

Whole Lotta God's Love: The Divine Service and Daily Offices

Since I borrowed the title of this essay from Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love," I originally subtitled it using lyrics from the same. "The Liturgy: Whole Lotta God's Love - Cause you need coolin, baby, and I'm not foolin'! I'm gonna send ya back to schoolin'! Way down inside, honey! The Liturgy . . . 'Cause You NEED it!" While the song is, you know, like totally awesome (and I really mean that!), its theme is base and its lyrics crass. Still, they "speak to me." Though I'd never allow the song in the Divine Service on account of its lyrics and acid-tripping orgasmic interlude, I'll employ it here to make a point. God's people need some coolin' down from our constant heat and passion for the new and novel. Like Israel longing after her well endowed paramours (read Ezek, 23:20), we lust after the forms and patterns of this world. We need to go "back to schoolin'" and learn how the Liturgy really is a whole lotta Christ's love for us, in the proper sense. We need that to go way down inside, honey! And yes, I know what the song is saying! Not in the intended carnal sense of its lyrics, it is nonetheless true in a genuinely spiritual sense that we need this to have its way with us as never before!

We see a world that shows little interest and we wonder what we have to do to attract it. Like an aging rock group who remembers when they filled stadiums, the Church looks at her emptying cathedrals and wonders how she can reinvent herself for a new generation. I get that. I also get that it works to some degree. If you happen to hit on what is hot at the moment; if you give 'em the right hook, they'll bite! We try to do what we can to grow the Church.

The Church's growth, however, does not depend on us.¹ Our Lord says it depends on Him. He will build His Church, promising that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt.

¹ That doesn't mean we aren't involved; we are, as this paper acknowledges. However, there is a line between faithfully being what God has called us to be, and going too far, even for good reasons. On the day David and all the house of Israel went up making merry before the Lord, Uzzah stretched out his hand to steady the Ark when the oxen stumbled (cf. 2 Samuel 6:1-8). The Lord's anger was kindled at that. It is the Lord's to keep things upright.

16:18). He sows His good seed in and through the preaching of Christ crucified and risen. He lets down – not hooks, but His Net – and gathers in His little fishes, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He tends to us through the Word and Sacraments administered in His Church. He feeds His Bride the way a man takes care of His own body. He does this as the Church is gathered together for Christ’s saving Gifts.

While the Lord makes use of all His saints in this, from pastors to parents who raise their children in the Way they should go, to the janitor who empties the trash, we confess that Christ Himself is the Chief “**Liturgist**” or minister in the Church, as Hebrews teaches:

^{ESV} **Hebrews 8:1** We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² a minister (*leitourgos* in the Greek; *the One Whose liturgy or service is ongoing in the Church*) - we have a leitourgos in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

So the New Testament does not speak merely of the works of men when it speaks of the worship of God’s people; rather, it speaks of the work of God Himself. It speaks of baptism as the circumcision done not by human hands but by Christ, when we were buried with Him through baptism into His death and resurrection (Col. 2:11-12). The holy apostle does not deny the use of human hands in baptism but points to the fact that in and through them Christ is the true Minister and Servant. So also, when we hear the pastor’s absolution, we receive it as from God Himself (Small Catechism), trusting that when the pastor forgives, “this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.” When we approach His Table, we approach *Him*, for “Christ is there when His body and blood are there” (Georg von Anhalt, Treasury of Daily Prayer, p. 1180). Thus, Baptism saves (I Peter 3:21), and absolution saves and the Supper saves because Christ Himself saves in and through them. From this, we may even say that the Liturgy saves, for in and through the Gospel purely preached and the Sacraments rightly administered, Christ Himself is the Minister at work.

Whole Lotta God's Love

When we speak about the Liturgy, we are speaking first of Christ's work and love, not ours. Even when addressing the sacrifices of the Old Testament saints, Luther highlights what God is doing over what is being done by faithful men. Luther writes:

It was a great comfort for Adam that, after he had lost Paradise, the tree of life, and the other privileges which were signs of grace, there was given to him another sign of grace, namely, the sacrifices, by which he could perceive that he had not been cast off by God but was still the object of God's concern and regard. . . In the same way the very Word, Baptism, and the Eucharist are our light bearers today, toward which we look as dependable tokens of the sun of grace. We can state with certainty that where the Eucharist, Baptism, and the Word are, there are Christ, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Contrariwise, where these signs of grace are not present, or where they are despised by men, there is not only no grace, but execrable errors follow, and men set up for themselves other forms of worship and other signs.²

Our Lutheran Confessions define the Liturgy not principally as the work of men but as that public service by which the Lord is caring for His people, drawing them near and comforting them with His mercy:

