and the actual eating and drinking of this Meat and Drink indeed.

This handful of ceremonies instituted by God are the requisite *givens* of the Liturgy. Beyond these, other ceremonies are needed, already from a practical standpoint, simply because it is not possible to do what the Lord has commanded without determining other specifics, such as the particular place and time of the Divine Service, and so on and so forth. Although such matters are incidental to the Gospel itself, they do point to the intersection of the Gospel with bodily human life in the world.

In addition to such housekeeping practicalities, the freedom of the Gospel allows for other ceremonies to be used in thanksgiving to God and in caring for His Church. These human ceremonies have no part in justification; they neither constitute nor contribute to righteousness and holiness with God. They may, however, be taken up into the life and love of the redeemed and sanctified *body* of the Christian, in order to serve the confession and piety of a strong and steadfast faith in the Gospel.

We have similar freedom in all of our human relationships and interactions, as within marriage and family. In these contexts, we use a wide variety of ceremonies, some for very practical and pragmatic reasons, and others for the sake of affection and celebration, as ways of rejoicing together in God's good gifts. Marriage itself is established by and depends upon God's Word. And in the confidence of that strong foundation, a husband loves and serves his wife, not only in his heart, but with his words and actions, with big and little gifts and other signs of affection. Customary ceremonies are likewise involved in the celebration of anniversaries and birthdays. Such adiaphora do not make the marriage, but they do contribute to it. So, too, a father doesn't have to hold his babies or hug his older children, but he does so because he loves them, and it means something and makes a difference when he does.

Because ceremonies are integral to human life, and because they are so powerful in their appearance and affect (even if quite simple in themselves), they have often been a point of controversy within the life of the Church on earth. It is nothing new that such things are difficult to discuss dispassionately. Contending over the place and purpose of ceremonies was part of the Reformation from the beginning, vis-à-vis the legalism of Rome on the right and of the Reformed on the left. While Lutherans taught evangelical freedom in human ceremonies, they also recognized the significance of adiaphora, not only for personal piety, but also for public confession. When the fanatics resorted to iconoclasm, Lutherans deliberately chose to preserve the catholic traditions in the freedom of the Gospel. When the papists insisted on the use of certain ceremonies, the Lutherans refused to comply, as a matter of conscience.

At stake in these matters was the Gospel itself, and the freedom of faith in the Gospel, by which alone we are righteous and holy before God. Therefore, Luther's warnings against any reliance on human works and ceremonies must ever be taken seriously. That is the case, in fact, irrespective of which or what kind of ceremonies are used. "High church," "low church," "traditional," or "contemporary," none of us is justified or saved by our particular brand or style of ceremony. Period.

There is more to be said, however, than simply, "Be careful and cautious, and don't attempt to stand before God on ceremony." One can also move beyond the historic context of past controversies, in order to consider the goodness and benefit of ceremonies where consciences are not being bound or twisted about. A case in point is found in Luther's theology of music, which he recognized and received as a good gift of God, as a most excellent part of the Lord's good creation.

Luther's frequent laudatory comments on the beauty and benefits of music provide a fruitful paradigm for a positive use and value of free outward ceremonies. As he wrote, for example, in his preface to the Wittenberg hymnal of 1524, that he "would like to see all the arts, especially music, used in the service of Him who gave and made them" (LW 53:316). Elsewhere, referring to the Renaissance composer, Josquin des Prez (who died in 1521), Luther asserted that "God has preached the Gospel through music, too, as may be seen in Josquin, all of whose compositions flow freely, gently, and cheerfully, are not cramped by rules, and are like the song of the finch" (LW 54:129).

Significantly, Luther embraced music as a blessing in itself, because it belongs to and exemplifies the divine grace and godly good order of Creation, especially in contrast to the chaos and confusion of the devil, sin, and death. From this perspective, Luther perceived that music itself, even apart from any particular text, is able to convey the Gospel, to chase away the devil, and to lift the sorrowing spirit.

