CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

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† Donald L. Deffner †
(1924-1997)

Donald Deffner, full-time visiting Professor of Homiletics at Concordia Theological Seminary for the past decade, died at his home in Moraga, California, on November 24, 1997. He was born to the Rev. Dr. Louis Henry Deffner and Rose May Kreitzer on March 12, 1924. He entered the Kingdom of God through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism on March 30, 1924.

After attending St. John's College in Winfield, Kansas, Dr. Deffner enrolled at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, which awarded him the Bachelor of Arts (1945) and Bachelor of Divinity (1947) degrees. He was ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry on November 2, 1947, at University Lutheran Chapel in Berkeley, California, and was the first Campus Pastor in the Missouri Synod. He later served Immanuel Lutheran Church, Deanville, California, as Assistant Pastor (1974-1983). He received the Master of Arts from the University of Michigan in 1946, and earned the Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in 1957. In 1962 he was awarded the Master of Theology from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. In 1993, Christ College, Irvine, California, awarded him the Doctor of Divinity for his many literary and academic accomplishments.

Dr. Deffner was Professor of Practical Theology at Concordia Semianry, St. Louis (1959-1969), and also served as chairman of that department (1964-1969). Concordia Theological Seminary Springfield also benefited from his talents as he served as guest professor (1963-1969). From 1969-1987 he was Professor of Homiletics and Christian Education at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and was also affiliated with the Graduate Theological Union during this time. As noted, from 1987 to the present he again served Concordia Theological Seminary, now in Fort Wayne.

Among the courses for which Dr. Deffner was best known were Christian Education, Homiletics, and Outreach to the Intellectual. His popular works appeared regularly in the *Lutheran Witness*. At the time of his death he had at least forty books in print, with others scheduled for publication. Among the most popular with seminarians and pastors are *The Doctrine in the Liturgy* and *Myths About the Lutheran Church*, both published by Concordia Theological Seminary Press.

Dr. Deffner loved his church and served it with distinction. He was chairman of the Synod's Commission on College and University Work, advised the Office of the Chief of Chaplains, and directed numerous continuing education programs. At Fort Wayne he continued as Director of the D. Min. Program to his last days.

After a Christian Celebration of Victory Over Death held at Trinity Lutheran Church, Walnut Creek, California, Dr. Deffner was buried in Oakmont Memorial Park, Lafayette, California, on December 1, 1997. Speaking for the seminary was Dr. David Scaer: "In respect to his preaching, his teaching, his writing, his doctrine, and his commitment to Christ and even in respect to who he was as a person, what he was in himself, his accomplishments will preserve his memory. He often thought of what he would do, if he were asked to preach for the funeral for any of his friends. The text would be from the Book of Genesis: 'Now in those days there were giants on the earth.' He never got to preach that sermon, but we who are here know that he spoke unwittingly of himself. He may be the last of his kind in that noble generation. 'Now in those days there were giants on the earth.' May the angels take him to Abraham's bosom and grant that we who walk in darkness of this world may walk with him in the light of Christ."

Dr. Deffner was a long-time friend of the seminary and his wide-ranging expertise will be sorely missed. Most of all, though, we will miss his ever-encouraging presence. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

Two Resolutions from the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne, Indiana

Regarding Lutheran Identity

WHEREAS when two or more churches accept mutual pulpit and altar fellowship, they thereby become one church; and

WHEREAS the ELCA in 1997 formally declared pulpit and altar fellowship with the Presbyterian Church USA, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, all of which belong to the Calvinist/Reformed tradition and confession; and

WHEREAS the ELCA formally accepted a Joint Declaration on Justification with the Roman Catholic Church; and

WHEREAS the Reformed churches have historically affirmed an understanding of the Lord's Supper which denies the real presence of the body and the blood of Jesus in the sacrament (see FC VII); and

WHEREAS Roman Catholic understandings of justification continue to confuse Law and Gospel; and

WHEREAS this tragedy for American Lutheranism has a complex background and global implications (for sample documentation see overtures in LCMS Convention Workbook 1977:112-113; 1979:113; 1981:177-178, 188; 1983:116, 120-121; 1986:128, 133-134; 1989:178-179); and

