

The Doctrine of Worship in the Lutheran Confessions

2nd Edition

Scope of this Paper

This paper was originally conceived as a short investigation into confessional principles of worship. Partly because I had seen so few references to the confessions in papers discussing liturgy and worship, I had assumed that relatively few references existed and that these could be minutely examined. I was very surprised to find that the confessions have a very well developed doctrine of worship and that this doctrine forms the basis of the positions taken in many sections of the Augsburg Confession, especially articles XXII through XXVIII. Consequently, the Apology devotes considerable space to the doctrine of worship in its discussion of the Roman abuses. The Smalcald articles and the Formula of Concord also devote large sections to worship issues. Additional references were found in the Catechisms and the Athanasian Creed.

Because of the wealth of material available it became necessary to limit the scope of the paper to a broader discussion of the fundamental principles and to draw these principles from the Confessions themselves. I have limited my research to those portions of the Confessions that raise worship related issues directly. Using Larson's *Concordance to the Book of Concord*, I identified the articles which contained the word "worship." Careful reading of each of these articles in its entirety produced an abundance of applicable quotations, many of which will appear in this paper. A full examination of all related and derivative concepts would require an entire book and would far exceed the intended scope of this assignment.

The First Principle

"There has never been a people so wicked that it did not establish and maintain some sort of worship."¹ The truth of this statement from Luther's Large Catechism is obvious. The issue is not whether we should worship--even the heathen affirm that by their behavior. It is rather who to worship and what sort of worship will please Him.

Therefore, the first principle of worship is that we must worship only the triune God. The Athanasian Creed states "This is the true Christian faith, that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God without confusing the persons or dividing the divine substance."²

As Christians, we worship only one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the creed states that we worship one God without mentioning others, it affirms the uniqueness of God. Other gods do not exist and their worship must be rejected as contrary to God's commandment "You shall have no other gods." Syncretistic worship is also forbidden. Christians may not worship ancestral gods, emperors, saints, or any others in addition to the true God. These, too, are forbidden by the commandment.

The creed not only defines the true faith as worship of the triune God, it also condemns those who distort or deny the truth about God. Unitarians, Jews, Muslims and others who deny the

¹LC, 17. All confessional citations are from *The Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Theodore G. Tappert, editor and translator (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

²Athanasian Creed, 3-4. Tappert, 19.

triune nature of God are lost, as are subordinationists of every stripe. The creed declares, "All three persons are coequal and coeternal, and accordingly, as has been stated above, three persons are to be worshiped in one Godhead and one God is to be worshiped in three persons. Whoever wishes to be saved must thus think about the Trinity."³

Since we worship not only "one God in three persons," but also "three persons in one God," Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each to be worshiped. We do not worship the Father only. Christians worship Christ and the Holy Spirit, just as they worship the Father. We praise and adore Christ, pray to him, and serve him and the Holy Spirit just as we do the Father. There is no sin in this, since we are dealing with the same triune God, not other Gods.

The creed and the commandment tell us who we are to worship, but the "what" and "how" of worship can be learned more easily from other parts of the confessions. The next section will establish a confessional definition of worship. I will then show that this definition and the doctrine of justification lie at the heart of the doctrine of worship and how this doctrine was applied to various disputes.

Worship Defined

Within the confessions, worship may be broadly defined as man's service to his god or gods. It is in this sense that Luther wrote, "There has never been a people so wicked that it did not establish and maintain some sort of worship."⁴ In this sense also monastic disciplines, fasts, and the like are called worship in various places. But this definition really isn't satisfactory. To fully understand the confessional doctrine of worship, we must distinguish between true and false worship, between worship that is pleasing and acceptable to God and substitutes for worship that are not.

True, God-pleasing worship is the response of faith to God's mercy in Christ Jesus. This definition, too, is very broad. In fact, it encompasses nearly every aspect of the Christian life. Nonetheless, as will become apparent, narrower definitions are inadequate rather than more precise.

This definition of true worship is also subjective, rather than objective. There is nothing to which we can point and say "This is true worship" or "that is true worship." True worship is not known by its form, but by the faith to which it gives expression. As such, it cannot have the objective character of justification and the means of grace.

Given the common tendency to identify worship with the Sunday service, the confessional definition of worship as faith in action is likely to prove startling even to many Lutherans. Accustomed to thinking of worship as an exercise to be performed, they fail to grasp the close connection between worship and justification by grace through faith and too easily fall into the Roman errors of thinking that various rites and services are essential or that they are pleasing to God by their mere recitation (i.e., *ex opere operato*).

Against this tendency to equate human ceremonies with the true worship of God, the Formula of Concord declares that such ceremonies are "in and for themselves no divine worship or even a part of it."⁵ This statement does not mean that the Mass and other ceremonies are not to be used. They are simply not to be equated with worship. They are something else altogether.

What then is worship? Melancthon provides one of the first clues. Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession states "The highest form of divine service [German: *gottes dienst*] is

³Athanasian Creed, 25-26. Tappert, 20.

⁴LC, 17. Tappert, 367.

⁵EP:X, 3. Tappert, 493.

sincerely to seek and call upon... Jesus Christ in every time of need."⁶ Similarly, article XXIV states

The people are also admonished concerning the value and use of the sacrament and the great consolation it offers to anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe in God and ask for and expect whatever is good from God. Such worship pleases God, and such use of the sacrament nourishes devotion to God.⁷

In these quotations from the Augsburg confessions we find that true worship is closely associated with faith. Faith comes to God in order to seek His grace, mercy, or help. The confessions identify this act of faith as worship. It is the kind of worship that is commanded by God (Ps. 50:15) and it springs naturally from the gospel (Romans 8:32).

The Apology picks up the same theme in article IV on justification. "Faith does not justify or save because it is a good work in itself, but only because it accepts the promised mercy. This service and worship is especially praised throughout the prophets and the Psalms."⁸ Here again, it is faith in action that is identified as worship. God is pleased and glorified when by faith we grasp hold of his promises.

Because faith cannot exist without acting, faith itself can also be called true worship of God. "It is strange that our opponents make so little of faith," Melancthon commented in Article IV of the Apology, "when they see it praised everywhere as the foremost kind of worship."⁹ That Melancthon was thinking of faith in action is made plain by the subsequent reference to Psalm 50:15 and the statement "This is how God wants to be known and worshiped, that we accept his blessings and receive them because of his mercy rather than because of merits."¹⁰ It is saving faith that is worship. It pleases God by accepting his forgiveness and blessings.

Although primary emphasis is placed upon faith's response to the Gospel, acts of service to God and Christ are also identified as worship. The Roman confutation had cited the account of the woman who washed Jesus feet in opposition to the Augsburg Confession's article on justification. In his analysis of the disputed passage, Melancthon refers twice to the way the woman's faith had shown forth in her worship of Christ.

He begins by establishing that the woman's faith had led to her salvation and the forgiveness of sins. He also asserts that this was not a passive, but an active faith as all saving faith is. Melancthon wrote,

The woman came believing that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from Christ. This is the highest way of worshiping Christ. Nothing greater could she ascribe to him. By looking for the forgiveness of sins from him, she truly acknowledged him as Messiah. Truly to believe means to think of Christ in this way, and in this way to worship and take hold of him.¹¹

Here Melancthon once again identifies seeking and accepting grace from Christ as the highest form of worship. However, as he continues on he describes her entire act of devotion as true worship:

⁶AC XXI, 3. Tappert, 47.

⁷AC XXIV, 7-8 [Latin]. Tappert, 56.

⁸Ap IV, 56-57. Tappert, 114.

⁹Ap IV, 59. Tappert, 115.

¹⁰Ap IV, 60. Tappert, 115.

¹¹Ap IV, 154. Tappert, 128.

[Christ] praises her entire act of worship...he says here, 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she loved much,' that is, because she truly worshiped me with faith and with the acts and signs of faith. He includes the whole act of worship.¹²

In the second reference to the woman's worship, Melancthon expands the concept of worship to include also self-chosen acts done out of love for Christ. This expansion is important because it makes possible a conditional acceptance of some traditional forms of Catholic worship.

What then of other deeds commanded by God? Some, such as preaching the gospel, are specifically identified.¹³ Prayer, fasting, and charity are also identified as proper forms of worship by context in the following quotation from article XII of the Apology:

"True prayer, charity, and fasting have God's command; and where they do, it is a sin to omit them. But where they are not commanded by God's law but have a set form derived from human tradition, such works belong to the human traditions of which Christ says (Matt. 15:9) 'In vain do they worship me with the precepts of men.'"¹⁴

In the final analysis, worship includes all of the fruits of faith. In article XXIV of the Apology we read, "The worship of the New Testament is spiritual; it is the righteousness of faith in the heart and the fruits of faith."¹⁵ and "The New Testament teaches there should be a new and pure sacrifice; this is faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, and proclamation of the gospel, suffering because of the Gospel, etc."¹⁶ Both of these summaries of the New Testament teaching make it plain that everything we do in faith, out of love for God, is worship that honors and glorifies him.