These are rather remarkable claims, but they are consistent in Luther's writings, and they were put into practice in the way that his followers approached the making and enjoyment of music in the Church.

As Luther appreciated and encouraged artistic excellence in musical composition and performance, he also knew, and took advantage of the fact, that music offers a tremendous benefit to the Christian faith and life, and to theology. For when it is coupled with the Word of the Gospel, it is a handmaid to the Word, which serves the Word, and supports its proclamation, and carries it to the people, into their hearts and minds. Luther's own German Mass (*Deutsche Messe*) is an especially good example, in which he went to great lengths to match the music to the texts, and to emphasize and underscore the meaning and significance of the texts via the musical intonation. His friend and collaborator, the great Lutheran Kantor, Johann Walter, attests to the great care that Luther took with these matters.

Music not only catechizes Christians with the Word that it bears; it also gives them a vehicle for confessing the Word of the Gospel, to and for each other in the Church, and to and for their neighbors in the world. Parents and children, spouses and siblings, also serve and strengthen one another with the Holy Spirit, by the singing of the Gospel in "Psalms, hymns, and Spiritual songs."

In contrast to Calvin and his followers, who allowed only for the singing of the Scriptures verbatim, Luther advocated the writing of hymns that confess the Holy Scriptures homiletically, that is, in much the same way that a sermon proclaims a text by unfolding it for the congregation. He and others also wrote hymns that carefully set forth and explain the chief parts of the Catechism. Lutheran hymnody is therefore kerygmatic and catechetical: It preaches and teaches the Word of the Lord to the people.

Along with its similarities to preaching, Lutheran hymnody is closely connected to the Liturgy in a numerous variety of ways. It serves and contributes to the ritual and ceremony of the Divine Service, and it is also liturgical in its own character and quality. Precisely in its confession and proclamation of the Word and work of God, it not only serves the people, but it praises and worships the Lord. For Luther, hymnody in particular, and music in general, is chiefly doxological: It glorifies its Maker.

### **Every Knee Shall Bow, and Every Tongue Confess, that Jesus Christ Is Lord**

Similar to music, other ceremonies may also be employed to praise and glorify God, to affirm His grace and goodness, to confess Christ Jesus, crucified and risen, and to give thanks for His Gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Ceremonies are capable of doxology, not because we make them so by our own works or good intentions, but because they belong to the Lord's creation and redemption of our bodies. The very fact that ceremonies, including music, can be used hypocritically — as words, too, can be spoken disingenuously — demonstrates the objective meaning and significance of these external expressions. For there is no hypocrisy or falsehood to be found in doing or saying things that mean nothing, but hypocrisy is present when outwards actions express something contrary to what lies hidden within the heart and mind. The goal, of course, is that we should believe the Word of God with heart and mind, sincerely, and that we should then confess the same in our speaking and ceremonials.

So, then, on the premise that ceremonies do convey meaning and have something to say, let me offer a few basic examples:

To begin with, the Sign of the Cross is a very ancient Christian ceremony, which is also quite simple and straightforward. It was in use as far back as the first century, and it is commended by Luther in both of his Catechisms. It is easily understood, and easily practiced, even by very young children. The Cross, as always, is readily identified with Jesus and His saving work; and the Sign of the Cross is especially connected to Holy Baptism, whereby the Christian has been crucified with Christ.

To make the Sign of the Cross is to call upon the Lord with a silent prayer and confession of the faith. The fact that it is traced upon the body, from the head to the heart, and from side to side, helpfully affirms the Lord's rescue and salvation of the Christian's entire body. It also serves notice to Satan that the baptized child of God belongs to the Seed of the Woman, who by His Cross has crushed the ancient serpent's head. It, too, belongs to that "one little Word" which fells the devil and his minions.