WHEREAS these actions by the ELCA raise fundamental questions about the Lutheran character of the ELCA and about the appropriate relationship which the LCMS should have with the ELCA at local, district, and national levels; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the LCMS in convention express its deep regret that the ELCA through these actions has ceased clearly and unambiguously to confess the two most central confessional Lutheran distinctives (justification and the sacramental presence); and be it further

RESOLVED, that the President of the Synod be requested to take all appropriate steps to lead the Synod at all levels in a careful study of the nature of Lutheran confessional identity, and to do so in the closest possible union with our sister churches throughout the world.

Regarding Close(d) Communion

WHEREAS the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has maintained and still maintains, in continuity with the ancient church, the historic practice of closed or close communion (see W. Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*); and

WHEREAS the Holy Supper expresses the participants' deep union, through Christ's body and blood, with God and with each other (1 Cor. 10:16-17); and

WHEREAS joint participation in the Supper of the Lord expresses agreement in the apostolic faith and doctrine, including, of course, the confession that the bread and wine in this supper are the actual body and blood of the Lord (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16-17); and

WHEREAS the ancient church and the church of the Lutheran Reformation saw the promiscuous observance of the Holy Supper with members of churches which opposed the full apostolic truth of the Gospel in any article, as a desecration of this most holy Sacrament (see Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 10:18; 11:26-29; Gal. 1:6-9; Heb. 13:10); and

WHEREAS advocates of "open communion" often argue that "denominational differences" are "man-made" and should not divide communicants at the Lord's altar; but

WHEREAS unlike details of "denomination" (name, designation) or organization, the solemn confession of the apostolic truth against all counterfeits is divinely instituted and mandated in the very foundation of the church (St. Mt. 10:32-33; 16:16-18; Gal. 1:6-9; Eph. 2:20; 4:5; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:2-5; Titus 1:9-11; 2 Jn. 10-11; Jude 3); and

WHEREAS to receive the Sacrament at the altar of another confession, or to give it to communicants of another confession, is to deny or compromise one's own confession; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod requires its President, District Presidents, Circuit Counselors, and other officials to give high priority, in their work of encouragement and supervision, to the maintenance of confessional integrity in the practice of closed or close communion.

Adiaphora: Marriage and Funeral Liturgies

Bryan D. Spinks

Introduction

In his lectures on the theology of John Calvin, Karl Barth noted that at the beginning of December 1537 the Bern Council turned its attention towards a number of differences in practice between the Churches of Bern and Geneva, which Bern regarded as disruptive and in need of resolving. There were four main issues. The first three were Bern's retention of certain feasts, fonts, and communion wafers. The fourth was that at Church weddings Bern allowed brides to wear hair adornment, but at Geneva the practice was forbidden on the basis of 1 Peter 3:3, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting hair, and of wearing of gold, and of putting on of apparel, but let it be the hidden man of the heart." Barth observed that while the bridal question was *tout egal* (a totally indifferent matter) for pastors Jacques Bernard and Henry de la Mare, for Farel and Calvin this was a question of the authority of Scripture.[1] He went on to note that in 1537 Bern was very much guided by one Peter Kunz, "a decided Lutheran," for whom such matters would be adiaphora.[2] Indeed, one can hardly imagine Luther wasting much time over hairstyles at a wedding. Compare the freedom expressed in the introduction to his *Traubuchlein* (1529): "Many lands, many customs, says the proverb. Since marriage and the married estate are worldly matters, it behooves us pastors or ministers of the Church not to attempt to order or govern anything connected with it, but to permit every city and land to continue its own use and custom in this connection."[3]

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[1] Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 346.

[2] Barth, *Theology of Calvin*, 347.

[3] "The Order of Marriage for Common Pastors, 1529," *Luther's Works*, volume 53, Liturgy and Hymns (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 111. References to volumes in this series will hereafter be abbreviated *LW*.