Faith and Worship Inseparable

Since worship is so intimately connected with faith, only the regenerate can truly worship God. Until the Holy Spirit has granted faith it is impossible to believe that God truly loves us and to seek his grace and favor for Christ's sake. Hypocrites offer their own works to God as if these could please him, while the terrified flee. Melancthon puts it this way in article XII of the Apology:

Consciences do nothing from faith if they always doubt whether they have forgiveness. In such doubt, how can they call upon God, how can they be sure that he hears them? So their whole life is without God and without the true worship of God. This is what Paul says (Rom. 14:23), "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."¹⁷

Hebrews 11:6 makes the same point. "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

Just as it is impossible to worship without faith, so faith without worship is inconceivable, for faith must act.

It is impossible to separate faith from love for God... For through Christ we come to the Father; and having received the forgiveness of sins, we become sure that we have a gracious God who cares about us, we call upon him, give thanks to him, fear and love him.¹⁸

¹²Ap IV, 155. Tappert, 128.

¹³"The chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel." Ap XV, 42. Tappert, 221.

¹⁴Ap XII, 143. Tappert, 204.

¹⁵Ap XXIV, 27. Tappert, 254.

¹⁶Ap XXIV, 30. Tappert, 255.

¹⁷Ap XII, 89. Tappert, 195.

¹⁸Ap IV, 141. Tappert, 126.

Faith must worship God by calling upon him, and giving thanks to him. Indeed, if it did not receive God's grace and the forgiveness of sins (such receiving being the highest form of worship) it would not be faith at all¹⁹.

False Worship

If faith is the prerequisite for true worship and its necessary companion, it follows that any worship which does not proceed from faith in Christ is false worship. In fact, if we follow Luther's Large Catechism there are several varieties of false worship.

Behold, here you have the true honor and 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...

There is, moreover, another false worship. This is the greatest idolatry that has been practiced up to now, and it is still prevalent in the world. Upon it all the religious orders are founded. It concerns only that conscience which seeks help, comfort, and salvation in its own works and presumes to wrest heaven from God. It keeps account how often it has made endowments, fasted, celebrated Masses, etc. On such things it relies and of them it boasts, unwilling to receive anything as a gift from God, but desiring by itself to earn or merit everything by works of supererogation, just as if God were in our service or debt and we were his liege lords.²⁰

The first type of false worship identified by Luther is gross idolatry. Man creates his own gods, in his own image or in the image of some creature, and worships them as he sees fit. This type of idolatry is expressly condemned by the first commandment.

The second kind of false worship or idolatry identified by Luther is more subtle. Man professes to worship the true God, but in his rebellion, he substitutes works of his own invention for faith in Christ. In so doing, he places himself above God and his Christ, making a god of himself.

This identification of works righteousness as idolatry follows easily from Luther's explanation of what it means to have a God.

What is it to have a God?... A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. 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. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.²¹

When men trust in their own works they become their own gods.

As noted in the earlier quotation from the catechism ("This is the greatest idolatry that has been practiced up to now... Upon it all the religious orders are founded"²²), works- righteousness

¹⁹For an extended discussion showing that worship is a necessary fruit of faith see Apology IV:189-194. Tappert, 133.

²⁰LC, First Commandment, 16 and 22. Tappert, 366-367.

²¹LC, First Commandment, 1-3. Tappert, 365

²²Op. Cit.

was the very heart of the Roman Church and her worship. It was for this reason that the abuses condemned in the Augsburg Confession were rejected.

Many of the rejected forms of worship were grounded upon the scholastic combination of merit and works of supererogation. That is, the scholastics taught that people were able to do works which earn additional grace and the forgiveness of sins. But the works chosen had to be "above and beyond the call of duty," that is, not commanded by God. The result was an ever increasing number of man-made rites, vows, ceremonies, and works which were executed to accumulate merit before God. As the Apology notes,

The scholastics teach men to merit the forgiveness of sins by doing what is within them, that is, if reason in its sorrow over sin elicits an act of love to God or does good for God's sake. Because this view naturally flatters men, it has produced and increased many types of worship in the church, like monastic vows and the abuses of the Mass; someone has always been making up this or that form of worship or devotion with this view in mind.²³

The idea that we can merit grace and forgiveness from God "flatters men" by overstating their capabilities. Bound by sin, man's reason does not have the ability to love, serve, or worship God. Article IV of the Apology states,

"It is false, too, that by its own strength reason can love God above all things and keep his law, truly fear him, truly believe that he hears prayer, willingly obey him in death and in his other visitations, and not covet"²⁴

and

"It is impossible to love God unless faith has first accepted the forgiveness of sins."²⁵

Therefore, the works and worship wrought by men without faith, in order to earn merit before God, cannot be works of love and faith toward God and therefore cannot be true worship.

If the first error was to believe that sinful men could do anything to appease God and merit grace and forgiveness, the second, greater error was to believe that this could be accomplished with works of our own choosing. These were called works of supererogation and they are condemned by Article XXII of the Apology.

Some works like pilgrimages, depart even further from God's commands... Christ calls these useless acts of worship, and so they do not serve to placate God's displeasure, as our opponents claim. Still they dress up these works with fancy titles; they call them works of supererogation, and they ascribe to them the honor of being a price paid in lieu of eternal death. Thus they rank them above the works of God's commandments.²⁶

By placing greater importance on their own works than God's commandments the Papists placed their Canon over God's Word. Their worship became idolatry as they made themselves greater than God.

Of course, if it is erroneous to believe that rites and ceremonies of men have any redemptive value before God, it is also wrong to believe that these same acts of worship can accomplish their purpose *ex opere operato*, that is by simple repetition. It is no surprise that the confessions reject such notions as well:

²³Ap IV, 9-10. Tappert, 108.

²⁴Ap IV, 27. Tappert, 111.

²⁵Ap IV, 36. Tappert, 112.

²⁶Ap XII, 144. Tappert, 205.

Hypocrites think that outward and civil works satisfy the law of God and that sacrifice and ritual justify before God *ex opere operato*.²⁷

Even ceremonies established by God are worthless without faith, because without faith they cannot put the conscience to rest or reconcile men and God.

[The prophets] condemn the wicked belief of those who did away with faith in the notion that through these [sacrifices] they placated the wrath of God. Because no works can put the conscience at rest, [faithless people] kept thinking up new works beyond God's commandment.²⁸

Consequently, this mechanistic view of worship and the sacraments leads men deeper and deeper into idolatry.

It can be readily seen from the above that the doctrine of worship is nothing more or less than the doctrine of justification viewed from a particular perspective. The confessors held that it is contrary to the gospel to seek salvation through rites and ceremonies created by men. Salvation is found only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Works of the law cannot save. Worship cannot save. The just must live (and, therefore, worship) by faith.

Since then the doctrine of worship is tied so closely to the Gospel, it is not surprising that false teachings concerning traditions of worship are condemned:

Scripture calls traditions 'doctrines of demons' (1 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.²⁹

Such words are consistent with the apostle Paul's words, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned" (Gal. 1:8).

Obviously, such teachings do not have their beginning in the theology of the cross. They are rather particularly crass examples of the theology of glory. Melancthon notes in article XV of the Apology,

In Col. 2:23 Paul writes that traditions 'have an appearance of wisdom' and indeed they have. this good order is very becoming in the church and is therefore necessary. But because the human reason does not understand the righteousness of faith, it naturally supposes that such works justify men and reconcile God. Under this delusion the common people among the Israelites expanded such ceremonies, just as they have been expanded among us in the monasteries.³⁰

It makes sense to people that they must do something to make up to God for their sins and that the things that they do must in some sense be extra. That is, they must go beyond the commandments which (viewed in an external sense) are seen as the minimum requirements. Of course its a very small step then to the belief that those whose lives conform externally to the law, can by these extra works and services accumulate additional merit. And what could be more "Christian" than providing some of this "treasury of merit" to others through indulgences and the like? Penance, purgatory, indulgences, vows, dispensations, and the abominations of the Mass-- all are derived from the same satanic lies.

²⁷Ap IV, 134. Tappert, 125.

