

Ceremonies for Seekers: Catechesis as a Fundamental Criterion for Worship in the Lutheran Confessions

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It is expected that speakers from Minnesota will begin papers with a reference to Lake Wobegon or a quote from Garrison Keillor. In keeping with that honored expectation, here are a few words from Garrison Keillor: "I think that the attempts of the church to modernize its message and to look and sound contemporary are almost always foolish and counterproductive. The church is a great mystery, and there is only so far that one can go in stating the mystery in terms that do not deny its mystique"[1] Not bad! Who knows? Maybe we'll soon hear that Pastor Ingqvist has applied to the colloquy committee.

Notice that the topic assigned me is "Ceremonies for Seekers: Catechesis as a Fundamental Criterion for Worship in the Lutheran Confessions." Catechesis is a fundamental criterion not the sole criteria for worship in the Lutheran Confessions. It is in this context that Article XXIV of the Augustana makes the claim that "... no conspicuous changes have been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung in addition to the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people. After all, the chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ" (AC XXIV:3). The Apology further clarifies this point stating, "The purpose of observing ceremonies is that men may learn the Scriptures and that those who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so may also pray" (AP XXIV:3). Here it is also essential to note that the Apology makes a distinction between two kinds of ceremonies: Sacrament and sacrifice:

A sacrament is a ceremony or act in which God offers us the content of the promise joined to the ceremony; thus Baptism is not an act which we offer to God but one in which God baptizes us through a minister functioning in his place. Here God offers and presents the forgiveness of sins according to the promise (Mark 16:16), 'He who believes and is baptized will be saved.' By way of contrast, a sacrifice is a ceremony or act which we render to God to honor him (AP XXIV:18).

There is a didactic or catechetical function to the liturgy but the liturgy is fundamentally something greater than a didactic device. The liturgy is the vehicle through which Christ comes to us with His words and gifts imparting the forgiveness of sins. Contrary to both the medieval Roman opinion that the liturgy or the Mass is the church's sacrifice and the modern Liturgical Movement's slogan "Liturgy is the work of the people,"[2] the Confessions understand liturgy as God's work, Gottesdienst, Divine Service.

The Lutheran Confessions operate with an evangelical rather than an anthropocentric definition of the Office of the Holy Ministry and of the liturgy which has as its stewards and dispensers (AP XXIV:80; II Corinthians 5:20) those ordained into this Office. To be sure, certain forms and practices embedded within the liturgy may indeed be adiaphora.[3] God's Word and Sacraments are not. The very nature of God's gifts in Word and Sacrament shapes and defines the form of their delivery in the Divine Service. The public worship of the congregation will always either confess or deny Christ and His Word. What Werner Elert said of Luther applies to the Confessions as well:

No matter how strongly he (Luther) emphasizes Christian freedom in connection with the form of this rite (the Sacrament of the Altar), no matter how much he deviates from the form handed down at the end of the Middle Ages, no matter how earnestly he warns against the belief that external customs could commend us to God, still there are certain ceremonial elements that he, too, regarded as indispensable.[4]

The Confessions make a clear distinction between the worship that flows from the Gospel and forms of worship which obscure or deny the work of Jesus Christ. Article IV of the Apology describes evangelical worship as faith:

Faith is that worship which receives God's offered blessings; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. It is by faith that God wants to be worshipped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers. (AP IV:49; also see AP IV:57, 59-60, 154, 228, 309-310).

The faith of which the Apology speaks is bestowed through external means, Word and Sacraments. Article V of the Augustana demonstrates how closely the liturgy is linked to the Office of the Holy Ministry:

For through the word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel. (AC V:2)

Word and Sacrament are by their very nature liturgy; they do not exist in the abstract but only in the fact of their institution by Christ and their administration by His called and ordained servants within His church. Here we may note the insistence of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, not simply on "Word and Sacrament" somehow being present in the church, but rather "that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the Sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word" (AC VII:2). We may not become liturgical Nestorians acting as if the "substance" of Word and Sacrament does not shape the "style" of their delivery. The Augsburg Confession "defines the church liturgically" (John Kleinig), that is to say the church is located in the liturgy where the Word is purely preached and the Sacraments rightly administered.