The term "liturgy. . ." does not really mean a sacrifice but a public service. Thus it squares with our position that a minister who consecrates shows forth the body and blood of the Lord to the people, just as a minister who preaches shows forth the gospel to the people, as Paul says (1 Cor. 4:1), "This is how one should regard us, as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the sacraments of God," that is, of the Word and sacraments; and 2 Cor. 5:20, "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Thus the term "liturgy" squares well with the ministry.³

As we consider the introduction of new worship styles and practices, it is helpful to ask what has grown up naturally out of God's loving service in Word and Sacraments, and what has been introduced from the outside? What reflects what God is doing in Holy Baptism, Absolution and the Eucharist, and what reflects a culture "where these signs of grace are not present, or

²Luther, M. (1999, c1958). Vol. 1: Luther's works, vol. 1 : Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5 (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (1:249). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

³Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of Concord*, Apology, XXIV, 80-81.

where they are despised by men”? We further recognize a difference between the Church baptizing a form in light of Christ’s ongoing Service and that same Church letting itself be baptized or formed by the world. When Constantine converted and the Church was able to build structures for the gathering of the saints, the Church did not choose the theater or coliseum as a model. Both were available. Both would have housed and attracted many. Both reflected a culture willing to be gathered around performances and exciting, engaging displays. The Church bypassed these forms, choosing the basilica instead. Not only did that reflect what God had put in place in the Tabernacle, it also confessed that in the liturgy, God brings sinners near, the unworthy and sinful, to hear that they now have fellowship with the One Who declares them “clean,” “forgiven,” “holy to the Lord.” The Church’s posture, prayers and places of worship reflect what it believes. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (What is prayed is what is believed).

She Wore an Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini

When being told that the Church needs to fit into something a little more attractive to the surrounding culture, I often hear people cite Luther, who spoke favorably of using a variety of instruments to celebrate and extol the Gospel. In a Bible Luther presented to the Halle organist Wolfe Heinz in 1541, Luther wrote Ps. 149:1 and the following:

"A new miracle deserves a new song, thanksgiving and preaching... The stringed instruments of the Psalms are to help in singing of this new song; and Wolf Heinz and all pious Christian musicians should let their singing and playing to the praise of the Father of all grace sound forth with joy from their organs and whatever other beloved musical instruments there are recently invented and given by God, of which David nor Solomon, neither Persia, Greece nor Rome knew anything. Amen."⁴

We can certainly add our own “Amen” to what Luther says! At the same time, we ought honestly ask whether he means to suggest a *carte blanche* approach to music in the liturgy. If his words are grounds for asking, “Then why not synthesizers and electric guitars and drums?” are

⁴ What Luther Says, Plass, CPH, 1959, p. 982

they also grounds for asking, “Then why not kazoos and spoons and a DJ scratching a vinyl LP? Why not Seussical styled instruments for a Dr. Seuss liturgy? Why not glasses filled to various depths with water, or a whoopee-cushion performance of the Hallelujah Chorus?”

We do receive all good gifts as coming down from the Father of Lights (James 1:17), even whoopee cushions! This is not about rejecting some things as bad and so unworthy of liturgical usage, nor is it about saying that since something is good it therefore has a place in the Divine Service. It is about making use of all good things in their proper place and time. As St. Paul says, ^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 6:12** “*All things are lawful for me,*” but not all things are helpful.” At least not in every situation!⁵

We are not against guitars, drums, kazoos, or organs. We are not against rock, country, polka, rap or any other form of musical or artistic expression, per se. We are not against dance, but exotic dancing has limited application, to say the least! Lap dancing? For Jesus?! At what point must we draw the line, even if it would bring more people to our churches? Death Metal as a genre may be fine, but is it transferable to the Sunday Service? Is Gangsta Rap? If some prefer what is called liturgical dancing, are polka dancing, clogging and line dancing equally worshipful? Perhaps more so than pole dancing! Then again, maybe not!

If in any of these, Christians can rejoice that God is at work for our joy and edification, does that mean they are appropriate for the Liturgy? We don’t have the luxury of dismissing such inquiries. What shocked parents about Elvis’ hips in the 1950’s seems silly by today’s standards.

⁵ It remains for further inquiry how instruments were used in the liturgies of the Old Testament saints. For instance, while “David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals” (2 Sam. 6:6), is the ark’s festival procession into Jerusalem prescriptive for worship in other venues? The Temple, with its slaughtering and sacrificing, its sprawling courts and colonnade, was not the same as Israel’s synagogues. How did instruments serve in the synagogue as opposed to the Temple? How did the early Church understand Psalms 47 and 150? There is a time for everything, as the Preacher and the Byrds remind us. “A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Eccl. 3:4). How does the Church make such distinctions in her services today? How does modern usage of guitars and drums compare with the ancients’ use of instruments as an aid in the singing of lengthy passages of Scripture?