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On the matter of hairstyles, the classification of this as adiaphora has won the day, and brides at Geneva are as adorned as any elsewhere. Yet Luther's apparent latitude has its dangers. At what point does custom give way to convention and innovation, and at what point may these become indecent and without taste? Novelty in attire, geographical place, or symbol can distract or obscure what the Christian liturgy attempts to profess. Near see-through wedding dresses, a bikini at a beach setting, an outrageous hairstyle, or secular music may make Calvin's objection not quite such a mere trifle after all. And what of funerals? Apart from cutting out what he regarded as superstitious, Luther made few positive suggestions for funerals. What would he have made of wreaths in the shape of whisky bottles and packets of cigarettes, which have adorned some coffins in England? To borrow the words of Wayne E. Schmidt, services for marriage and funeral liturgies should neither be cheap nor gaudy. They are not secular but churchly rites. They should, therefore, be services of worship, conducted with reverence and dignity, lest inappropriate outward ceremony contradict the spiritual message that the Church seeks to proclaim.[4]

What, however, is the real core of a Christian marriage and funeral liturgy? If the core can be identified, then the rest can be classed as adiaphora. But when does adiaphora cross the line and become an offense or superstitious? While not claiming to be exhaustive, these issues are ones that this paper begins to explore.

On the substance of marriage and funeral rites, Scripture remains singularly unhelpful. The Song of Songs celebrates human love as God given. Lack of decent burial is regarded as an indignity in the Old Testament. It assumes custom, however, and neither describes nor prescribes it. That is true also for the New Testament. Jesus attended a wedding, and much to the horror of prohibitionists, multiplied the volume of wine

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[4]Wayne E. Schmidt, "The Lutheran Wedding Service," *Concordia Journal* 6 (1980): 55.

available to celebrate the nuptials, but gave no advice on ceremonies. And given that every funeral he attended he ruined — including his own — he is every funeral director's nightmare. Yet the New Testament clearly sees marriage as a gift of God, which reflects in certain ways the covenant between God and his people. Further, 1 Corinthians 15, which may have been provoked by a clash over funeral etiquette, reminds us that in the face of death, the Church has a powerful message of good news and defiance to proclaim. Both have eschatological significance. Neither Jesus nor the Church invented marriages and funerals, but because of Jesus, the Church does have something significant to contribute to both, in respect of its own members, and others willing to hear.

Both marriage and funeral rites fall into what Arnold Van Gennep called "rites of passage." In these human rites, Van Gennep identified three stages or phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation. In marriage rites these correspond to betrothal — the separation of the couple as a couple and future husband and wife; the time of the betrothal, when the parties are no longer free for other attachments, but do not yet enjoy the obligations and privileges of marriage; and finally the marriage rite by which the pair of individuals is established in the community as a couple. In funerals there is a dual passage — of the deceased and the bereaved. Impending death was marked by preparation and farewell, and dressing the body for its last journey; the liminality was between death and disposal of the body; and finally, the burial or disposal of the body — that is, incorporation into the land of the departed. But the mourners too were changed by the death, and underwent a period of mourning and adjustment, which was often extended by rites and ceremonies for a period after burial of the body.

It is around these stages of passage that the Christian insights and interpretation are set. When Luther quoted the proverb, "Many lands, many customs," it was applicable to both marriages and funerals. But the questions remain: what constitutes the core of these rites, and what is adiaphora in these rites? And at what point do the customs cease to be adiaphora, and become instead a direct contradiction to the Gospel?

It would be rash to claim that one lecture could cover all that can and needs to be said on this. Rather, this paper begins by looking at what Luther advised in the matter of the two liturgies, illustrating his latitude by reference also to the Swedish Lutheran rites of Olavus Petri. Second, it reviews what modern research has taught us about the origin and development of these two rites in early epochs. It considers these rites in two recent Lutheran liturgies. Finally it briefly outlines what this author considers to be the core elements of these rites, and what may and may not count as useful or unhelpful adiaphora.