Another very basic, very simple and straightforward ceremony, mentioned throughout Holy Scripture, is bowing, bending the knee, or full bodily prostration. In fact, the very terminology that is taken up and used for "worship," in both Hebrew and Greek, refers to the bending and lowering of the body before the Lord. Thus, for example, when Satan tempts Jesus to bow down and worship him, the Lord Jesus replies with reference to the First Commandment: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." Frequently, several of these terms are combined, thereby emphasizing the point: "Let us *worship* and *bow down*, and *kneel* before the Lord our Maker." Such admonitions are strikingly similar to those that call upon God's people to sing and make music to the Lord.

To bow down and kneel, or to prostrate oneself, is not only the common practice of worshipers on earth, but is the posture of worship in heaven, such as St. John describes in the Book of the Revelation. And, as St. Paul records in his Epistle to the Philippians, so shall every knee in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, bow before the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what worship looks like outwardly, in the body; and that is how the Holy Scriptures depict and describe the inward attitude of fear, love, and trust in the one true God.

Not only in the Bible, but all across the cultures of the world, bowing, kneeling, and prostration are recognized and practiced as significant indications of humility, of honor for a superior, of supplication for mercy, and of adoration, especially for the divine. So it was that Daniel was thrown into the lions' den for kneeling in prayer to the Lord three times a day, whereas Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the blazing fiery furnace for refusing to bow down and worship the golden image. Many of the early Christians, too, were martyred for their similar refusal to bow down and worship, or to offer incense, before the images of Caesar and the gods of Rome.

The First Commandment remains, which permits no other gods before the Lord. He alone is to be worshiped and adored, with all the heart, all the soul, all the mind, and all the strength of man. What, then, of the body? Granted that bowing, kneeling, and prostration are not specifically commanded of the Christian — there is genuine freedom here. Yet, in view of the pervasiveness with which this sort of posture and ceremony is set forth in the Holy Scriptures, one might be inclined to ask: Where is the Word of God to suggest that we should *not* worship and bow down, and kneel before the Lord?

Moving in the other direction, so to speak, there is the lifting up of the heart, the head, and the hands, unto Christ our Savior, as in the ancient “*orans*” position (which is the historic posture of prayer). So, for example, the eucharistic rite exhorts you to “lift up your hearts” (*Sursum Corda*). The Lord Jesus bids you to “lift up your heads,” as your Redemption is drawing near. And St. Paul calls upon the men in every place to “lift up holy hands” in prayer. In each of these ways, we look up to Christ Jesus in faith and hope, especially as we look to Him for mercy and forgiveness in His means of grace.

It is also to be noted that this ancient posture of prayer, with hands uplifted to either side, is not only a bodily indication of petition, receptivity, and hopeful expectation; it is also a form of the Cross, in which the one who prays identifies himself with the great High Priest, who was crucified for us, and yes, who was raised up by God to life again, who ever lives to make intercession for us.

There are also those ceremonies by which the Church and Ministry seek to lift up Christ the Crucified in His means of grace, in the administration of His Gospel. In this, doxology and proclamation again belong together, as we glorify Christ Jesus by setting Him before the world, calling attention to Him, and commending Him to all the nations. Here a high Christology goes hand in hand with a theology of the Cross, as we acknowledge and adore the Son of the Living God, who is hidden in humility.

Broadly speaking, what we have in view in this case are pastoral vestments, church paraments and furnishings, sacred art and iconography, fine vessels of crafted metal for the Holy Communion, altar candles and chancel flowers, bells and choirs and other musical adornments, and also incense. Almost all of these ceremonies are exemplified in Exodus, in the instructions for the Tabernacle, which God revealed to Moses on the holy mountain. They are also referenced, either specifically or in general, among the traditional ceremonies that our Lutheran churches have retained in the Divine Service.