If our criteria for admitting something into the Service of God's House is that it "speaks" to the current generation or culture, where will we draw our lines? Whole Church bodies now welcome practicing homosexuals. That "speaks" to many, as does women's ordination, open communion and tolerance of premarital sex. If we contend that something is good because it reaches those who would not otherwise be reached, who can legitimately argue against anything tailored to a demographic which would not otherwise find traditional models attractive? Thus, a Dr. Seuss liturgy for kindergarteners, a Klingon liturgy for sci-fi geeks, a yellow-polka-dot bikini service for beach bums, or a cowboy church for those with a Western flare! And sign me up for a church that targets Rastafarians! Bob Marley and bong hits – all in the name of Jesus! *"Let's get together and feel alright!"*

I'm honestly not sure how we avoid the eventuality of such extremes, if we let the world determine how we worship. Elvis' hips are already gyrating, and while even many in the contemporary worship camp may be shocked, to quote Marty McFly, "your kids are gonna love it!" It's only a matter of time! In addition to the Seusscharist offered by Calvary Episcopal Church in Pittsburg, PA, St. George's Episcopal Church in York Harbor, ME also has led the way in efforts to "engage" through "new forms of worship." They offer U2charists featuring the music of U2. "Communion on the Rocks" is available in some churches in England, who describe it as "Holy Communion for the 21st century . . . The Battlestar Gallactica of worship." You can hear the opening riff of Free's "All Right Now" as the introduction to a sung version of the Creed. Another Anglican Church, Trinity Wall Street, conducted a "Clown Eucharist" in an effort to return the liturgical experience to "our gut and heart." St. James Music Press offers a Pirate Eucharist, as a spoof, though I won't be surprised to hear that someone actually has tried it! "P: The Lord be with ye, Mateys! R: Arggh! And with ye too, me Bucko!" I feel the need to

confess! In the pseudo-Seussian words of the Seusscharist (I'm not making this up!). . .

*God, we have wronged you
And we need to say boo-hoo
For the things we did and didn't do
We are not content
we want to repent
One hundred percent*

I Say, Slow – Don't Go So Fast! Don't You Think that Love Can Last?

I realize the above examples have the potential for meaning something to someone. I've given much of contemporary Christian music a look-see and listen to, thanks to YouTube, and admit that it can be upbeat, moving, emotionally engaging. The words are not necessarily bad. They can be very good, in fact, though they tend to be fairly simple, often geared more toward ease of repetition rather than profound theological confession. Still, add some well chosen video or graphics and my YouTube experience can be quite satisfying. I can appreciate why people like many of these songs. However, I find the case to be similar when I watch videos of Led Zeppelin and other classic rock. It moves me, even inspires me. It is not therefore, something I would use in a Divine Service.

I admit that I am sympathetic to those who are asking, "Why not – if it moves you – and if the lyrics are neither heretical nor heterodox?" In return, I would like them to be sympathetic to what the Church has received from God through the ages. We have a liturgy that has grown out of the practices of God's Old Testament Church. The structure of our Divine Service orders our doxology in much the same way God's holy priesthood approached Him in the Tabernacle. We walk in step with our fathers when God brings us near in His Liturgy. We are on holy ground and in holy time.

By His Name, we come boldly before His throne of grace, confessing what is most true of us; that we are sinners. We pass again the laver of His washing as we are cleansed by His

absolution. In faith, we cry, *Kyrie*, knowing that the Lord has mercy. We enter the courts of His Holy Place with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. With the heavenly choir, we sing the *Gloria in Excelsis*. Like Mary, we sit at His feet in the hearing of His Word and are comforted by the preaching of His death, the way Israel was comforted by the rising smoke of the sacrifices that assured her she “had not been cast off by God but was still the object of God’s concern and regard.” We bring our sacrificial gifts. Our prayers rise before Him like incense. As the High Priest entered once a year the Holy of Holies, so we are gathered every Lord’s Day and at other festivals before His Mercy Seat for the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood. With angels, archangels and all the company of heaven, we sing the *Sanctus* and pray the prayer our Savior taught us. Like John the Baptist, we point to Christ in our kneeling, confessing Him the *Agnus Dei*, Who takes away the sin of the world. When He has served us, we who have held Him in our hands and mouth sing the *Nunc Dimittimis*, the song of Simeon who held Him too. Finally, as Aaron placed the Name upon God’s people, we are named again by the Name we were given at our Baptisms, when we first entered the Lord’s Liturgy, that we might bear His Name as a blessing in our daily liturgies of service and love.