Luther and Olavus Petri on Marriage and Funeral Rites

Luther's reforms of the marriage rite were set forth in 1529. He was well aware of the different customs found in different parts of Germany. Noteworthy also is the brevity of provisions for the marriage rite found in German Manuals and Agendas, of which the Magdeburg rite is a prime example. In other words, Luther was not accustomed to lengthy provisions as found, for example, in the Spanish or English medieval rites.[5] In his Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520), Luther had already disqualified marriage from being classed as a sacrament, and he was also critical of the regulations for marriage found in canon law.[6] Essentially, Luther believed that marriage was a covenant of fidelity based upon free consent. He defended the ancient custom of betrothal of vows in the future tense that canon lawyers had tried unsuccessfully to outlaw. But Luther also rightly discerned that the espousals and customs of marriage were essentially secular and private in origin, and certainly not the core of the Christian marriage rite. In the *Traubuchlein*, the marriage contract, which fulfills the requirements of civil and canon law, took place at the entrance of the church building, as was the custom. Only then did the bride and groom enter the church. Luther made no provision for

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[5]Bryan D. Spinks, "Luther's Other Major Liturgical Reforms: 3. The *Traubuchlein*," *Liturgical Review* 10 (1980): 33-38; K. W. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing* (London: Alcuin Club/SPCK, 1982).
[6]*LW*, 36:11-126.

a traditional nuptial blessing—but neither did the Magdeburg Agenda. Instead there is a blessing by Word and Prayer. A reading from Genesis 2 is followed by an exhortation, and Luther frequently preached at this point. Notice, however, Luther's rubric: the pastor "shall read God's Word over the bridegroom and bride"; blessed indeed, by the Word of God himself. And Luther concludes with his version of a nuptial blessing, with hands spread over the couple. Strodach thus commented: "This Office is wholly evangelical; it is built of Scriptures and prayer . . . the Benediction of the Word and Prayer which Luther in another writing says is the only right benediction"[7]

When we turn to Luther and funerals, we lack a proper funeral text. Instead we have Luther's recommendations in summary form, scattered in his writings—in his Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony (1528), and in his Preface to the Burial Hymns (1542).[8] According to H. Richard Rutherford, "Luther, consistent with his rejection of adiaphora that he believed violated the absolute free gift of divine grace, removed funeral rites from the liturgical repertoire, while encouraging appropriate pastoral care of the bereaved and proper decorum (integrity) at burials as a sign of Christian hope."[9]

In fact, Luther had a little more to say than Rutherford suggests. Luther urged that the corpse be fittingly treated; a chaplain and sexton should accompany it; the people should be urged from the pulpit to follow and at the burial to sing the German hymn *Mitten wir in leben sind*.[10] In his Preface to the Burial Hymns, Luther noted that St. Paul exhorts us not to sorrow, but to comfort and have hope. A funeral was an

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[7]Paul Z. Strodach, *Works of Martin Luther*, six volumes (Philadelphia 1915-43), 6:223.

[8]*LW* 40:263-320; *LW* 53:325-331.

[9]H. Richard Rutherford, "Luther's 'Honest Funeral' Today: An Ecumenical Comparison," *Dialog* 32 (1993): 178-184.

[10]*LW* 53:274-276.

opportunity to confess the resurrection, and therefore a time for singing. He wrote:

> Accordingly, we have removed from our churches and completely abolished the popish abominations, such as vigils, masses for the dead, processions, purgatory, and all other hocus-pocus on behalf of the dead. And we do not want our churches to be houses of wailing and places of mourning any longer, but *koemeteria* as the old fathers were used to call them, i.e. dormitories and resting places.
>
> Nor do we sing dirges or doleful songs over our dead and at the grave, but comforting hymns of the forgiveness of sins, of rest, sleep, life, and of the resurrection of departed Christians so that our faith may be strengthened and the people be moved to true devotion.[11]

However, as it is well known, there is an ambiguity in Luther's writings over the state of the dead, and therefore of the desirability of praying for the dead. Philip Secker has observed that Luther's frequent reference to death as sleep is sometimes euphemistic or metaphorical, but in other places seems to have a literal meaning.[12] Secker concluded his survey with the words "Luther was less than wholly consistent in his treatment about the state of the dead between death and the Day of Resurrection."[13] The inconsistency surely reflects that Luther, unlike a number of later Reformers, dared not pontificate on a subject of which Scripture itself never gives systematic treatment. Luther did concede that the saints in light pray for us, and the Lutheran Confessions also taught that it is not forbidden to pray for the dead, providing this is done without attempting to bargain with God and transfer merit.[14] Both the Hannover and Württemberg Church Orders of 1536 acknowledge that

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[11] *LW* 53:326.