We gladly receive and make use of these customary practices, because they are meet, right, and salutary ways of demonstrating and encouraging reverence and awe in the presence of God. To be sure, the Tabernacle with all of its furnishings, rites, and ceremonies, the priesthood and all the sacrifices of the Old Testament, are now fulfilled in Christ Jesus: The substance has come! But precisely because these things faithfully pointed to Him, and depicted what He would be like, and foretold what He would do and accomplish for the salvation of the world, by grace, so do they helpfully inform the theology and practice of Christian worship. They are appropriate examples, by which the Lord prepared His people in the past to receive the Christ who was to come. Now that He has come, and all things are made brand new, the spiritual life of His Church is not “less” but “more.” Not as the Law, yet to be fulfilled, but as the Gospel already accomplished, for us and for all people, in His own Body of flesh and blood.

There is an edifying place for aesthetics of this kind, and for beauty, not “for its own sake,” but in the joy of faith in God, the Maker and Redeemer of Creation, and in the hope and gladness of His Resurrection from the dead. Not everything has to be practical, pragmatic, productive, or pedagogical, but may simply adorn the good things of God with loveliness. The Lord Himself arrays the flowers of the field with great beauty, though they are here today and gone tomorrow. Like music, the flowers also glorify God and praise their Maker with the beauty that He has given them. So, too, within His Holy Church, beauty and adornment are appropriate; not for the sake of achieving or accomplishing some purpose or some work, but for the sake of honoring God and His gifts and rejoicing in them.

*The place* where you are standing in the Divine Service is *holy ground*, because it is sanctified by the preaching and administration of Christ Jesus. Therefore, let His priests be clothed with righteousness, and let His saints sing for joy; even as His saints and martyrs have washed their robes and made them white in His holy and precious Blood. By the washing of water with His Word, He adorns His Bride with Himself and His own holy vesture, as He is vested in the garments of His great High Priesthood. Likewise, similar vestments cover the men who preach His Word and administer His good gifts of the Gospel, while at the same time adorning the Office which they serve (which is the Office of Christ).

The same rationale can also be applied to each and all of these ceremonies, without denying that all of them are free (*adiaphora*), and that none of them are necessary to faith and life, to righteousness or worship. They are simply good *examples* of fine practices, which, in many cases, may yet be helpful to our confession of the Gospel, by acknowledging and honoring Christ in His means of grace. Some of these have been too lightly let go or laid aside without ample consideration. Whereas others, such as incense (which is so deeply *biblical*), have frankly not been given adequate attention among us.

None of these adiaphorous human ceremonies are of chief importance or concern. They are neither the foundation, nor the heart and center of the Liturgy. They are not decisive, nor are they a goal unto themselves. They do not make us “better Christians.” They rather emerge in glad response to what the Lord is doing and giving by His Ministry of the Gospel. They cast no doubt upon the Gospel, but they delight with joyful confidence in the complete sufficiency and absolute certainty of the Gospel.

The Word of Christ has its own autonomous authority. We add nothing to it, nor can we; neither is it contingent upon us. The Word of Christ does not depend upon our faith and love, but we depend on it. We rely upon the Word, and so we honor it in all that we say and do. By the way that we speak and handle it, by the way that we make use of it, and by the way we act in the presence of the Word, we confess what we believe and thereby catechize the Church with Christ, the Word-made-Flesh.

### **As Moses Lifted Up the Serpent in the Wilderness, So Must the Son of Man Be Lifted Up**

One more particular ceremony, or pair of ceremonies, needs to be considered, because it touches upon a decisive theological point. Here I refer to the Elevation and the Adoration of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. Actually, more time and attention should be given to this topic than this paper can afford, but for now, if nothing else, let us have it on the table for discussion.

The Elevation of the Sacrament occurs after each of the elements is consecrated with the Word of the Lord. Thus, after Christ has spoken, “This Is My Body,” His Body is lifted up by the celebrant at the Altar, in and with the consecrated Bread, in order that all may see it; and all are thus invited to adore the Lord in His Body. In the same way also, after Christ has spoken, “This Is the New Testament in My Blood,” the Chalice is lifted up for all to see, that all may adore the Lord in His Blood.