I am concerned that many are quick to let go of such a treasure. What the Church has received in her liturgies has stood the test of time. It has come to us through the Tabernacle, Temple and Synagogue, as well as 2,000 years of Christ serving His New Testament people. It has not always looked or sounded as it does now. Even now, a faithful Lutheran liturgy in Kenya or Sri Lanka will differ to some degree with what we do in Brandon, Mississippi. There is room for that, but it will still be the Liturgy. What a people may bring naturally to the Liturgy as part of their folk culture is arguably different from what a people demand because they want the Church to conform to what they have on their iPods! Folk culture and pop culture are not the

same. Folk culture tends toward stability while pop culture tends toward change. The former serves the continuity between generations while the latter celebrates and capitalizes on what is “in” at the moment – I mean, what’s “cool,” I mean what’s “phat,” “rad” – you get the point.

As we let go of the timelessness of the liturgical forms and ceremonies we have inherited in favor of keeping up with a culture that changes as quickly as Lady Gaga’s costumes, I am concerned that we erode our people’s hold on what stays the same. Tragically, I hear that LCMS newcomers to our community sometimes opt for the multi-campus, Willow-Creek/Saddlebrook style mega-congregation up the hill, bypassing Word and Sacraments at the little liturgical Lutheran church near the highway for a place where no infant will be received by God through Holy Baptism, no repentant sinner will hear his pastor absolve him, and no Christian will be served the Body and the Blood of Christ in bread and wine, but at least they have a praise band!

By catering to popular tastes, we can reaffirm a fallen world’s desire for non-essentials. Worse, praise, as a joyful expression, can become almost sacramental and any attempt to evaluate it from a Scriptural or Confessional point will likely come off as a bit of a buzz-kill. That is not to say that joyful expressions have no place. They do! David danced before the Lord in a parade-like procession before the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:15-22). Elizabeth exclaimed and the infant John leapt for joy at the greeting of the Christ-bearing Mother of God (Luke 1:39-44). Likewise, the people strew palm branches and clothing in the way as they shouted before the Lord riding into Jerusalem, lowly and mounted on a donkey (Matt. 21:1-9).

Would that our people spontaneously leapt and danced the next time a baptism is administered or the next time absolution is pronounced or as the pastor brings to our ears the Pax Domini or to our lips the very Body and Blood of Christ in bread and wine! But we should not tailor our services to elicit such expressions or even expect them. Herman Sasse, in his 1927

essay, *American Christianity and the Church*, wrote:

“Worship has been, as we say, ‘developed.’ There must always be something new, and everything must be effective: lighting effect, musical effect, an effective liturgy. I remember a large new Baptist church. The room had only artificial lighting . . . Next to the sanctuary there was a special control room from which the lighting was adjusted. As soon as the preacher knelt to pray, the attendant rotated the great lever on the control board. Darkness filled the church. The desired feelings were literally ‘switched on.’”⁶

Many people likely do want to have their emotions and feelings “switched on” when they come to Church. That’s what makes certain styles popular. People want a spiritual “high.” They want a place where they feel accepted, not judged, not even on the basis of their moral choices or personal belief system. They want to forget their pain. A theology of glory accommodates that; conforms to people’s expectations to feel a certain way. A theology of the cross does not deny that feelings and circumstances need to be addressed and can even be altered, but entrusts that to the Words and Promises of God in Christ Jesus! Accordingly, our Confessions “maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil.”⁷

Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places

A fallen world is not attracted by essential things. It looked on during the days of the early Church and marveled how they loved one another; a fine witness! But what the world missed in that was the Lord’s Liturgy having its way with His people. They held all earthly things in common because they first held all spiritual things in common, devoting “themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

Is apostolic doctrine still our focus? I’m sure most would argue that our doctrine hasn’t changed, but it seems we have lost our confidence in it. Why else do we constantly hear that the world won’t come if we don’t start looking and sounding like it? Our emphasis seems to be less

⁶ The Lonely Way, vol. 1, CPH, 2001, p. 29

⁷ Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The Book of Concord*, Smalcald Articles, VIII.10

on sound theology and practice and more on making the sounds people want to hear.