Apart from the faith-creating Gospel which is bestowed in Word and Sacrament, man will indeed worship, but his worship will be idolatry. So Luther writes in the Large Catechism:

As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. (LC I:2-3)

Unbelief is not merely atheism in the conventional sense of the word, but false belief, belief in a lie about God. Luther would agree with Chesterton who said that when man ceases to believe in God, he will believe in anything. Unbelief is not merely a passive absence of faith. Such unbelief is energetic as it exchanges the truth of God for a lie and worships accordingly. So Luther writes:

Behold, here you have the true honor and the true worship which please God and which he commands under penalty of eternal wrath, namely, that the heart should know no other consolation or confidence than that in him, nor let itself be torn from him, but for him should risk and disregard everything else on earth. On the other hand, you can easily judge how the world practices nothing but false worship and idolatry. There has never been a people so wicked that it did not establish and maintain some sort of worship. Everyone has set up a god of his own, to which he looked for blessings, help, and comfort. (LC I:16-17)

Man is by nature a worshipper. The problem is that the worship which we engage in by nature is idolatry. This idolatry is fueled by the *opinio legis*, the opinion of the law that we can do something to save ourselves from God's wrath and judgment. It is for this reason that Luther identifies idolatry as the foundation upon which the Roman Mass stands (See LC I:22 as it confuses God's beneficium with man's sacrificium).

Luther's treatment of this theme under the First Commandment's requirement that "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things" (SC I:2) informs his exposition of the Second and Third Commandments as

well. In his explanation of the Second Commandment, the misuse of God's name is set in opposition to faith's use of the Lord's name in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. The Second Commandment is related to the Third Commandment as God's Name is to His Word. The point of linkage between the Second and Third Commandments is the Explanation of the First Petition of the Our Father where we are taught that God's Name is hallowed "When the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we as children of God, lead holy lives in accordance with it." (SC III:5)

Seen in this light, the Third Commandment has its focus not on a specific day (which is fulfilled in Christ according to Colossians 2:16-17; also LC I:82) but on the pure preaching of the Gospel and faithful hearing of the same. Vilmos Vajta explains:

In no sense is this worship a preparatory stage which faith could ultimately leave behind. Rather faith might be defined as the passive cult (*cultus passivus*) because in this life it will always depend on the worship by which God imparts Himself -- a gift granted to the believing congregation.

This is confirmed in Luther's Explanation of the Third Commandment. To him Sabbath rest means more than a pause from work. It should be an opportunity for God to do His work on man. God wants to distract man from his daily toil and so open him to God's gifts. To observe Sabbath is not a good work which man could offer to God. On the contrary it means pausing from all our works and letting God do His work in us and for us...

Thus Luther's picture of the Sabbath is marked by the passivity of man and the activity of God. And it applies not only to certain holy days on the calendar, but to the Christian life in its entirety, testifying to man's existence as a creature of God who waits by faith for the life to come. Through God's activity in Christ, man is drawn into the death and resurrection of the Redeemer and is so recreated a new man in Christ. The Third Commandment lays on us no obligations for specific works of any kind (not even spiritual or cultic works) but rather directs us to the work of God. And we do not come into contact with the latter except in the Service, where Christ meets us in the means of grace.[5]

Thus Luther notes in his 1525 lectures on Deuteronomy, "The Lord our God is to be regarded as one Lord; that is, He is not to be worshiped by this or that rite which we ourselves have devised but only by that rite which He Himself has established" (AE 9:68).

As it is Christ who gathers His congregation by His Name and around His Word and Sacraments, the Lutheran Confessions are engaged in a polemic against all "self-chosen"[6] forms of worship which obscure the glory of Christ and rob sinners of the sure comfort of the forgiveness of sins. Article XV of the Apology states:

Scripture calls traditions 'doctrines of demons' (I Tim. 4:1) when someone teaches that religious rites are helpful in gaining grace and the forgiveness of sins. This obscures the Gospel, the blessing of Christ, and the righteousness of faith. The Gospel teaches that by faith, for Christ's sake, we freely receive the forgiveness of sins and are reconciled to God. Our opponents, on the other hand, set up these traditions as another mediator through which they seek to gain the forgiveness of sins and appease the wrath of God. (AP XV:5)

It is clear that this polemic is not against traditions per se, but against a use of traditions to obtain the forgiveness of sins. Article XV continues:

Although the holy Fathers themselves had rites and traditions, they did not regard them as useful or necessary for justification. They did not obscure the glory or work of Christ but taught that we are justified by faith for Christ's sake, not for the sake of these human rites. They observed these human rites because

they were profitable for good order, because they gave the people a set time to assemble, because they gave the people a good example of how all things could be done decently and in order in the churches, and finally because they helped instruct the common folk. For different seasons and various rites serve as reminders for the common folk. For these reasons the Fathers kept the ceremonies, and for the same reasons we also believe in keeping traditions. (AP XV:20)

The Apology notes that traditions "interpreted in an evangelical way" are useful for catechesis and preaching;

We gladly keep the old traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquility, and we interpret them in an evangelical way, excluding the opinion which holds that they justify. Our enemies falsely accuse us of abolishing good ordinances and church discipline. We can truthfully claim that in our churches the public liturgy is more decent than in theirs, and if you look at it correctly we are more faithful to the canons than our opponents are. Among our opponents, unwilling celebrants and hirelings perform Mass, and they often do so only for the money. When they chant the Psalms, it is not to learn to pray but for the sake of the rite, as if this work were an act of worship or at least worth some reward. Every Lord's Day many in our circles use the Lord's Supper, but only after they have been instructed, examined, and absolved. The children chant the Psalms in order to learn; the people sing, too, in order to learn or to worship. Among our opponents there is no catechization of the children at all even though the canons give prescriptions about it. In our circles the pastors and ministers of the churches are required to instruct and examine the youth publicly, a custom that produces very good results. Among our opponents, there are many regions where no sermons are preached during the whole year, except in Lent. But the chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel. (AP XV:38-42)

The Lutheran Confessions, therefore, gladly embrace the catholic liturgical heritage, cleansing it of the virus of works righteousness. The Confessions thereby maintain the Mass "with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents" (AC XXIV:1; see also AP XXIV). For the Lutheran Confessions, "spiritual worship" that is, "the worship of faith" is not set in opposition to the external proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. Indeed, the Confessions' attack on the enthusiasm of the spiritualists is particularly sharp:

In these matters which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one His Holy Spirit or grace except through the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts -- that is, from the spiritualists who boast that they possess the Spirit without and before the Word, and therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures according to their pleasure. (SA III:VIII:3)

As God graciously comes to us only by means of the external Word, it is this Word that gives content and form to the Divine Service. The Word gives content and form to the Divine Service not in a biblicistic sense but in the way of the *viva vox evangeli*. As the clear proclamation and confession of the saving Gospel is not a matter of indifference, the content and form of the liturgy is hardly a matter of indifference. Under "the impact of the Gospel" (Elert), the Lutheran Confessions restore the liturgy as Christ's service to His people to be received in faith. The liturgy is the "external Word" in action bestowing God's gifts and unlocking the lips of His people to extol His name in faithful confession and praise.

What does this mean for the praxis of catechesis by Lutherans today?

1. The liturgy itself is catechetical, that is, it provides ongoing catechesis in the doctrinal content of the Christian faith. In his *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, William Harmless has demonstrated how the liturgy was the matrix for catechesis in the church of Augustine's day. Harmless writes:

Augustine thought of the liturgy as a sequence of 'visible words.' And it was within the visible words of liturgy that his spoken words, his catechesis, usually resided. The two intertwined. Each nurtured and shaped the other. On the one hand, Augustine's catechesis moved according to liturgical rhythms: his classroom was his basilica; his lectures were his sermons; his textbooks were the Scriptures proclaimed by readers and sung by cantor and congregation; and his lessons, often enough, drew on a repertoire of ritual gesture, movement, and word. On the other hand, he used catechesis to rescue ritual from unthinking ritualism. With catechesis, he would draw out how liturgy held hidden theological meanings and glaring moral imperatives. In his catecheses, he would probe the liturgy for echoes of salvation history or for reverberations from the endtime. In his catecheses, he would trace out how the shape of the rite might shape the heart or how ritual mores might clash with cultural ones." [7]

This legacy gave shape to the way Luther and the Lutheran Confessions would envision the intersection of liturgy with catechesis.