Luther dealt with questions concerning the Elevation and the Adoration of Christ in the Sacrament throughout his lifetime as a reformer. His attitude and criteria remained consistent, but were applied somewhat differently in the advice that he gave, depending on the particulars of each situation and its immediate context. Bear in mind that he had to confront competing challenges on either side: Roman

sacrificial notions, and the adoration of the Host apart from the Holy Communion, on the one hand; and Zwinglian denials of the Sacrament altogether, on the other hand.

Because of its associations with the Roman sacrificial Mass, Luther was at first inclined to do away with the Elevation. However, several considerations led him to preserve the practice, and to defend it against critics and detractors: First, he wanted to exercise patience and care for the piety of the people, lest they be scandalized by such a dramatic change at the highest point of the Divine Service. Second, he recognized that the Elevation could be understood evangelically, as a commending of the Body of the Christ to the communicants. For this very reason, Luther notably retained the Elevation in both his Latin and German Masses, describing it as a proclamation of Christ in the Sacrament, and as a gracious invitation to eat and to drink His Body and His Blood for the forgiveness of sins.

As a third and final reason for retaining the Elevation, Luther set himself in opposition to Karlstadt and others, who insisted that the practice was contrary to the Gospel and to the Holy Scriptures, and that it therefore had to be abolished. Here, as previously mentioned, Luther insisted on its freedom.

It was not Luther, but his own pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen, who finally did away with the Elevation in Wittenberg (in the late 1530s). He did so while Luther was away, and there are some indications that Luther was unhappy with this change in practice, especially because there were many people who then perceived it to be a capitulation to Zwinglianism. In any case, Luther consistently supported Pastor Bugenhagen, and he did not publicly object to the change in ceremony. Although he mentioned on occasion the possibility of restoring the Elevation to the Liturgy in Wittenberg, that did not happen.

Toward the end of his life, Luther indicated that it would be just as well for the Elevation to be let go from the practice of the churches; not because he was opposed to it, but for the sake of unity among the Lutheran territories, since many of them had already done away with this ceremonial practice.

In considering the Elevation of the Sacrament, it has to be taken into account what a prominent and visible part of the Roman Mass this practice was, and what a volatile issue it became in the context of the Reformation. In that light, it is actually remarkable that the Lutherans kept it at all, and for so long. That this continuation of the practice was not solely as a consolation for the weak, nor simply a matter of polemics against the Zwinglians, is demonstrated by a similar but slightly different practice that developed in some of the Lutheran territories of the Sixteenth Century. In those places, the Body and Blood of Christ were elevated before the people at the Pax Domini, the pastor facing the people with the Host and the Chalice in his hands. Evidently there was also a rite that would sometimes accompany this new ceremony, drawing upon the words of Luther from one of his writings against Karlstadt: "Look, dear Christian, here are the Body and Blood of your Lord Jesus, which He gives to you for the forgiveness of sins." In some cases, this new ceremony was used in addition to the historic Elevation. Both practices were understood as a strong confession of the Body and Blood of Christ.

With or without the Elevation, as far as Luther himself was concerned, and for other Lutherans after him, there still remained the Adoration of Christ in the Sacrament; although this practice became controversial among the Lutherans, mainly after Luther's death, in connection with a receptionist trend in Melancthon and his followers.

The “Adoration,” here, refers specifically to bending the knee (or genuflecting) at the consecration of the Sacrament. That is to say, it is the bodily worship of Christ, the Lord our God, in His Sacrament.

“Receptionism” is the view that Christ is not present in the bread and wine, except in the actual eating and drinking of the elements. This view developed with Melanchthon, and continued after him, on the basis of Aristotelian philosophy (or, rather, on a misunderstanding of Aristotle’s “four cause”). Especially as Melanchthon grew closer to John Calvin, in the years after Luther had died, he and others would make disparaging remarks about “bread worshipers,” referring to those (such as Luther!) who adored the Lord Jesus Christ in His Sacrament.