²⁸Ap IV, 207-208. Tappert, 135.

²⁹Ap XV, 4. Tappert, 215.

³⁰Ap XV, 22-23. Tappert, 218.

Of course false doctrine and false worship do not remain alone. They are soon accompanied by a false piety that finds the "extra" works created by men holier and more worthy than the mundane commandments of a practical God.

Once this appearance of wisdom and righteousness has deceived men, all sorts of troubles follow. the Gospel of the righteousness of faith in Christ is obscured and replaced by a vain trust in such works. As a result, the commandments of God are obscured; for when men regard these works as perfect and spiritual, they will vastly prefer them to the works that God commands, like the tasks of one's calling, the administration of public affairs, the administration of the household, married life, and the rearing of children. Compared with these ceremonies such tasks seem profane.³¹

True piety finds opportunities for worship in everyday life. It does whatever it finds to do "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). The Christian may be sweeping a floor "as unto the Lord" (Col. 3:23), disciplining his child, or telling his wife how much he loves her. All are infinitely more pleasing to God than the most beautiful liturgy performed without faith (Hebrews 11:6).

In opposition to the false faith, false worship, and false piety that arise from the wisdom of men, true faith, true worship, and true piety are grounded in the Word of God and the theology of the cross. The Gospel of Christ crucified is its heart.

In the church we must keep this teaching, that we receive forgiveness of sins freely for Christ's sake by faith. We must also keep the teaching that human traditions are useless as acts of worship, and that therefore neither sin nor righteousness depends upon food, drink, clothing, and similar matters.³²

Melancthon notes that both teachings must be kept, because they are in reality, not two teachings but one. For if righteousness depends upon food, drink, clothing, or human traditions then it is not a gift freely given for Christ's sake and the Gospel has been lost. Here we see why the Augsburg Confession attacks the worship abuses that had arisen in the church, and why Melancthon keeps returning to the doctrine of worship in the Apology.

Article XV of the Apology makes the same point, but extends it to argue on the same grounds that none of these ceremonies can be required either. Any of them may be omitted without sin.

Against this deceptive appearance of wisdom and righteousness in human rites, let us therefore arm ourselves with the Word of God. Let us know that they merit neither the forgiveness of sins nor justification before God, and that they are not necessary for justification.³³

It can now be seen why such ceremonies are considered adiaphora. If their use or observance is required, they become a new law to burden consciences. Such requirements are Judaizing and as contrary to the Gospel as the attempts to force circumcision upon the gentiles in Galatia. Circumcision at least had the command of God through Moses! None of the liturgies or other traditions had such a command. That is why Melancthon can refer to them as "useless"³⁴ and "trifles."³⁵

³¹Ap XV, 25. Tappert, 218-219.

³²Ap XXVIII, 7. Tappert, 282.

³³Ap XV, 29. Tappert, 219.

³⁴See Apology XXVIII, 7 above.

³⁵"It is terrible to read and hear such pharisaical and even Mohammedan expressions in the church, finding perfection of the Gospel and of the Kingdom of Christ, which is eternal life, in these silly observances of vestments and similar trifles." Ap VII, 27. Tappert, 274.

To recap, the doctrine of worship and the doctrine of justification are very closely related in the Lutheran confessions, with the later being plainly drawn from the former. None of the following opinions can be maintained without sacrificing the doctrine of justification:

1. That there are rites, ceremonies, or other traditions of men which must be observed.
2. That the purpose of worship is to make propitiation for sins.
3. That these traditions merit the forgiveness of sins or other grace from God.
4. That the mere performance of these ceremonies is pleasing to God and, therefore, meritorious even if faith is absent.

Where these errors are present there is no true worship. Instead idolatrous men serve themselves.

The Roman Abuses

Having established the distinctions between true worship and false worship and also the primary objections of the confessors to the Roman system of worship, we will now consider how the doctrine of worship was applied to specific abuses. In particular, we will examine the sections relating to the distinction of foods, monastic vows, and the Mass.

Article XXVI of the Augsburg Confession rejects dietary rituals of the Roman church, such as the forbidding of meat on Friday. The reason these traditions were rejected is plainly stated in the opening paragraph of the article:

It has been common opinion not only of the people but also of those who teach in the churches that distinctions among foods and similar human traditions are works which are profitable to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins. That the world thought so is evident from the fact that new ceremonies, new orders, new holy days, were daily instituted and the learned men in the churches³⁶ exacted these works as a service necessary to merit grace and sorely terrified the consciences of those who omitted any of them. From this opinion concerning traditions much harm has resulted.³⁷

That this analysis was correct is evident from the fact that the Roman Confutation rejected the article in its entirety.

The argument of the article proceeds along three lines: such enactments obscure the Gospel; they obscure the commandments of God; and they endanger men's consciences.³⁸

In the first place, required observances obscure the gospel by elevating man's work instead of Christ and faith. The righteousness of faith is an imputed righteousness; it cannot be obtained through any sort of work. This is true whether or not the works are commanded by God.

Further, the great emphasis which human works receive when they are required makes it difficult for people to understand and believe that they are saved by grace alone. The confession puts it this way:

"The Gospel demands that the teaching about faith should and must be emphasized in the church, but this teaching cannot be understood if it is supposed that grace is earned through self-chosen works."³⁹

Instead of revealing Christ and leading people to faith, such regulations conceal him.

Nor can such regulations easily serve as proper expressions of faith, for they are commonly taught and observed in order to merit those things which are already ours in Christ. As such,

³⁶E.g., Thomas Aquinas.

³⁷AC XXVI, 1-3 [Latin]. Tappert, 63-64.

³⁸C. H. Little, *Lutheran Confessional Theology*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), 129.

³⁹AC XXVI, 20. Tappert, 67.

then, they are false worship and idolatry, for true worship is the response of faith to God's grace in Christ.

The traditional fasts and requirements to avoid meat also obscure the commandments of God. They were often exalted above God's commands. They were called 'holy' and considered evidence of true piety while common morality, commanded by God, was considered secular.

Whoever observed festivals in this way, prayed in this way, fasted in this way, and dressed in this way was said to live a spiritual and Christian life. On the other hand, other necessary good works were considered secular and unspiritual: the works which everyone is obliged to do according to his calling--for example that a husband should labor to support his wife and children and bring them up in the fear of God.⁴⁰

The third argument against the dietary traditions was that they endangered men's consciences. This happened because "it was impossible to keep all traditions, yet men judged these observances to be necessary acts of worship."⁴¹ In other words, since these observances could not be omitted without sin, and there were so many such observances that it was impossible to fulfill them all. That which was offered to them as a means of achieving justification led them instead to despair and, as noted in the reference to Gerson, even suicide.

It is plain that observances of this kind are not to be thought of as necessary acts of worship. In fact they are not only not necessary, they are useless for the purposes for which they are done.

Grace cannot be earned, God cannot be reconciled, and sin cannot be atoned for by observing the said human traditions. Accordingly they should not be made into a necessary service of God... In Matt. 15:1-20 Christ defends the apostles for not observing the customary traditions, and he adds, "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:9). Since he calls them vain service, they must not be necessary.⁴²

The Roman response to this article was to argue that the church had the power to make such ordinances. Little summarizes the argument this way:

"Their leading argument was that all power is of God and that this is especially true of ecclesiastical power, which God has given for edification. Whatever, therefore, the church ordains should be received as useful; and whoever despises ecclesiastical ordinances offends grievously against God."⁴³

Undoubtedly this argument was anticipated for the confession answers it in advance with scripture:

In Acts 15:10,11 Peter says, "Why do you make a trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." Here Peter forbids the burdening of consciences with numerous rites, whether of Moses or of others. And in I Tim. 4:1,3 Paul's calls the prohibition of foods a doctrine of demons, for it is in conflict with the Gospel to institute or practice such works for the purpose of meriting grace through them or with the notion that Christian righteousness cannot exist without such acts of worship. [German: or with the notion that nobody is a Christian unless he performs such services.]⁴⁴

⁴⁰AC XXVI, 9-10 [German]. Tappert, 65.

⁴¹AC XXVI, 12 [Latin]. Tappert, 65.

⁴²AC XXVI, 21-23 [German]. Tappert, 67.

⁴³Little, 128.

⁴⁴AC XXVI, 27-29. Tappert, 68.

Lest it seem that they were rejecting fasting and similar forms of worship altogether, the confessors point out the proper use of such exercises is for self-discipline. They state, "every Christian ought so to control and curb himself with bodily discipline, or bodily exercises and labors, that neither plenty nor idleness may tempt him to sin."⁴⁵ They were not rejecting fasting itself, but the teaching that certain traditions were necessary acts of worship.