In a 1538 preface to a collection of hymns on the Passion of Christ, Luther wrote:

Experience testifies that, after the Word of God, music alone deserves to be celebrated as a mistress and queen of the emotions of the human heart . . . By these emotions men are controlled and often swept away as by their lords. A greater praise of music than this we cannot conceive. For if you want to revive the sad, startle the jovial, encourage the despairing, humble the conceited, pacify the raving, mollify the hate-filled . . . what can you find that is more efficacious than music? The Holy Spirit Himself honors it as an instrument of His specific office when He testifies in His Holy Scriptures that His gifts came upon the prophets through its use . . . Not in vain, therefore, do the fathers and the prophets want nothing more intimately linked to the Word of God than music.”⁸

Luther said this long before finger tapped guitar solos and driving rock rhythms. We do not deny but acknowledge what he says, and call for the responsible use of something so powerful. External elements such as chanting, vestments, choirs, towering cathedrals, organ swells, silence, incense, icons, the use of candlelight, even the repetitions of certain prayers, all have the capacity to assist the worshiper toward a desired spiritual posture. Insofar as they remain “handmaidens” to the Gospel rather than a focus in and of themselves, we grant their appropriate usage, especially in keeping with what has served the Church faithfully and without detriment for millennia. However, anything may be abused, and Hezekiah found it necessary to remove the bronze serpent God had previously given Israel when it ceased serving the Gospel but became a focus unto itself (2 Kings 18:4).

When the Corinthians abused the gift of languages in their congregation, St. Paul had to impose parameters, lest a confusing witness be given to those who attend the Services (I Cor. 14:23). Notice that the Apostle does not remove the gift of languages (I Cor. 14:29) but adds to it the discipline of self-constraint to preserve decency and good order, along with interpretation so that all may be edified. May we not draw from this a response to those who argue that the Divine Service and other offices are overly confusing to newcomers and so need to be changed or

⁸ What Luther Says, 3103, pp. 982-983

replaced? Instead of removing the historic liturgies, why not add this: a proper interpretation so that those who are otherwise confused may be edified? And let the whole people of God speak together the same confession regarding these most blessed gifts, as St. Paul says . . .

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 14:24** If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

St. Paul is mindful of the needs of unbelieving visitors, but rather than wanting them caught up in an indefinable emotional or “spiritual” experience, he wants them convicted and brought to repentance and faith by the clear-sounding testimony of God’s people united in the same confession. For that, we do not accommodate the world’s tendency to look for love in all the wrong places, but place before it the Gospel clearly and purely preached and the Sacraments rightly administered.

Love Hurts

I admit to accommodating popular culture in my early years in the ministry. I replaced the Agnus Dei with a recording of a Michael W. Smith song. I choreographed liturgical dance. I told people that if the liturgy was a hindrance to reaching someone with the Gospel, we ought make changes. I wrote my own services, incorporating “praise verses” like “Our God is an Awesome God.” I made use of drama in lieu of preaching.

What happened to me? Amongst other things, I got back into reading the Confessions, which I had neglected. I got more into the Scriptures and the faithful testimony of the Church through the centuries. I worked through some Charismatic leanings I had from my experiences as a college student. I looked more deeply into the Lord’s ongoing and timeless service in His Church and fell in love again. I repented. I grew up.

While love can employ playful methods, God did not give us children for our amusement.

He gave them to us to raise, hard and sometimes hurtful as that may be. In the home, our liturgies may be simply structured; mothers and fathers folding their children's hands in their own and teaching them to pray. In my home, we lit the Advent Wreath and allowed our young daughters to blow out its candles. Every night we had to have devotions because our daughters wanted their turn to puff out the flames! We recited the Small Catechism before dinner and while driving to the store; even when taking bike rides. We found simple cadences by which to make the memorizing of the Catechism a little easier for the girls. We prayed Matins and Vespers with them. We bought them their own hymnals to take to church when they were just beginning to read. They took great delight in being able to join with the saints in singing the Faith.

This is the way the Church raises her children. It begins in the home. It moves us forward into faith and living beyond the home. It moves us into the Liturgy of Christ in His Church, and as we grow, the Lord's Service moves us outward and the world is given the mature in Christ who have learned and are learning repentance and faith, and how to rejoice in service even when it is difficult. The call of genuine Christianity is not *"Girls just want to have fun!"*

I admit to having tried to make worship fun for kids during VBS and in our chapel at school. As I grew as a biological father I also grew as a spiritual one. Now, instead of playing with the children, we teach them, in gentle ways. Daily chapel in our school follows the office of Matins. Most of our children are non-Lutheran and not even baptized. They enter as four year olds and cannot read. I introduce Matins slowly, explaining how the pastor chants something and then the children do. We take baby steps and by Thanksgiving break, the children can sing through the Venite. By Christmas break, they can sing the whole office from memory, though many of the younger ones are still trying to catch the words. From January to the end of the school year, the children get better and better at having their singing and praying formed by

God's Word. At our school closing, it is inevitable that parents express how impressed they are to hear such young voices singing so much from heart!