Luther, in his lifetime, explicitly answered the receptionist position, along with its implications for the celebration of the Sacrament, especially in a couple of letters that he wrote to a Pastor Wolferinus. Therein he indicated that the proper “use” of the Sacrament, in accordance with the Lord’s Institution, begins with the consecration of the elements (with the *Verba Domini*) and continues until everything has been consumed. Within that breadth of “use,” as Luther describes, the bread is the Body of Christ Jesus, and the wine is the Blood of Christ Jesus, exactly as the same Lord Jesus Christ has spoken in the consecration: “This Is My Body,” and “This Is My Blood.” Therefore, we eat and drink *because* the Holy Supper is the Body *given* and the Blood *poured out* for us. Likewise, everything is consumed, in keeping with the Word of Christ: “Eat,” and “Drink.” None of the elements that He has consecrated with His Word should be returned to common usage, nor simply “disposed of.”

The Lutherans of the Sixteenth Century (and well beyond) followed Luther’s lead in this regard, and took these matters quite seriously, as the various Lutheran Church Orders (and several controversies) make plain. In fact, church practices emulated Luther’s “consecrationist” position, in spite of the growing entrenchment of Melanchthon’s “receptionism” in subsequent generations. Regrettably, the Formula of Concord, in its article on the Lord’s Supper, has frequently been interpreted through the filters of those later developments, and has therefore been misunderstood in a “receptionist” manner.

As regards the Adoration, in particular, the Formula of Concord has likewise been misunderstood. On the surface, it would seem as though the Formula rejects this ceremony, when it explicitly disavows the adoration of the bread and wine. However, that particular “antithesis” is actually confessed in response to those (including Melanchthon) who had accused the Lutherans of “bread worship,” as mentioned earlier. The point is made, precisely because Luther himself, and many others, *did* adore the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament, while yet distinguishing His sacred flesh and blood from the creaturely elements of bread and wine, which do of course remain in the Holy Communion.

It is especially clear that the Adoration is actually defended and affirmed, when one compares the Formula of Concord on this point with the corresponding section of the *Examination of the Council of Trent*, by Martin Chemnitz (a primary author of the Formula). For “no one except an Arian heretic can or will deny that Christ Himself, true God and Man, who is truly and essentially present in the Supper when it is rightly used, should be adored in Spirit and in Truth in all places but especially where His community is assembled” (FC/SD VII.126). As Luther had also written in 1544: “*In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is deserving of honor and adoration, the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, proffered, and received both by the worthy and by the unworthy*” (LW 34: 355).

## **When the Son of Man Is Lifted Up, He Will Draw All People to Himself**

Now, then, what does this mean for us? Since the Sixteenth Century, “Receptionism” has become an entrenched problem, and a kind of “commonplace” among many Lutherans, including the Missouri Synod to a large degree; whereas the temptations of the Roman sacrificial Mass are hardly a prevalent danger in modern Lutheran circles. Consequently, not the sacrifice of the Mass, nor Corpus Christi processions, but “Consecrationism” vs. “Receptionism” is a defining issue in our own day. And it is a deeper crisis than one might realize or even imagine. Consecrationism is chiefly a case of reliance on the Word of Christ, whereas Receptionism introduces a human synergism into the Sacrament, and calls into question the objective integrity of the Sacrament prior to and apart from the faith and activity of the recipient. In doing so, Receptionism dethrones the Lord and undermines His Gospel.

Against these developments, as against the Karlstadts and Zwinglians of Luther’s day, the Elevation and the Adoration of Christ in the Sacrament offer a strong affirmation of Christ and His Word: That, when Christ says, “This Is My Body,” and “This Is My Blood,” it is actually so.