Monastic Vows

Similar arguments were brought forth in the article concerning monastic vows. These, too, were seen as being contrary to the gospel, for by them men sought to atone for their own sin and for the sins of others.

Article XXVII of the Augsburg Confession begins with a discussion of commonly recognized abuses rampant in the monasteries: vows made at an inappropriately young age, and people taking vows unaware of the kind of life they would lead. But as Little notes,

"the greatest of all abuses was the over valuation placed upon vows, by which such a life was exalted above Baptism and the Gospel, and was regarded as meriting the forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God."⁴⁶

Three arguments were advanced to justify the voiding of monastic vows. The first was that no vows could supersede God's command. Thus those who were unable remain chaste should be permitted to marry. The second was that many of the vows were entered into in such a way that they were not binding (e.g., not voluntarily with a full knowledge of what was being promised). The third was that since the vows were represented as meriting forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God, they were to be wholly rejected as contrary to the Gospel.

The Apology dealt with monastic vows in much greater depth and although the Augsburg Confession had argued from justification and legal grounds, the Apology makes plain that the issue is also one of proper worship.

Those who teach that the monastic life merits the forgiveness of sins or eternal life are simply crushing the Gospel about the free forgiveness of sins and the promised mercy available in Christ and are transferring to their own foolish observances the trust that is due Christ. Instead of Christ they worship their own cowls and their own filth. Although they need mercy themselves, they wickedly fabricate works of supererogation and sell them to others.⁴⁷

It is plain from the preceding quotation that Melancthon considered the monastic system to be grossly idolatrous. Not only did the monks seek to earn their own salvation, but they stood in the place of Christ by offering their own works to others that their sins might be forgiven. So it is that they worship their cowls, for they exalt their vows and lifestyle above the counsel of God that salvation will be found only in his son, Jesus Christ. They worship their filth, because their so-called works of supererogation are nothing but sin, being in their very conception contrary to God's will.

The belief in works of supererogation was essential to Roman piety. Monasteries, penance, purgatory, and indulgences were all linked. Without works of supererogation and their companion, the treasury of merit, there could be no indulgences. Without purgatory there would be no need.

⁴⁵AC XXVI, 33 [Latin]. Tappert, 69.

⁴⁶Little, 131.

⁴⁷Ap. XXVII, 34. Tappert, 275.

A related issue was whether there existed such a thing as "evangelical perfection" and whether it could be achieved by the monastic life. The Roman scholars held that the monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, gave one the opportunity to fulfill both God's commandments and his councils. The councils differed from the commandments in that, while they had God's blessing and recommendation, they were not required of all Christians. It was believed then that by keeping these councils one could truly please God, go above and beyond the ordinary requirements of the commandments, and so achieve evangelical perfection, thereby obtaining sufficient merit to cover not only one's own sins, but also those of others. The chief evangelical councils were poverty and celibacy.

The Roman Confutation had sought to use the concept of evangelical perfection to support the necessity and value of the monastic vows. In the Apology, Melancthon responded by denouncing the very idea.

It is a most wicked error to believe evangelical perfection is to be found in human traditions... Because the Kingdom of God is righteousness (Rom. 14:17) and life in the heart, therefore perfection means to grow in the fear of God, in trust in the mercy promised in Christ, and in devotion to one's calling.⁴⁸

It is terrible to read and hear such pharisaical and even Mohammedan expressions in the church, finding perfection of the Gospel and of the Kingdom of Christ, which is eternal life, in these silly observances of vestments and similar trifles.⁴⁹

The second quotation cited reminds us that when we are dealing with traditions, vows, and other works of supererogation, we dealing with questions of worship. The monks tried to obtain justification, grace, forgiveness, and perfection for the sake of their worship. For them worship was propitiation rather than eucharist. It was a response to God's Law rather than to God's grace.

On this basis, then, the Apology judges both the vows of poverty and chastity. Each is found wanting.

The abandonment of property is neither commanded nor advised in the Scriptures. The poverty of the Gospel (Matt. 5:3) does not consist in the abandonment of property, but in the absence of greed and of trust in riches. Thus David was poor in a very rich kingdom. Since the abandonment of property is therefore merely a human tradition, it is a useless service.⁵⁰

There are two kinds of leaving [one's family]. One happens without a call, without a command of God; this Christ does not approve, for works which we have chosen are 'vain worship' (Matt. 15:9)... The other kind of leaving is that which happens by a command of God, when a government or a tyranny forces us either to leave or to deny the Gospel. Here we have the command rather to bear the injury... because of the confession of the Gospel."⁵¹

The confutation had argued that the vows of the Nazarites gave ample precedent for monastic vows. Melancthon responded by turning yet again to the doctrines of worship and justification.

The ritual of the Nazarites was intended to exercise or show faith before men, not to merit the forgiveness of sins before God or to justify before God. Furthermore, just as circumcision or the slaughter of victims would not be an act of worship now, so the ritual of the Nazarites should not be

⁴⁸Ap XXVII, 27. Tappert, 273.

⁴⁹Ibid. Tappert, 274.

⁵⁰Ap XXVII, 46-47. Tappert, 277.

⁵¹Ap XXVII, 41. Tappert, 276.

proposed as an act of worship but should be regarded simply as a matter of indifference. Hence it is not right to compare monasticism, thought up without a Word of God as an act of worship to merit forgiveness of sins and justification, with the ritual of the Nazarites, which had a Word of God and was not meant to merit the forgiveness of sins but to be an outward exercise like the other ceremonies of the Old Testament.⁵²

The worship of the Nazarites differed fundamentally from the vows of the monks. It was not an attempt to merit God's grace. It was rather a public confession of faith. It glorified God rather than men.

Not even 1 Timothy 5:11,12 can be used to justify the monastic vows.

Even if we suppose that Paul is talking here (1 Tim. 5:11,12) about vows, this passage does not support monastic vows, taken for wicked acts of worship and with the idea that they merit forgiveness of sins and justification. For Paul loudly condemns all worship, all laws, all works, if they are observed in order to merit the forgiveness of sins or to secure eternal life instead of mercy for Christ's sake.⁵³

The caution about widows breaking their vows cannot be used against those who considered their monastic vows void, either. Idolatrous vows have no validity.

But the idolatries of the monks were not limited to their vows. Worship of the saints and the rosary were common in the monasteries. This too is condemned as false worship.

The worship of saints... is guilty of a double fault: it arrogates Christ's place to the saints, and it worships them wickedly. Thus the Dominicans made up the rosary of the blessed Virgin, which is mere babbling, as stupid as it is wicked, nourishing a false confidence.⁵⁴

Their liturgies and hours are also condemned for their purpose--the accumulation of merit.

We shall not discuss their whole ceremonial worship--lessons, chants, and the like--which could be tolerated if they were used as exercises, the way lessons are in school, with the purpose of teaching the listeners and, in the process of teaching, prompting some of them to fear or faith. But now they imagine that these ceremonies are the worship of God to merit the forgiveness of sins for them and for others. That is why they multiply these ceremonies. If they undertook them in order to teach and exhort the hearers, brief and pointed lessons would be more useful than these endless babbling.⁵⁵

Liturgies may properly serve a didactic purpose, an idea we'll return to later, but they cannot propitiate God.

The condemnations of the monastic system cannot be summarized better than by the apology itself:

Pious hearts... should reject the hypocrisy and the sham worship of the monks, which Christ cancels with one declaration when he says (Matt. 15:9), "In vain do they worship me with the precepts of men." Hence the vows themselves and the observance of foods, lessons, chants, vestments, sandals, cinctures--all these are unprofitable services before God. And let every pious heart know and be sure that such ideas as this are plain, damnable pharisaism: that these observances merit the forgiveness of sins; that because of them we are accounted righteous; that we attain eternal life because of them

⁵²Ap XXVII, 58. Tappert, 279.

⁵³Ap XXVII, 65. Tappert, 280.

⁵⁴Ap XXVII, 53. Tappert, 278.

⁵⁵Ap XXVII, 55. Tappert, 278. It is interesting to note Melancthon's apparent distaste for the form of the liturgies as well as their purpose.

rather than because of Christ through mercy... God is pleased only with services instituted by his Word and done in faith.⁵⁶

The Mass

Abuses of the Mass abounded, but at their heart lay a false theology of justification and worship. Chief among these errors were that the Mass was an unbloody sacrifice of Christ's body and blood which the priest offered for the propitiation of sins, and that it was efficacious *ex opere operato*. In addition, the priest was believed to be able, by his "intention," to offer the Mass on the behalf of specific individuals, living or dead. The result was a profusion of private masses and, since it was customary to pay for these masses, a great deal of income for the church.