Long before there were Sunday schools, the church was teaching her people -- both young and old -- in the liturgy. The Gospel-laden canticles of the liturgy like the Gloria in Excelsis and the Agnus Dei proclaimed the incarnation and atonement of Christ week after week. The lectionary carried the hearers into the depths of the Scriptures. The creed was confessed as the summary of the faith once delivered to the saints. Hymns gave doxological expression to the dogma of the church. The early Lutherans would abandon none of this. It was crucial not merely to preserve good order and a sense of decorum, but for the sake of those who were being catechized in the Gospel.

Within the context of the liturgy there is catechetical preaching. The Apology notes: By the blessing of God, the priests in our churches pay attention to the ministry of the Word, they teach the Gospel of the blessings of Christ, and they show that the forgiveness of sins comes freely for Christ's sake. This teaching really consoles consciences. They add to it talk about the value of good works which God commands, and they talk about the value and use of the sacraments... The real adornment of the churches is godly, practical, and clear teaching, the godly use of the sacraments, ardent prayer and the like. Candles, golden vessels, and ornaments like that are fitting, but they are not the peculiar adornment of the church. If our opponents center their worship in such things rather than in the proclamation of the Gospel, in faith, and in its struggles, they should be classified with those whom Daniel (11:38) describes as worshiping their God with their gold and silver." (AP XXIV:48, 51)

While these words were clearly aimed at the Roman church we might ask if they do not have at least as much application to those who would attempt to make the church more appealing to our consumeristic culture. For example, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., a professor at Calvin Seminary, describes what happens to catechetical clarity when the church's worship is forced into the mold of entertainment:

Naturally, services of this kind give an impression of a religion some- what different from historic Christianity. One could imagine a visitor walking away from such a service and saying to himself: 'I had it all wrong. I had thought Christianity included a shadow side -- confession, self-denial, rebuke of sin, concern with heresy, willingness to lose one's life for the sake of Jesus Christ. Not so, apparently. The Christian religion isn't about lament or repentance or humbling oneself before God to receive God's favor. It's got nothing to do with doctrines and the struggle to preserve the truth. It's not about the hard, disciplined work of mortifying our sinful self and learning to make God's purposes our own. It's not about the inevitable failures in this project and the persistent grace of Jesus Christ that comes so that we might begin again. Not at all! I had it all wrong! The Christian faith is mainly about celebration and fun and personal growth, and five ways to boost my self-esteem. And especially, it's about entertainment.' [8]

While those who advocate the use of so-called "seeker services" often do so with the appeal that these services will provide a means for reaching the modern pagan who is biblically illiterate with the Gospel, we must ask: "Where is the Gospel in such a service? What is the nature of the catechesis transmitted by this kind of service? Is it a catechesis into repentance, faith, and holy living? Or is it a catechesis that echoes the kind of fulfillment that the seeker has already determined that he or she desires?" Such a liturgy tells us more about the wants and cravings, the assumed needs and Desires of our own particular expression of the adamic culture than it does about Christ and the gifts that He has acquired for the world in His atonement.

2. Catechesis teaches the language of the liturgy, that is, the language of the faith. Many of our contemporaries begin with the assumption that words have to be immediately meaningful or else they are useless. Witness any number of Christian education curriculum offerings that have as their starting point some experience or event in the life of the learner (Following this model, I should have divided you up into small groups, appointed a facilitator by determining whose birthday was closest to Easter this year, and then given you 15 minutes to discuss amongst yourselves how you have experienced the inter-relatedness of liturgy and catechesis). This is done on the assumption that the texts of Scripture and Catechism are in and of themselves lifeless and come to life only if they are connected with some existential meaning.

Luther's Preface to the Small Catechism evokes groans of terror from contemporary educational theorists. He starts with the text! He makes three salient points: (1) Don't be so quick to adapt new and improved translations. Luther writes: "In the first place, the preacher should take the utmost care to avoid changes or variations in the texts and wording of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, etc. On the contrary, he should adopt one form, adhere to it, and use it repeatedly year after year. Young and inexperienced people must be instructed on the basis of a uniform, fixed text and form" (SC-Preface, Tappert, 338). (2) After the text itself has been learned by heart, then the catechist can teach the catechumen its meaning. "In the second place, after the people have become familiar with the text, teach them what it means" (Preface, 339). (3) Go into great depth on those parts of the Catechism that require greater attention using the Large Catechism. "In the third place, after you have thus taught this brief catechism, take up a larger catechism so that the people may have a richer and fuller understanding" (Preface, 340).