We could spend our time teaching songs that will be out of style in a few years, or which the kids will outgrow. We choose to raise up the children God gives us in something with more staying power! In addition to teaching them slowly, we make the accommodation of singing hymn verses rather than a changing Psalm each week, for the sake of our non-readers. My wife does not play the organ for Matins, as she needs to sit with her class. We sing acapella. I make a concession to the little ones by sitting off to the side and accompanying them with light guitar strumming as they sing their hymn verses, "The Church's One Foundation," "God Himself is Present," "Jesus Loves Me," and "I am Jesus' Little Lamb." I sit to the side when I do this, as I found if the children can watch me they tend to focus more on the guitar than on singing. In such ways we accommodate their youth while moving 4 through 10 year olds into praying what gives many adult Lutherans the heebie-jeebies!

Why do we do this? In part because the world does not need more self-centered 40 year old spiritual adolescents. It needs the kind of men and women the Church had in her blessed martyrs, who were converted to the Faith and held to it, even to the point of death, despite the demands and attractions of the world. While the Willow Creek model may succeed in appealing to non-Christians or "new Christians," Bill Hybels himself has admitted its failure with regard to mature and growing Christians. Why repeat the mistakes of those who have exchanged the Lord's "signs of grace" for "other forms of worship"? The Lord's liturgy is capable of taking us by the hand and leading us, but it does not resort to cheap tricks. It is not base but neither is it beyond our reach. Like a mother who is mindful of her duty, it takes us by the ears, heart, mind and mouth and lifts us out of childhood and childishness into maturity. It transforms us, as St.

Paul writes in Romans:

^{ESV} **Romans 12:1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

When Our Lord spoke to the crowd who followed Him after He fed the five thousand in John 6, He charged them with following Him for the wrong reason. As He spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, they turned up their noses. It was against their sensibilities. It was a hard saying. They were culturally unprepared for it! Yet, our Lord did not alter the Medicine He was giving. He did not dilute it for their tastes. He did not follow after them, promising to change. In what must surely have been a sad moment for the Lord, He watched them walk away.

Such reminders help me resist my own tendencies to indulge or cater to – at least at the point of the Service of God’s House – a petition I admit I have a certain affinity for: *Give me the beat boys and free my soul I wanna get lost in your rock n' roll - And drift away*

Where Do We Go From Here? Which is the Way That’s Clear?

If I may, let me share some words a young Lutheran who is very dear to me sent in answer to my questions about his participating in a praise band at an LCMS congregation. He writes:

I believe that a praise band is almost a necessity in today’s church. I believe this wholeheartedly not only because I’m in one, but because "new Christians", as I like to say may be somewhat confused or may not understand the traditional hymns that we are used to. "New Christians" are also used to today's secular music. With that being said they are hungry for rock riffs and heavy beats with a Christian message behind them. I also believe that praise bands are necessary for today’s church because people who aren't sure what to believe and are on the verge of being atheist or agnostic NEED to hear really good music with a great message. And as these people who have almost lost their faith or have no faith hear the music, they say, "this is awesome!!!" Then as they are singing the words, they begin to realize that they can relate to those words being sung. Then filled with joy and faith they begin to realize that Faith isn't just a five letter word with a meaning, they begin to feel it in their heart.

I appreciate the passion in this statement. I believe it sums up the reason many have introduced the new forms they have. While I hope we can all commend the desire to reach the lost, I continue to search in vain for where Scripture teaches the Church to conform her worship to the pattern of this world in order to win it. I hear people quote St. Paul, who writes:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 9:20** To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

This does not address the Church altering her worship in order to accommodate those who would otherwise not give her a second glance. It speaks to a willingness to make personal and individual concessions within our Gospel freedom in an effort to reach the lost. So, St. Timothy was circumcised while St. Titus was not. We have no indication from St. Paul's epistles that he said, "If the Greeks are used to a more lively kind of worship in the temples of Dionysus we ought make sure our own style is familiar to them."

How does the Church today maintain a proper distinction from the world while attempting to reach it? What latitude do we have for change? The words of the Introduction to the Lutheran Worship hymnal remind us that the Church, in living from what the Lord gives, is living, breathing, growing. She is not static.

The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him. He gives his gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our Lord gives us his body to eat and his blood to drink. Finally his blessing moves us out into our calling, where his gifts have their fruition. How best to do this we may learn from his Word and from the way his Word has prompted his worship through the centuries. We are heirs of an astonishingly rich tradition. Each generation receives from those who went before and, in making that tradition of the Divine Service its own, adds what best may serve in its own day – the living heritage and something new. (LW, p. 6)

How do we do this responsibly? For myself, as a pastor, I suggest humility. We can all err and do. The saints who went before often fell at the point of what seems trivial. It was just ONE bite after all! Aaron threw in some gold and out came this golden calf! At least he called it “a feast to the Lord” (Ex. 32:5). Moses struck the rock. So? The people still drank! And Nadab and Abihu . . . Why make such a big deal about the blend of incense? (Lev. 10:1-2) If those greater than I fell in little things, who am I to bypass the Church’s liturgies for those I write?