To eliminate the abuses, the Lutheran churches had stopped private Masses and had returned to the Greek practice of celebrating the Mass only during the main Sunday service. They had also made extensive revisions to the Mass. Because the Lutherans rejected the propitiatory nature of the Mass those portions and prayers recited by the priest as he consecrated and offered the bread and wine were heavily edited.

Consequently, it was also necessary to reeducate the people about the proper meaning and use of the sacrament. According to the Augsburg Confession this involved teaching them that, 1) "there is no sacrifice for original sin, or any other sin except the one death of Christ;" 2) that grace could be obtained only by faith, not by performing the Mass; and 3) "the holy sacrament was not instituted to make provision for a sacrifice for sin... but to awaken faith and comfort our consciences."⁵⁷

Although the Mass was altered and the private masses were eliminated, the bulk of the public portions of the liturgy were retained in many places. Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession begins with the following statement:

Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. Actually the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained except that German hymns are interspersed here and there among the parts sung in Latin.⁵⁸

The Apology reiterates this statement even more strongly.

We do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it. In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved. We keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of the lessons, prayers, vestments, etc.⁵⁹

These statements show it was not the idea of liturgical worship that troubled the Lutheran reformers, or even the particular form which the Mass took⁶⁰. It was the false theology behind the

⁵⁶Ap XXVII, 69-70. Tappert, 281.

⁵⁷AC XXIV, 24-30 [German]. Tappert, 58-59.

⁵⁸AC XXIV, 1-2 [Latin]. Tappert, 56.

⁵⁹Ap XXIV, 1. Tappert, 249.

⁶⁰The quotations cited use the term "Mass" as a synonym for the "Lord's Supper" and distinguishes it from the traditional liturgical forms and ceremonies. To retain and defend the Mass, therefore, is nothing more or less than to continue to celebrate the Lord's Supper in accordance with Christ's institution as a means of grace. This semantic distinction is important today in view of the attempts of some to use these quotations to insist that the historic forms for the Mass ought to be retained by all congregations. Although some may remark that these passages also refer to retaining these traditional forms, such ceremonies are plainly adiaphora, and *many variations already existed* when the Augsburg Confession and the Apology were written.

abuses.

Among these false ideas was that the Mass brought the forgiveness of sin even when faith was absent. Both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology repeatedly reject the teaching that rites, ceremonies, or even sacraments are effective without faith because it is contrary to the doctrine of justification by faith.

The scriptures also teach that we are justified before God through faith in Christ. Now if the Mass takes away the sins of the living and the dead by a performance of the outward act (*ex opere operato*), justification comes from the work of the Mass and not from faith. But the Scriptures do not allow this.⁶¹

The Lord's Supper does not grant grace *ex opere operato* and does not merit for others, whether living or dead, forgiveness of sins or of guilt or of punishment *ex opere operato*.⁶²

In the section on Monastic vows we saw that human works do not justify and that therefore it is ridiculous to hold that they do so without faith. But here, when discussing the Mass, the confessions point out that that even divine works, such as the sacraments, do not justify without faith.

The reformers also objected strongly to the Roman teaching that the Mass was propitiatory sacrifice. The Roman view was that the Aaronic priests had been replaced by the Christian priests who offered the blood of Christ in place of the blood of bulls and goats for the sins of the people. In the Apology Melancthon complains, "The services of the Mass and the rest of the papal order are nothing but a misinterpretation of the Levitical order."⁶³ The Lutherans, on the other hand, followed the book of Hebrews in asserting that Christ has made a single sacrifice, once and for all time, for the sins of the world.

The holy sacrament was not instituted to make provision for a sacrifice for sin--for the sacrifice has already taken place--but to awaken our faith and comfort our consciences when we perceive that through the sacrament grace and forgiveness of sin are promised us by Christ. Accordingly the sacrament requires faith and without faith it is used in vain.⁶⁴

There has really been only one propitiatory sacrifice in the world, the death of Christ.⁶⁵

Note that in this last citation that not even the Old Testament sacrifices are considered truly propitiatory. As Hebrews 10:4 points out, "it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." Their propitiatory character was civil, preventing the sinner from being separated from his people⁶⁶. At the same time, they served as Old Testament sacraments, foreshadowing the propitiatory sacrifice which God himself would offer for the sins of men, and carrying with them the promise of God's forgiveness which was to be received by faith. Thus for the Confutation to use the example of these sacrifices to justify the belief that Mass is a propitiatory sacrifice was inappropriate.

Melancthon used Jeremiah 7:22 and 23 to show that even the Old Testament sacrifices required faith.

⁶¹AC XXIV, 28-29 [Latin]. Tappert, 59.

⁶²Ap XXIV, 11. Tappert, 251.

⁶³Ap XXIV, 52. Tappert, 259.

⁶⁴AC XXIV, 30. Tappert, 59.

⁶⁵Ap XXIV, 22. Tappert, 253.

⁶⁶Ap XXIV:22-24, Tappert, 253.

The Old Testament prophets also condemn the popular notion of worship *ex opere operato* and teach spiritual righteousness and sacrifice. Jer. 7:22,23, "I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them, 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God.'" How are we to think the Jews accepted this declaration, which seems to contradict Moses directly? Clearly God had commanded the fathers concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices, but what Jeremiah is condemning is an idea of sacrifices that did not come from God, namely, that such worship pleased him *ex opere operato*. He adds that God had commanded faith. "Obey me," that is, 'Believe that I am your God and that this is the way I want you to know me when I show mercy and help you, for I do not need your sacrifices. Believe that I want to be God, the one who justifies and save, because of my Word and promise, not because of works. Truly and wholeheartedly seek and expect help from me.'⁶⁷

It is plain then that no sacrifice offered by men to God can propitiate their sins. Only Christ could offer the necessary sacrifice and it was offered once, for all time on the cross of Calvary.

If the Mass is not a propitiatory sacrifice, what is it? For even though the confessions deny that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice for sin, they still teach that we obtain the forgiveness of sins through this means of grace. The answer, of course, is that the Supper is a sacrament. Melancthon explains the difference between a sacrament and sacrifice in Article XXIV of the Apology.

A sacrament is a ceremony or act in which God offers us the content of the promise joined to the ceremony,... By way of contrast, a sacrifice is a ceremony or act which we render to God to honor him.⁶⁸

In other words, when we make a sacrifice we give something to God, but in a sacrament God gives something to us--namely the forgiveness of sins which we receive by faith.

But there are many references in Patristic literature to the sacrifice of the Mass. How are these to be interpreted? We have already hinted at something that Melancthon makes very plain in the Apology: there are two kinds of sacrifices.

There are two, and only two, basic types of sacrifice. One is the propitiatory sacrifice; this is a work of satisfaction for guilt and punishment that reconciles God or placates his wrath or merits the forgiveness of sins for others. The other type is the eucharistic sacrifice; this does not merit the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation, but by it those who have been reconciled give thanks or show their gratitude for the forgiveness of sins and other blessings received.⁶⁹

As we have already pointed out, there has only been one propitiatory sacrifice in the history of the world. Therefore the rest, including the Mass, must be Eucharistic sacrifices.

In addition to criticizing the Roman abuses, the article XXIV of the Apology also has much to contribute to our understanding of the true substance of Lutheran worship. The following quotation from Article XXIV of the Apology lays down the fundamental principles:

Spiritual sacrifices are contrasted not only with the sacrifices of cattle but also with human works offered *ex opere operato*, for "spiritual" refers to the operation of the Holy Spirit within us. Paul teaches the same in Rom. 12:1, "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." "Spiritual worship" is a worship in which the spirit knows and takes hold of God, as it does when it fears and trusts him. Therefore the contrast is not only with Levitical worship,... but with any worship where men suppose they are offering God a work *ex opere operato*. The Epistle to the Hebrews teaches the same (13:15): "through him let us continually offer

⁶⁷Ap XXIV, 28. Tappert, 254.

⁶⁸Ap XXIV, 18. Tappert, 252.

⁶⁹Ap XXIV, 19. Tappert, 252.

up a sacrifice of praise to God" with the interpretation, "that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." He commands them to offer praises, that is, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, and the like. these are valid, not *ex opere operato* but because of faith. We see this from the phrase, "through him let us offer," namely, through faith in Christ.⁷⁰

The quotation above shows the close connection between faith and spiritual worship. Indeed, spiritual worship is impossible without faith, since man's spirit "takes hold of God" in "fear" and "trust." What is this other than coming to God in repentance and faith?