For Luther and the Confessions, evangelical catechesis was a presupposition of the liturgy. In his preface to the German Mass of 1526, Luther notes the need for a catechism:

... the German service needs a plain and simple, fair and square catechism. Catechism means the instruction in which the heathen who want to be Christians are taught and guided in what they should believe, know, do, and leave undone according to the Christian faith. This is why the candidates who had been admitted for such instruction and learned the Creed before their baptism used to be called catechumenos. This instruction or catechization I cannot put better or more plainly than has been done from the beginning of Christendom and retained until now, i.e., in these three parts, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Our Father. These three plainly and briefly contain exactly everything a Christian needs to know. This instruction must be given, as long as there is no special congregation, from the pulpit at stated times or daily as may be needed, and repeated or read aloud evenings and mornings in the homes for the children and servants, in order to train them as Christians" (AE 53:64-65).

It would be three years before Luther produced his Small and Large Catechisms but here in 1526, we observe Luther's desire for a "plain and simple, fair and square catechism" that might function liturgically.

Luther saw catechesis both as a necessary prelude to involvement in the liturgical life of the congregation. Bruno Jordahn suggests that a proper understanding of Luther's Catechism must proceed "from the point that the Catechism had primarily a liturgical function." [9]

The roots of Luther's Catechisms and their relationship to liturgy can be seen in Luther's catechetical preaching which began in June 1516 with a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments with regularity. These sermons would form the basis for the Large Catechism. Heinrich Bornkamm writes, "Without the preparatory condensation of the catechetical sermons into the Large Catechism, there would have been no crystallization of the entire substance into the Small Catechism." [10] In other words, the Catechisms were derived from Luther's preaching. Luther's own catechetical preaching would guide future generations of Lutheran pastors in the practice of preaching just as his Catechisms would provide the laity with a framework for understanding the sermons of their pastors.

Luther's catechetical hymns also accent the connection between worship and catechesis. Of the six hymns based on the six chief parts of the Catechism, only two ("Our Father, Who From Heaven Above" in 1539 and "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord" in 1541) were written after the Catechisms had appeared. The other four were written in the mid-1520's and give doxological expression to dogmatic themes that Luther will weave into his exposition of the chief parts of the Catechisms. The parallelism between Luther's hymn on the Ten Commandments, "Here Is the Tenfold Sure Command" (written in 1524) and his treatment of the decalog in the Small Catechism is most striking.

3. Lutheran catechesis will distinguish between God's beneficium and man's sacrificium. To confuse the two is to muddle Law and Gospel. Beneficium is of God. Sacrificium is from man. The critique of the Roman Mass in Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology centers in Rome's failure to make this fundamental distinction, thus turning the Mass into a meritorious work, a propitiatory sacrifice. Luther and the Lutheran Confessions understood that liturgy is not a work done either by priest or people, but the very work of God Himself who comes to serve His church with the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation won on the cross and now distributed in sermon and sacrament. In Lutheran liturgical theology, God is the subject of liturgy rather than its object. Here the Catechism guides us in understanding what is happening in the liturgy as the Catechism confesses the Supper to be the Lord's Supper. Here Christ is the benefactor and donor. He gives His true body and blood for Christians to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins.

Rome had reversed the flow, making the Supper a sacrifice to be offered rather than a gift to be received in faith. The catechesis embodied in the Small Catechism aims not only at defining what it is that Christ gives us in the sacrament, but also in teaching Christians how to use the sacrament in a salutary and blessed way. Here we also see how Luther's preaching converges with the Catechism drawing the hearer into the Divine Service. An example of such preaching can be found in Luther's Maundy Thursday sermon of 1529 where he exhorts the congregation to use the sacrament as God's own remedy against the world, the flesh, and the devil:

For this reason, because Christ saw all this, he commanded us to pray and instituted the Sacrament for us to administer often, so that we are protected against the devil, the world, and flesh. When the devil attacks, come for strength to the dear Word so that you may know Christ and long for the Sacrament! A soldier has his rations and must have food and drink to be strong. In the same way here: those who want to be Christian should not throw the Sacrament to the winds as if they did not need it. [11]

Luther's catechetical preaching was not simply the re-telling of the biblical story of Christ's passion; it pointed to the delivery of the salvation acquired at Calvary in the sacrament itself.