I realize the Lord has not prescribed the form of liturgical ceremony we have in the New Testament Church, nor the style of music. But what we have received has grown up from the Faith Christ once delivered to the saints (Titus 1:3). I would rather keep my prayers in line with that than to take my cues from the popular culture or from those whose worship has grown up around a different confession regarding Baptism, Absolution and the Supper.

It is thankfulness and faith that make me keep the Liturgy in place. “The word liturgy squares well with the ministry.” The Lord’s Liturgy through the Means of Grace is the engagement ring He has placed on the finger of His Bride, the Church. The Lord’s presence and ongoing Gospel Service is the diamond. The order of our rights and ceremonies has arisen as the beautiful setting in which that diamond is conveyed from one generation and place to another. If the world turns up its nose at that, what of it? Christ told us that would happen. He said the world looks for the broad and easy road, and many there are upon it, but the narrow way – His Way – is not populated like it would be if Justin Bieber were truly present instead of just the Body and the Blood of Jesus!

The Church is not a desperate housewife trying to dress like her teenaged daughter to attract the hunk next door! She is the Queen of Heaven in the proper sense. She is the stately Bride and Mother of all the Truly Living, washed by Christ and beautifully adorned. If Mars

needs mothers, the Earth needs no less. She has one in the Church. When the neighbor kids come over, she doesn't change the pattern of behavior she has imparted to her own. Her kids may complain that the other kids "won't play with me unless I do this or that," but Mom explains, "They are in our house now." If they speak Spanish, she speaks that to them. But if they reject her food and manners and make demands, she reminds them where they are.

So, how do we get our house back in order? Repentance is good! So is learning from our fathers. We remember the need for correction at the time of the Saxon Visitation. We recall that the approach expressed in those Articles was truly pastoral, patient and loving. Let the teaching never lag, though the practice may take some while catching up to it. We are not advocating a new slaughter of souls. We are advocating a renewed study of the Scriptures and our Confessions, something that even those in liturgical congregations need, so that we truly receive with joy what we have been entrusted with, and responsibly make it our own.

Is there room for music and instrumentation that reflects a particular culture without displacing the liturgy? Yes, though the proof is in the pudding, and how can you have your pudding if you don't eat your meat?! Obscure rock references aside, what I mean is I don't often find the liturgy sacrificed when it is properly understood and well digested, or where the Confessions are part of a congregation's regular diet. Conversely, I don't often find the liturgy in full when new music styles and practices have been adopted from the world or from non-Lutheran sources. I suspect the reason is that styles and forms arising out of a spiritual culture that does not have the Lord's Word and Sacraments at the center simply don't integrate well with the historic Liturgy. One cannot take what has developed in the void left by the absence of the Lord's serving through Baptism, Absolution and the Eucharist, and expect it to fit in the place of the opening or closing hymn. Something has to give, and usually, it is the historic liturgy, which

may be there in some of its parts, but suffers terribly in our efforts to carve it up and make room for what is new and quite honestly alien to it. If things can be done better, and I believe they can, I am open to seeing them. When we do it right, we won't be trying to be the world's "blue Jean, baby queen."

Teach Your Children Well

The Church has a long history of welcoming new kids into its fold. In Acts 15, we read how the early Church wrestled with the issue of Gentile conversions and those who preached the need for circumcision. The Church resolved that on two fronts. First, the Gospel must not be compromised. Secondly, those new to the faith were to humbly recognize the sensibilities of those who preceded them, while conforming to what is expected of all Christians.

Our Lutheran Confessions demonstrate a similar sense of catholicity or connection with what has been faithfully guarded and handed to us by former generations. While it is taught among us that "it is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places," (AC, VII, The Church), it is also "taught among us that those usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church, among them being certain holy days, festivals, and the like. Yet we accompany these observances with instruction so that consciences may not be burdened by the notion that such things are necessary for salvation." (AC, XV, Church Usages)

Like the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, we are not willing to permit outward practices which conflict with the Gospel, but we continue those which are in keeping with it and which, by instruction, further promote it, raising up the next generation of Christians. It is therefore found among us Lutherans, that "we have introduced nothing, either in doctrine or ceremonies, that is

contrary to Holy Scripture or the universal church” (AC, conclusion).

I wonder how much consideration is given these days to the universal church when introducing new forms. I wonder if we are properly mindful that what we do now affects coming generations. There are times when “ceremonies and church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God . . . have been introduced into the church with good intentions for the sake of good order and decorum or else to preserve Christian discipline” (FC, SD, art. X, para. 1), but issues arise when such things are mandated, either from within or from without. What are we to say when the world demands that our worship look like what it is used to or it won’t have us? Are we still in the realm of adiaphora?