The sacrifice made by faith is not a propitiation. Instead faith offers eucharistic sacrifices of "praises... prayer, thanksgiving, confession, and the like." To this list we can also add "the proclamation of the Gospel, faith,... the afflictions of the saints, [and] all the good works of the saints."⁷¹ In other words, spiritual worship includes all that faith does in response to the Gospel. These things form the substance of Lutheran (that is, truly Christian) worship, not the rites, ceremonies, and traditions of the men.

Even the sacrament of the altar must be interpreted in this light. For although it is truly a means of grace, yet this grace cannot be appropriated without faith.

As the promise is useless unless faith accepts it, so the ceremony is useless without the faith which really believes that the forgiveness of sins is being offered here. Such a faith encourages the contrite mind. As the Word was given to arouse this faith, so the sacrament was instituted to move the heart to believe through what it presents to the eyes. For the Holy Spirit works through the Word and the Sacraments.

This use of the sacrament, when faith gives life to terrified hearts, is the worship of the New Testament, because what matters in the New Testament is the spiritual motivation, dying and being made alive.⁷²

But there is more to the substance of Lutheran worship than those things which faith does. For when faith proclaims the Word and celebrates the Sacrament it is not just faith that acts. God acts, too. And this is precisely what faith seeks, to be sanctified by the putting to death of the old man and the raising of the new. Melancthon explores this aspect of worship by comparing the Word and Sacrament to the Old Testament daily sacrifice:

Although the ceremony is a memorial of the death of Christ, therefore it is not the daily sacrifice by itself; the communion is the real daily sacrifice, the proclamation and the faith which truly believes that by the death of Christ God can be reconciled. There must be a drink offering, namely, the effect of the proclamation, as we are sanctified, put to death, and made alive when the Gospel sprinkles us with the blood of Christ. There must also be an offering in thanksgiving, confession, and affliction.

With the rejection of the idea that ceremonies work *ex opere operato*, we can see that their real meaning is spiritual worship and the daily sacrifice of the heart, for in the New Testament we should look for the substance of things, for the Holy Spirit who puts us to death and makes us alive.⁷³

We have said before that faith worships by coming to God to seek good things. And this is why we gather on Sunday mornings. We come to seek good things from God--His absolution, His Word, and His supper. For through these He sanctifies us, give us life and grace, and fits us for heaven. This ought to be preached, and taught, and rubbed into the people's ears. For who that knows of these things could stay away?

⁷⁰Ap XXIV, 26. Tappert, 254.

⁷¹Ap XXIV, 25. Tappert, 253.

⁷²Ap XXIV, 70-71. Tappert, 262.

⁷³Ap XXIV, 38-39. Tappert, 257.

The Smalcald Articles express the same criticisms of the abuses associated with the Roman Mass as the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. But they do so more bluntly. In reading them, however, one must be aware that unlike Melancthon, Luther uses the term "Mass" to refer to the Roman service. Luther calls the Roman Mass "the greatest and most horrible abomination"⁷⁴ because its use and form are both in conflict with the doctrine of justification by faith.

The Roman Mass is also idolatrous, since it puts the work of sinful men on par with the work of Christ.

[The Mass] has been the supreme and most precious of the papal idolatries, for it is held that this sacrifice or work of the Mass (even when offered by an evil scoundrel) delivers men from their sins, both here in this life and yonder in purgatory, although in reality this can must be by the Lamb of God alone.⁷⁵

Consequently, "there can be no concession or compromise"⁷⁶ concerning the Mass. It must be abolished to cleanse the worship of the Church from all idolatry.

The Mass is and can be nothing else than a human work, even a work of evil scoundrels (as the canon and all books on the subject declare), for by means of the Mass men try to reconcile themselves and others to God and obtain and merit grace and the forgiveness of sins. It is observed for this purpose when it is best observed. What other purpose could it have? Therefore it should be condemned and abolished because it is a direct contradiction to the fundamental article, which asserts that it is not the celebrant of a Mass and what he does but the Lamb of God and the Son of God who takes away our sin.⁷⁷

The article concerning the Mass makes it plain that Luther has abandoned the attempt to soothe the emperor and others by claiming that the Lutherans have not abolished the Mass, only edited it. He now concedes the point that the Roman Mass is no longer celebrated. Although there are outward similarities between some of the services used by the Lutherans and the Roman Mass, the Mass as the vehicle for propitiation had been put to death and reborn as a vehicle for the gospel and faith.

The strength with which both Catholics and Lutherans held their positions on the Mass--and therefore on the true nature and purpose of worship--is also indicated by this article.

Even if it were possible for the papists to make concessions to us in all other articles, it would not be possible for them to yield on this article. It is as Campegio said in Augsburg: he would suffer himself to be torn to pieces before he would give up the Mass. So by God's help I would suffer myself to be burned to ashes before I would allow a celebrant of the Mass and what he does to be considered equal or superior to my Savior, Jesus Christ. Accordingly we are and remain eternally divided and opposed the one to the other. The papists are well aware that if the Mass falls, the papacy will fall with it.⁷⁸

These strong statements explain much about the Interim and the position of the Formula of Concord related to the adiaphoristic controversy. By reestablishing the ceremonies the Roman church had thought to reestablish the Mass. After all, since they believed that the sacrifice of the

⁷⁴SA II, 1. Tappert, 293.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Op. Cit.

⁷⁷SA II, 7. Tappert, 294.

⁷⁸SA II, 10. Tappert, 294.

Mass was efficacious *ex opere operato*, they felt that merely ensuring that the rite was correctly performed would result in its intended benefits.

The controversy on the Lutheran side was caused by the conflict between the belief that the ceremonies and forms themselves were (in the words of the Apology) "trifles" and the belief that (in the words of the Smalcald articles) "there is to be no concession or compromise" related to the Mass. The Formula solves the problem by arguing that ceremonies, such as those of the Roman Mass, whose meaning is contrary to the Gospel may not be adopted without sin.

We should not consider as matters of indifference, and we should avoid as forbidden by God, ceremonies which are basically contrary to the Word of God, even though they go under the name and guise of external adiaphora and are given a different color from their true one. Nor do we include among truly free adiaphora or things indifferent those ceremonies which give or (to avoid persecution) are designed to give the impression that our religion does not differ greatly from the papists, or that we are not seriously opposed to it. Nor are such rites matters of indifference when these ceremonies are intended to create the illusion... that these two opposing religions have been brought into agreement and become one body, or that a return to the papacy and an apostasy from the pure doctrine of the Gospel and from true religion has taken place or will allegedly result little by little from these ceremonies.⁷⁹

These sections of the Smalcald Articles and the Formula of Concord have several implications for the discussions going on in the LCMS between the liturgical movement and those who espouse a more evangelical style of worship. In the first place, we must absolutely reject the idea proposed by Kleiforth, Giertz,⁸⁰ and others that the liturgy is in some sense inspired by the Holy Spirit. Such views are utterly contrary to the confessions and to the gospel. The confessions are adamant that the Mass and liturgical forms are human inventions which may be altered or omitted without sin. The Smalcald Articles declare, "They are a purely human invention. They are not commanded by God. And we can discard all human inventions."⁸¹ The Solid Declaration declares that Christian liberty applies and that it must not be abrogated.

As soon as this article is weakened and human commandments are forcibly imposed on the church as necessary and as though their omission were wrong and sinful, the door has been opened to idolatry, and ultimately the commandments of men will be increased and be put as divine worship not only on par with God's commandments, but even above them.⁸²

To insist on particular forms for worship, even when these forms are ineffective vehicles for true worship in a particular culture or community, corrupts the Gospel by removing faith. Worship is redefined as doing the service. As the Apology complains:

When they chant the Psalms, it is not to learn or to pray but for the sake of the rite, as if this work were an act of worship or at least worth some reward.⁸³

Since this attitude assumes that the outward performance of the service is pleasing to God, it is nothing less than a reintroduction of the doctrine of *ex opere operato*.

Such attitudes are condemned by the Formula of Concord which will not tolerate the identification of ceremonies with worship.

⁷⁹SD X, 5. Tappert, 611.

⁸⁰Bo Giertz, *Liturgy and Spiritual Awakening*, Clifford A. Nelson, trans. (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1987 Reprint), 3.

⁸¹SA II.II.7. Tappert, 293.

⁸²SD X, 15. Tappert, 613.

⁸³Ap XV, 40. Tappert, 220.