The second article of the Creed is at the heart of the Small Catechism. From the second article we are catechized in the facts of incarnation and atonement. But Luther does not stop with the fact that redemption was done on the cross. In his exposition of the third article in the Large Catechism, Luther connects the accomplishment of salvation in Christ with salvation's delivery in the preaching of the Gospel:

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us the treasure of salvation. (LC II:38)

All of this, both the accomplishment of redemption in the death of Christ and its delivery in the means of grace is beneficium. Faith clings to the gift drawing its life from the benefits of Christ bestowed in Word and Sacrament.

Sacrificium or sacrifice grows out of the beneficium or the gift. The Apology calls this sacrifice a eucharistic sacrifice, a sacrifice of thanksgiving, that embraces the praise of the lips as well as works of love done with the hands. This is not a sacrifice offered to God in atonement for sins but a sacrifice of praise offered by those who are already reconciled. Luther and the Confessions removed sacrifice from the chancel and re-located it in the world as the whole life of the believer becomes a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). This is "the liturgy after the liturgy" to borrow a phrase from Carter Lindberg.[12] Served with the gifts of Christ in the Divine Service, the life of sacrifice is lived out in the concrete places of our various callings in the congregation, family, government, and workplace. Luther in his 1526 treatise "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ -- Against the Fanatics" illustrates this point, "As [Christ] gives himself for us with his body and blood in order to redeem us from all misery, so we too are to give ourselves with might and main for our neighbor" (AE 36:352).

In the structure of the Catechism, the relationship between beneficium and sacrificium is demonstrated with the placement of the daily prayers and the table of duties after the six chief parts. The anatomy of the Catechism is structured around repentance (decalog), faith (creed, Our Father, sacraments), and holy living (daily prayers and table of duties). This catechetical structure coincides with the anatomy of the Divine Service as we receive the gifts of Christ in repentance and faith and live them out in sacrificial love toward the neighbor.

The familiar post-communion collect is a fine summary of Luther's liturgical theology. It is also a good reflection of the rhythm of faith and love in his catechesis. In this collect from Luther's 1526 German Mass, we give thanks to almighty God that He has refreshed us with the salutary gift of Jesus' body and blood and we pray that this gift "would strengthen us through the same in faith toward" God "and in fervent love toward one another." Faith lays hold of Christ's gifts and as they have their way with us they issue in love for the neighbor. That is the way of the liturgy. It is also the way of catechesis.

4. Catechesis is the necessary link between evangelization and the Divine Service. The Saxon Visitation of 1528 revealed how deeply the pastors and people were in need of catechesis. Luther alludes to this in the Preface to the Small Catechism:

Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as though they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty" (SC -- Preface 2). 1528 doesn't sound that much different from 2000! The catechesis that Luther envisioned for Saxony is still needed.

Within the last two decades "evangelism" has become the slogan of choice among Lutherans. We have witnessed one evangelism program after another. Synodical and district conventions pass high-pitched resolutions urging evangelism. Pastors and congregations are shamed for not being more motivated to reach the lost for Christ. We are regularly chided for being more concerned about doctrine and liturgy than saving souls. Yet with all the hype about evangelism and nervousness about the growth of the church, the very means that Christ uses to bring sinners unto Himself are routinely diminished and little thought is given to the character of the community into which we evangelize. Luther and the Confessions provide a necessary corrective in their teaching on catechesis and liturgy.

The entire life of the Christian congregation emanates from the Divine Service and leads back to that living and life-giving center. As unbelievers hear the Gospel that is carried out into the world from the Divine Service they will be led back into that Service by way of catechesis. Yes, the Divine Service will itself catechize, but the liturgy presupposes catechesis that prepares the about-to-be baptized or the newly baptized for what they will receive and how they are to live within Christ's church. Such catechesis is absolutely essential. This means that Lutheran catechesis will involve three books: The Bible, the Small Catechism, and the hymnal. Doctrine is drawn from the Scriptures, confessed in the Catechism, and doxologically expressed in liturgy and hymnody.