FC X affirms that minor external differences between churches of a common confession do not constitute a threat to true unity, as they are introduced “for the sake of good order and the general welfare” and are in and of themselves “no divine worship or even part of it.” Having incense or not having incense cannot be the measure of true worship any more than having a praise band or organ. It behooves us to ask to what degree any external or aesthetic form is equated in our minds as genuine worship, and whether there is a particular danger in choosing one form over another on the basis of “it really moves me,” or “it gets you up on your feet,” or “it just makes you feel like you’ve really worshiped,” or “it will grow the church.”

While FC X affirms that the Church in every locality has authority to change external ceremonies as these may be profitable and edifying to the faithful, it doesn’t say that we have the same authority to pick and choose whatever appeals to the world. It does not speak to each congregation doing what seems right in its own eyes. It further states that “all frivolity and offenses are to be avoided.” Sorry, Dr. Seuss!

I for one will speak in behalf of those new to the Faith: “Please, let them grow up!” We

hear so often that people without a churchly tradition need to be accommodated. If we grant that, do we leave them perpetually in such a state, or do we move them forward? Our little ones start off in t-ball, move on to buddy ball, and then to little league. Likewise, one string melodies on guitar are followed by multiple strings, then chords and on into more complex pieces. The point is that novices progress!

In all other venues, this is true. In today's Church, however, we hear the hue and cry of change for the sake of the newcomer, and the whole "game" gets brought to their level! There it stays, because it is not seen as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. If that is the case, it needs to be measured against the historic Liturgy's ability to form God's children and to convey the Faith from one generation to the next. Are our new forms equally up to that challenge? As defined by their advocates, they are aimed at the lowest common denominator and at those who are either young or not yet even in the Faith. By definition, these forms are of the "lite" variety; easy on the palate, with lots of fizz. At a time when many are asking why "Johnny can't read," perhaps it is time for the Church to ask why its adult children can't explain the Faith or resist cultural, moral and even theological trends that oppose it!

In the midst of constantly changing fads, the Church is called to remain steadfast and sure, trusting that we have a *leitourgos* who will continue to turn the hearts of many as His Spirit works in the faithful administration of the Word and Sacraments. It is the Lord's Church, not ours. We are the heirs of a rich tradition. Each generation will contribute something of itself. The Body does change as it grows. That is inevitable. Each generation should do so faithfully, carefully, in humility, in true catholicity and love. We will need to exercise patience with each other and avoid judging with unrighteous judgment. Peter needed to learn not to call unclean what the Lord calls clean. However, the Lord did not say, "They won't come unless we give

them bacon!” Eating pork arises out of the Gospel, not out of an attempt to compete with the Shoney’s breakfast bar, or out of our crass realization that people will in fact behave like the Purina Beggin’ Strips dog: “*It’s Bacon!*”

Our Synod’s first president expresses well my concern for the integrity of our Synodical affiliation. As I’ve said, I have the big Willow Creek/Saddlebrook style church next door. Over here are the Means of Grace. Will members who leave sister LCMS churches find a home at Good Shepherd, or will they be drawn to the praise bands up the hill? This is a question of whether we are rightly raising the Church’s children to seek after that which is most needful, or keeping them forever young, self-centered and looking for what they think is “cool”?

I leave you with the words of C. F. W. Walther, who writes. . .

We refuse to be guided by those who are offended by our church customs. We adhere to them all the more firmly when someone wants to cause us to have a guilty conscience on account of them. It is truly distressing that many of our fellow Christians find the difference between Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism in outward things. It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when a person sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the deluded American denominations just so they won’t accuse of being Roman Catholic! Indeed! Am I to be afraid of a Methodist, [or a non-denominational Christian, or a Calvinist, or an Evangelical], who perverts the saving Word, or ashamed in the matter of my good cause, and not rather rejoice that they can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them? We are not insisting that there be uniformity in perception or feeling or taste among all believing Christians, neither dare anyone demand that everyone be of the same opinion as his in such matters; nevertheless, it remains true that the Lutheran liturgy distinguishes Lutheran worship from the worship of other churches to such an extent that the houses of worship of the latter look like lecture halls, [theaters or auditoriums], while our churches are in truth houses of prayer in which Christians serve the great God publicly before the world. . . . Someone may ask, “What would be the use of uniformity in ceremonies?” We would answer, “What is the use of a flag on the battlefield? Even though a soldier cannot defeat the enemy with it, he nevertheless sees by the flag where he belongs. We ought not to refuse to walk in the footsteps of our fathers.”⁹

⁹ C.F.W. Walther, *Essay on Adiaphora in Essays for the Church: Volume I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), p. 193-194.