We believe, teach, and confess unanimously that the ceremonies or church usages which are neither commanded nor forbidden by the Word of God... are in and for themselves no divine worship or even a part of it.⁸⁴

At best, ceremonies encourage true worship and provide a form for its expression.

For this reason, local congregations must be given the right to alter services, adapt them to local conditions, or even replace them with something more suitable as long as such changes are made responsibly:

The community of God in every locality and every age has authority to change such ceremonies according to circumstances, as it may be most profitable and edifying to the community of God. But in this matter all frivolity and offense are to be avoided, and particularly the weak in faith are to be spared.⁸⁵

Likewise congregations that desire to use the older more traditional forms must be allowed to do so. Christian liberty cuts both ways. The Formula of Concord points out that it was inappropriate for the more radical Protestants to forbid the use of traditional liturgical forms:

[It is] false and contrary to God's Word... when such external ceremonies and indifferent things are abolished in a way which suggests that the community of God does not have the liberty to avail itself of one or more such ceremonies according to its circumstances and as it may be most beneficial to the church.

For a more modern example, it is inappropriate for the church hierarchy to force all congregations to adopt a new hymnal.

In the end, adiaphora should truly be matters of indifference. Some congregations will be more traditional, others more radical. It doesn't matter as long as each worships God in Spirit and in truth and neither condemns the other:

We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because it has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God, as long as there is mutual agreement in doctrine and in all its articles as well as in the right use of the holy sacrament.⁸⁶

Although there is liberty with regard to forms, the unwillingness of the confessions to compromise justification by faith by restoring the Mass means that there should be visible differences between Lutheran services of worship and the Roman Mass. When our services appear to all the world to be Roman Catholic, the witness of our congregations to the Gospel is compromised or even silenced. Then the world can no longer see the tremendous differences between the doctrine of justification by faith and the Roman system of purgatory, propitiatory Masses, indulgences, and the like.

The danger of compromising the gospel must also be avoided by those wishing to adopt evangelical forms of worship. Altar calls and anxious benches can exalt the works of man over those of Christ just as surely as monasticism and its propitiatory system. Even if these things can be properly interpreted they will usually be best avoided, lest it appear that we no longer believe man is saved by grace alone.

Finally, both sides must avoid the danger of making worship into a spectator sport. True worship is an active response of faith to the mercy of God. As such it is incompatible with forms that encourage passive observation rather than active participation. The Roman Confutation

⁸⁴Ep X, 3. Tappert, 493.

⁸⁵Ep X, 4. Tappert, 493.

⁸⁶Ep X, 7. Tappert, 493.

erroneously held that it was enough for the people to see the Mass and to know for whom it was being offered. The Bill Hybels and Robert Schullers of our modern age are master showmen who create truly entertaining services. But it is questionable how much true worship takes place. The Solid Declaration notes:

Neither are useless and foolish spectacles, which serve neither good order, Christian discipline, nor evangelical decorum in the church, true adiaphora or things indifferent.⁸⁷

Good Lutheran services should be constructed in such a way that they encourage the congregation to come to God in repentance and prayer, to receive the forgiveness of sin, and then to praise and thank him for all He has done. The people should be alive in faith, participating in the service with their hearts as well as their mouths.

The Proper Role of Ceremonies

Liturgies and other ceremonies do play several important roles in the life of the church. To the extent they fulfill those roles, they are highly valued. In its introduction to the articles concerning abuses the Augsburg Confession states,

Nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches.⁸⁸

Therefore one important role which the liturgies play is to maintain the proper decorum so that the service does not degenerate into a bazaar, full of noise and side discussions, or even into a circus.

This purpose of the ceremonies is more frequently referred to after the pattern of St. Paul as ensuring that everything is done decently and in order. The Apology gives this as the original reason the orders of service were established.

The holy Fathers did not institute any traditions for the purpose of meriting forgiveness of sins or righteousness. They instituted them for the sake of good order and tranquillity in the church.⁸⁹

A second role is that of teacher. Many Lutherans today suggest that the liturgy is a proper subject for catechetics because the people need to be taught the meaning of our traditional forms of worship. Doing so, they say, will help the people to appreciate them. The Reformers had a much different idea. For them the liturgy was not what was taught, it was the teacher. It wasn't the subject of catechetics, it was catechetics.

Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession makes this point when it says, "Ceremonies are needed especially in order that the unlearned may be taught."⁹⁰ The German expresses the same idea somewhat differently calling catechetics the "chief purpose of all ceremonies."⁹¹ The Apology echoes this idea when in article VII it states that the traditional ceremonies are cherished "when they contain a discipline that serve to educate and instruct the people and the inexperienced."⁹²

⁸⁷SD X, 7. Tappert, 611.

⁸⁸Augsburg Confession, "Articles in Which an Account is Given of the Abuses Which Have Been Corrected," [Latin], Tappert, 49.

⁸⁹Ap XV, 13. Tappert, 216.

⁹⁰AC XXIV, 3 [Latin]. Tappert, 56.

⁹¹Op. Cit.

⁹²Ap VII, 33. Tappert, 174.

Along with this belief that the ancient liturgies were useful for teaching the people about Christ came a recognition that the ceremonies must be intelligible to the people.

No one has ever written or suggested that men benefit from hearing lessons they do not understand or from ceremonies that do not teach or admonish, simply *ex opere operato*, by the mere doing or observing. Out with such pharisaic ideas!⁹³

While this passage was written in response to the Confutation's insistence that Latin be should be retained, it applies equally well to services that use archaic language and flowery phrases such as "meet, right, and salutary" that are only understood by the highly educated.

Working from the principle that the traditions and ceremonies are meant to teach, one could easily argue that a truly Lutheran service should be written so plainly that children could understand it. It could also be argued that the service should also set out the truths of scripture and the Gospel so plainly that unbelievers could be brought to faith. In fact, the Apology does just that when it states, "The purpose of observing ceremonies is that men may learn the Scriptures and those who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so may also pray."⁹⁴ It must not be forgotten that the worship service is often the Church's first and most frequent contact with both her children and the lost.

As far as the Melancthon was concerned these had always been the reasons for traditional forms and seasons. In his arguments concerning the Mass and other universal traditions he wrote:

The holy Fathers... observed these human rites because they were profitable for good order, because they gave the people a set time to assemble, because they provided an 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 ceremonies and for the same reasons we also believe in keeping traditions.⁹⁵

Beyond the need for order and instruction, faith also uses the ceremonies to give form to its own response to God's grace. In other words for worship.

Once faith has strengthened a conscience to see its liberation from terror, then it really gives thanks for the blessing of Christ's suffering. It uses the ceremony itself as praise to God, as a demonstration of its gratitude, and a witness of its high esteem for God's gifts. Thus the ceremony becomes a sacrifice of praise.⁹⁶

These three roles--maintaining order, teaching the faith, and providing a framework for heartfelt worship--must be kept in mind whenever evaluating a particular service from a confessional perspective. They are primary and must take precedence over antiquity, breadth of usage, or aesthetic considerations. (Obviously, any service that did not conform to the patterns of sound doctrine could not teach the faith effectively).

Christian Liberty

No discussion of confessional principles of worship would be complete without a thorough exploration of the principles of Christian liberty and the related issue of the relationship between

⁹³Ap XXIV, 5. Tappert, 250.

⁹⁴Ap XXIV, 3. Tappert, 250.

⁹⁵Ap XV, 20-21. Tappert, 218.

⁹⁶Ap XXIV, 74. Tappert, 262.

the church hierarchy and the congregations as they related to the rites and ceremonies used for worship.

In Article XXVIII on Ecclesiastical Power, the Augsburg Confession states, "It is necessary to preserve the doctrine of Christian liberty in the churches, namely, that bondage to the law is not necessary for justification."⁹⁷ This statement makes it plain that the principle of Christian liberty may not be sacrificed without corrupting the Gospel and that therefore this liberty must be maintained.

This is especially true in relation to worship. From the very beginning of the church there has been a strong temptation to forsake the Gospel and return to the law. To establish this, we need only to note the frequent difficulties Paul had with the circumcision party, which held that the ceremonial laws of Moses had to be added to the righteousness that comes through faith.

In the time of Luther and the reformers this temptation had seized and conquered the church. All of the abuses which the reformers objected to were attempts by the church hierarchy to impose observances upon the people. In place of the law of Moses they had established ecclesiastical regulations. The Confutation insisted upon the right of the bishops, popes, and councils to do this citing Jesus words, "He who hears you, hears me" (Luke 10:16). Their opinion was that Christ has left these things in the hand of the apostles and their successors.