Robert Jenson has insightfully commented, "Catechesis was born as the instruction needed to bring people from their normal religious communities to an abnormal one." [13] The normal religious communities of our world are anthropocentric -- they are centered on man and his perceptions of who God is and how God ought to behave. Or to use the language of Luther, these normal religious communities run in the way of the theology of glory. We are catechizing into an abnormal community centered in a crucified Messiah. That's the theology of the cross reflected in an ecclesiology of the cross. We are introducing people to a worldview, if you will, that is determined by the First Commandment. Catechesis dismantles false gods and replaces them with the Holy Trinity. Our liturgy is abnormal in the eyes of the world because the Gospel we proclaim is abnormal in the eyes of the world.

The confessional, sacramental, and liturgical ethos of Lutheranism is foreign to North America not simply because of our Germanic and Scandinavian background, but because our theology does not fit with a religious culture that is shaped by American Evangelicalism. For an analysis of the pervasiveness of this culture, I refer you to Nathan Hatch's book, *The Democratization of American Christianity*. Lutheran catechesis cuts against the grain of this culture. The people we catechize (even life-long, Lutheran Day School-educated Lutherans!) are immersed in this culture and think in its categories. Catechesis has to train catechumens to think like Lutherans, to think in Lutheran categories, or else we will end up pouring Lutheran doctrinally-correct data into minds that will almost automatically re-cast it into the thought forms of Evangelicalism.

We do not craft a liturgy that fits with the unbeliever's world. Rather through catechesis the unbeliever is brought into the real world, the world as it really is, created and redeemed by the Triune God. Lutheran catechesis does not cater to the seeker's felt needs nor does it attempt to find something in the Scriptures that he might judge to be relevant or meaningful. William Willimon writes:

When I was in the seminary, someone told us in preaching class that the gospel must be translated into the thought forms of the modern world or we would not be heard. The preacher is the bridge between the world of the Bible and the world of the twentieth century. I've decided that the traffic has been moving in only one direction on that bridge. Our task as preachers is not the hermeneutical one of making the gospel capable of being heard by modern people but the pastoral-political job of making a people who are capable of hearing the gospel." [14]

I take that to be good advice for us also as we think through the implications of catechesis as it relates to liturgy.

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- [1] Cited by Paul Westermeyer, "Music: Poured Out for the World" in *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission* edited by Thomas N. Schattauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p.135.
- [2] See Charles Evanson, "Evangelicalism and the Liturgical Movement and Their Effects on Lutheran Worship" (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Printshop, 1989) for an analysis of the theological presuppositions behind the phrase "liturgy is the work of the people."
- [3] For a treatment of Article X of the Formula and its relationship to the current confessional-liturgical crisis in Lutheranism, see John T. Pless, "The Relationship of Adiaphora and Liturgy in the Lutheran Confessions" in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* edited by Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn, Michigan: Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), pp.195-210. For historical background of Article X see Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church 1530-1580* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), pp.63-81.
- [4] Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* trans. By Walter Hanson (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p.325.
- [5] Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship* trans. By U.S. Leupold, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p.130.
- [6] George Wollenburg has identified the "ordination" of women to the pastoral office as one such form of "self chosen worship." See George Wollenburg, *The Office of the Holy Ministry and the Ordination of Women* (Minneapolis: University Lutheran Chapel, 1990), p.25. A related example of such idolatry would be liturgical and sacramental use of feminine nouns for the Godhead. See Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., "The Grammar of Baptism" in *First Things* (December 1991), pp.33-37 for an excellent critique. In light of what the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions teach us regarding the relationship of God's Name to worship, catechumens will need to be warned that "baptisms" performed in the name of "creator, redeemer, and sanctifier" or other substitutions for the canonically-mandated Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are pagan rituals that profane the Name of God.
- [7] W. Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), p.359.
- [8] C. Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Original Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1995), p.193.
- [9] C. Arand, "Catechismal Services: A Bridge Between Evangelism and Assimilation" in *Concordia Journal* (July 1999), p.181.
- [10] H. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career* trans. by E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p.601.
- [11] M. Luther, "Maundy Thursday Morning, March 25, 1529: An Exhortation to Receive the Lord's Supper" in *The 1529 Holy Week & Easter Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther* trans. by I. Sandberg, annotated by T. Wengert (St Louis: Concordia Academic Press, a division of CPH, 1999), p.78.
- [12] C. Lindberg, *Beyond Charity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993), p.169.
- [13] R. Jenson, "Catechesis for Our Time" in *Marks of the Body of Christ* edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1999), p.140.

[14] Cited by Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street in *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), p.159.

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