The Elevation marks and identifies the high point of the Divine Service, and visually lifts up Christ before the people; whereas the Adoration confesses Him to be the Lord our God. Taken together, these two ceremonies express with the body what St. John the Baptist declared: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Beloved, “He must increase,” and “we must decrease.”

Lutherans gladly “Lift high the Cross, the love of Christ proclaim.” Why should they hesitate to lift high *the Christ* in His Body and His Blood, to the praise and glory of His holy Name? They know of kneeling for confession and for prayer, and for the distribution of the Holy Communion. Why then balk at the Adoration of Christ in the Consecration of His Sacrament? Acolytes “reverence the Altar,” which is meet, right, and salutary, since it is from the Altar that Christ, the Son of God, gives to us His Body and His Blood. So, why not “reverence” the Body and Blood by which the Altar is sanctified?

Aside from the Elevation and the Adoration of Christ in the Sacrament, in any case, it is even more basic to the faithful confession of Christ and His Word, that the elements be handled appropriately, before, during, and after the Consecration. The Lutheran Church Orders of the Sixteenth Century are practically unanimous in specifying these several practices, in particular: Only as many elements should be prepared and set upon the Altar as are reasonably expected to be needed for the distribution. From the Consecration onward, and throughout the distribution, the elements should be handled with utmost care, and the ministers should conduct themselves with devout reverence in the presence of the Lord. If additional elements are required to complete the distribution, they must first be consecrated by the Words of the Lord (*Verba Domini*). And, finally, everything that has been consecrated should also be consumed; or, at the very least, it should reverently be set apart until the next Holy Communion.

## **All Who Believed Were Together and Had All Things in Common**

The Lutherans of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries regulated the practices of the churches within each territory, in the interest of a unified confession of the faith they held in common. We in our day could, and should, learn something from them.

There does not need to be, nor could there be, a “lock-step uniformity” in all ceremonies. However, a unity and harmony and consistency of practice, as belonging to our confession of fellowship in the Gospel, is desirable and would be edifying. That was true at the time of the Reformation, and it is not less so in this modern age of internet communications and rapid mobility!

As Luther and others often cited, it is appropriate that we Christians should have common rites and ceremonies for the administration of the Sacraments, since we have the Sacraments themselves in common. Indeed, we have one Lord, one faith, one Holy Baptism, one God and Father of all. We are called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by one and the same Holy Spirit, and we all partake of one Holy Communion. We are all one Body in Christ Jesus, because we all eat of the one Bread, which is His Body; so do we all drink of the one Cup, which is the New Testament in His Blood. As our fellowship is found in the Sacrament, it is appropriate that our celebration of the Supper be similar.

The regulating of adiaphorous rubrics, rites, and ceremonies within the good order of the Church’s fellowship, within a particular jurisdiction of the Church’s life on earth, is not contrary to the Gospel, but serves the confession and catechesis of the Gospel within the Church’s catholicity of faith and love. Such commonly agreed-upon rubrics, coupled with the supervision of an overseer, or “bishop,” provides for a common practice from place to place, and from week to week, while it also allows room for genuine pastoral care of the Church in each time and place.

This approach to the life of the Church, as a fellowship of congregations in the unity of the faith, is beneficial, not only to the mutual relationships of the congregations with one another, but also to the life of each congregation, and to the relationship of pastors and people within each congregation.

Pastors benefit from the use of what has been received and adopted in common. Especially because it is the case that pastoral piety, in both large and small ways, is never simply personal or private, but is public, “political,” and pedagogical. The people learn from their pastor’s practice. They also pick up on discrepancies between his preaching and his practice (as in his handling of the Sacrament).