Melancthon responded by pointing out the fallacy of applying this passage to traditions:

[This passage] cannot be applied to traditions. For Christ requires them to teach in such a way that he might be heard, because he says, "hears me." Therefore he wants his voice, his Word to be heard, not human traditions.⁹⁸

To make any of the traditions binding obscures the Gospel. All rites and traditions, even those established by the apostles and universally observed are subject to change and can be set aside without sin.

We should interpret [universal traditions] just as the apostles themselves did in their writings. They did not want us to believe that we are justified by such rites or that such rites are necessary for righteousness before God. They did not want to impose such a burden on consciences, nor to make the observances of days, food, and the like a matter of righteousness or of sin. In fact, Paul calls such opinions "doctrines of demons."⁹⁹

Consequently we should let no one pass judgment on us because of our use or disuse of human traditions.

In Col. 2:16,17 [Paul] says: 'Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or Sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.' This includes both the law of Moses and the traditions of men.¹⁰⁰

If the law of Moses has been set aside by the New Testament, then surely the ordinances of men cannot be binding.

This principle of liberty derives naturally from the doctrine of justification by faith. Requiring the observances of various rites and ordinances obscures the Gospel by elevating man's work instead of Christ and faith. If anything is required beyond the atonement made by Christ, that

⁹⁷AC XXVIII, 50 [Latin]. Tappert, 89.

⁹⁸Ap XXVIII, 19. Tappert, 284.

⁹⁹Ap VII, 39-40. Tappert, 176.

¹⁰⁰Ap XV, 30. Tappert, 219.

requirement becomes in effect greater than his suffering and death. This is especially true when such works are thought to merit grace before God. To quote the Augsburg Confession,

The Gospel demands that the teaching about faith should and must be emphasized in the church, but this teaching cannot be understood if it is supposed that grace is earned through self-chosen works.¹⁰¹

The real question is simply this: are these works necessary for salvation? If not, then they are not necessary at all.

The question is whether the observance of human traditions is an act of worship necessary for righteousness before God. This must be settled in this controversy, and only then can we decide whether it is necessary for the true unity of the church that human traditions be alike everywhere. If human traditions are not acts of worship necessary for righteousness before God, it follows that somebody can be righteous and a child of God even if he does not observe traditions that have been maintained elsewhere¹⁰²

The answer to the question is obvious and stated plainly in Article XXVI:

Grace cannot be earned, God cannot be reconciled, and sin cannot be atoned for by observing the said human traditions. Accordingly they should not be made into a necessary service of God... In Matt. 15:1-20 Christ defends the apostles for not observing the customary traditions, and he adds, "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:9). Since he calls them vain service, they must not be necessary.¹⁰³

The obvious application of these principles is that the congregations have the liberty to either use or ignore whatever ceremonies or traditions they wish. Unfortunately, church leaders don't always see it that way. This was especially true of the Roman hierarchy, but one still sees evidence of similar attitudes even within Lutheran and Protestant circles. Although these sentiments can be expressed as brashly as that of the young man who asked, "Lutherans? Are they saved? They're so liturgical," they are more commonly cloaked in the guise of greater expertise and learning. In response we can but sigh and join Melancthon in saying,

Our opponents completely misunderstand the meaning of the righteousness of faith and of the kingdom of God if they regard as necessary a uniformity of observances in food, days, clothing, and similar matters without divine command.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, there are limits to the Christian use of liberty. Of particular concern are the weaker members of the congregation, who may associate particular ceremonies with various kinds of idolatry. Consider for example a large congregation with many former Catholics as members. In one such congregation in St. Louis, all field workers have been required to wear cassock and surplice instead of the alb. Although there is nothing sinful about an alb, many of the congregation's members associate the alb with sacerdotalism and the abominations of the Mass. The seminarians, being the stronger members, are therefore asked to set their liberty aside for the sake of others.

This sort of practice is completely consistent with the Lutheran Confessions. Melancthon writes concerning such traditions,

¹⁰¹AC XXVI, 20 [German]. Tappert, 67.

¹⁰²Ap VII, 34. Tappert, 175.

¹⁰³AC XXVI, [German], Tappert, 67

¹⁰⁴Ap VII, 45. Tappert, 177.

Liberty in these matters should be use moderately, lest the weak be offended and become more hostile to the true teaching of the Gospel because of the abuse of liberty. Nothing should be changed in the accustomed rites without good reason, and to foster harmony those ancient customs should be kept which can be kept without sin or without great disadvantage.¹⁰⁵

Here the concern is primarily with those who by long exposure have come to associate certain practices with the worship of God. These practice provide them with a useful framework for their own spiritual worship and when they are removed their worship suffers. In either case, the weaker brother needs to be taken into consideration for Christian liberty to be properly used. The confessional rule of thumb seems to be, "when in doubt, stick to tradition."

Although uniform practices do have certain advantages church leaders are limited in their ability to establish them. Those with ecclesiastical authority must be careful not only not to offend those who are weak in the faith, but also to avoid binding the consciences of those who choose not follow their lead. Article XVIII of the Augsburg Confession states:

Inasmuch as ordinances which have been instituted as necessary [German: to propitiate God] or instituted with the intention of meriting justification are in conflict with the Gospel, it follows that it is not lawful for bishops to institute such services or require them as necessary.¹⁰⁶

At issue here are all of the various rites established by the Roman Church as propitiation for sin. Included are the Mass, the idolatries of the monks, and the other abuses mention earlier in this paper. It is simply contrary to God's Word for any church leader to try to establish rites that replace the cross of Christ and faith.

As long as this error is avoided and they do not take their regulations so seriously that they try to bind people's consciences, Bishops and pastors may make regulations for the sake of order and those regulations should generally be observed.

Bishops or pastors may make regulations so that everything in the churches is done in good order, but not as a means of obtaining God's grace or making satisfaction for sins, nor in order to bind men's consciences by considering these things necessary services of God and counting it a sin to omit their observance even when this is done without offense... It is proper for the Christian assembly to keep such ordinances for the sake of love and peace, to be obedient to the bishops and parish ministers in such matters... However, consciences should not be burdened by contending that such things are necessary for salvation or that it is a sin to omit them, even when no offense is given to others.¹⁰⁷

It is perfectly consistent with this confessional principle for the Synod to publish a common hymnal and to recommend particular services and rubrics for their use as long as no attempt is made to require their use even in inappropriate circumstances. Congregations, on the other hand, should adopt standard practices whenever feasible, deviating only in the case of necessity.

Where, on the other hand, the ecclesiastic authorities abuse their power, establishing idolatrous traditions or attempting to force the adoption of various adiaphora as if they were necessary for unity of the church or sinful to omit, they must be challenged and disobeyed.

Bishops must not create traditions contrary to the Gospel, nor interpret their traditions in a manner contrary to the Gospel. When they do so, we are forbidden to obey them by the statement (Gal. 1:8), "If anyone preaches another gospel let him be accursed..." To the extent that they teach wicked

¹⁰⁵Ap XV, 51. Tappert, 222.

¹⁰⁶AC XXVIII, 50 [Latin]. Tappert, 89.

¹⁰⁷AC XXVIII, 53 [German]. Tappert, 90.

things, they should not be heard. But these are wicked things: that human traditions are the worship of God; that they are necessary acts of worship; that they merit forgiveness of sins and eternal life.¹⁰⁸

Church leaders need to be aware that the privilege of establishing common forms of worship is nothing more than a privilege and that it is granted them by the congregations which they lead. They have no real authority in matters of worship.

A bishop has the power of order, namely the ministry of Word and sacraments. He also has the power of jurisdiction, namely, the authority to excommunicate those who are guilty of public offense or to absolve them if they are converted and ask for absolution... [But] it does not follow that since they have certain jurisdiction bishops may institute new acts of worship, for worship does not belong to their jurisdiction.¹⁰⁹

In worship, as in matters left free by God's Word, the rights of the congregation and the individual believer reign supreme.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, we have examined the doctrine of worship as it is taught and applied in the Lutheran confessions. In the process, we have looked at only a portion of the available material, but I believe that portion is representative and that it is sufficient to show how fully this doctrine was developed.

Of all the principles that have been derived, the most important is the principle that true worship is not an exercise or ceremony but the subjective response of a faithful heart to God's mercy. True worship is an inner thing, which liturgy can help express, but it also finds expression in all that we say or do because we are God's. It is my prayer that this paper will be a first step toward recovering the true substance of Lutheran worship for our church.

About This Paper.

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¹⁰⁸Ap XXVIII, 21. Tappert, 284.

¹⁰⁹Ap XXVIII, 13. Tappert, 282.