Parishioners benefit, too, when pastors use the common rites and ceremonies of the Church, rather than inventing their own practices, or else importing practices from outside of the Lutheran Church. Wilhelm Löhe advised, for example, that a layperson should be able to discern where there is Lutheran doctrine and Lutheran worship, by comparing what the pastor preaches and teaches with the Small Catechism, and by comparing what the pastor says and does in the Divine Service with the rubrics, rites, and ceremonies of the Lutheran Liturgy. In any event, the people of God should not be asked or expected to pray and confess words which they have never seen before, and which they will most likely never see again. How shall they give their “Amen” to such things, without even knowing where they came from? Of course, they listen attentively to the sermon, which they haven’t heard ahead of time; but they are not asked to pray and confess the sermon, nor to give their “Amen” to it, without first being given an adequate opportunity to follow it through and to consider it against the Scriptures.

## **Worthy is Christ, the Lamb Who Was Slain, to Receive All the Worship and Honor and Glory**

In dealing with each other, among and within our congregations, and in approaching the Liturgy, we get our bearings, and chart our course, and take our cues from Christ at the Center: He is the Lamb upon His Throne, the One who was slain, and yet, behold, He lives; Who calls and gathers us to Himself, by the Spirit through the Gospel, in order to make us His own priestly people, and to share with us His own divine, eternal Life in body and in soul. He is the Preacher, the Celebrant, and the Liturgist of the Divine Service; and He is the Husband and Head of His Body and Bride, the Church

As we think very highly of Him, our Savior, so do we think highly of His Church and honor her in word and deed. She is, after all, the Bride of Christ, and she ought to be treated like a Lady. Not only that, but we (especially we pastors) should not take liberties with her, but ought to conduct ourselves with the Church in a manner becoming of gentleman with another Man's Wife.

Make no mistake, the King's royal Bride is truly a Queen, even when she may be outwardly dressed in beggar's rags. But for that very reason, as we are so given the privilege and the opportunity to care for her, to wait upon her needs in this life under the Cross, and to serve and honor her dignity, we shall not deliberately clothe her in rags, but would surely delight to adorn her as the royal Bride that she is.

If we are thus restrained by appropriate decorum and propriety, it is for the sake of the Gospel, which retains its pre-eminence, priority, and predominance. It is for us a matter of self-discipline, in order to give pride of place to the Gospel. It is the Gospel that does and gives everything; because it is the Word and work of Christ, who freely and fully forgives the sins of the world, and who reconciles sinners to the Father. Therefore, the Gospel does not bind or constrain us, but glorifies Christ as our Savior and our God, and comforts terrified consciences with the gift of His Righteousness and Peace.

This Gospel is, and ever shall be, the true adornment and the real beauty of the Church, with which our dear Lord Jesus Christ, our heavenly Bridegroom, graciously covers and clothes us, day by day: within and without, in heart and mind, in spirit, soul, and body.

It is by this grace of God in Christ, by the life that is given to us freely in the Gospel, that we in turn adore Him, confess Him, rejoice in Him, give thanks to Him, and worship Him in faith and love.

As we are called and gathered by the Gospel unto Christ, unto the Lamb upon His Throne, "Let Solemn Awe Possess Us." For we are brought into His presence in the humility of repentance, but so also do we enter His courts with praise, in the joyful confidence of faith. We kneel in awe of His Majesty, and yet, we find that His almighty power is chiefly shown in His tender compassion toward us poor sinners: "The LORD, the LORD, merciful and gracious, patient and long-suffering, abounding in steadfast love, forgiving sin, and not counting trespasses."

Here He has come to us: to open our eyes, our hearts and our minds, our eyes by faith, and finally our mouths; to reveal Himself in the Breaking of the Bread, to feed us with Himself, His Body and His Blood, and to abide in us forever and ever. So do we abide in Him, and with the Father and the Spirit in His Flesh, in that Peace of the Lord which the world cannot give, and we could never have imagined, but He bestows by His Gospel. To Him who loves us, who has freed us from our sins by His Blood, and made us a kingdom of priests to His God and Father: to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.