[12] Philip Secker, "Martin Luther's Views on the State of the Dead," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38 (1967): 422-435.

[13] Secker, "Luther's Views," 434.

[14] Smalcald Articles, Part II.II.26 and 14. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV.

such prayers are in accordance with an acceptable ancient custom.[15]

The core for Luther, then, seems to have been as follows. For marriage, only after the civil requirements were met (outside the church building, at the door) did the Church's part come—blessing by Word and Prayer. For funerals, dignified disposal, a celebration of the resurrection, and, if worded appropriately, prayer about the dead person.

The Manual of Olavus Petri (1529) provides an excellent paradigm of how Luther's approach to adiaphora was applied to these two rites.[16] The provisions for marriage begin with an instruction, based around Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3, 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 Corinthians 9. Marriage as a covenant is highlighted. Provision is made for the reading of banns three times. Then, at the church door, free consent is affirmed three times, followed by a prayer during which the bride and groom incline their heads together. Yelverton notes that the triple consent and the inclining of heads preserves a peculiarity of the Swedish custom. There is a prayer that relates to the ring, and though it is really more a prayer for the bride rather than the ring, the sign of the cross was made over the ring. The groom's vow and giving of the ring and the bride's vow and receiving of the ring follow, and the witnesses are called upon to remember this giving and receiving. The quotation from Matthew, "Those whom God has joined together," follows, along with versicles and responses, and traditional prayers from the medieval manuals, including a nuptial mass. Two things are of significance. The Swedish tradition of blessing the couple under a canopy was retained, as was the blessing of the home.[17]

When we turn to burial, the first thing to note is that Petri retained the custom of "Hallowing of the Dead," with

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[15]For further discussion one may see Eric E. Dyck, "A New *Lex Orandi*; A New *Lex Credendi:* The Burial of the Dead, 1978, from an Historical Perspective," *Consensus* 18 (1992): 63-73.

[16]E. E. Yelverton, *The Manual of Olavus Petri 1529* (London: SPCK, 1953).

[17]Yelverton, *Manual*, 74-75.

exhortations, a Gospel reading, and a prayer, which included these words: "that, if this our departed brother, whom thou through death hast called from this miserable life, be in such an estate that our prayers can avail for his good, thou wilt be gentle and merciful to him."[18] For the actual burial, provision was made for the committal, with throwing earth on the corpse, prayer (again, with petition for the deceased), an anthem (either a hymn, the *Media Vita,* or a psalm), a lesson, and a homily.

Thus, provision was made for the retention of Swedish customs that differed from the German customs, but also for a theology that emphasized certain continuities with the received tradition, but modified them in such a way as to make them scriptural.

Lessons from Liturgical History

Though there is nothing infallible about the ancient liturgical rites, our knowledge of them and their evolution is such that we are in a better position than our Reformation forebears to distinguish between what was early and authentic in the tradition, and what are later developments or even distortions.

With regard to marriage rites, the first thing of note is the difference in emphasis between Eastern custom and Western custom. In the former, the crowning with garlands remains an important ingredient, as does the exotic imagery of the blessing of the ring. In the West, thanks to the insistence of canon lawyers who wished to pinpoint what was a valid marriage, the emphasis came to be placed upon the public exchange of vows. Historically speaking, however, these are late comers to Christian liturgy.

In the history of Western marriage rituals, two types can be discerned.

1. Rituals reflecting Roman and Italian usage, where a nuptial blessing with a canopy or veil placed over the bride formed part

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[18]Yelverton, *Manual,* 92-94.

of a special mass. The ceremony took place in the church building within a celebration of the mass.

2. Rituals reflecting Celtic, Gallican and Spanish usage, where there is a blessing of the rings and tokens of betrothal (betrothal here as something quite separate from the marriage), and the blessing of the bed or bridal chamber. These were domestic rites, taking place in the home.

At some stage these two rituals came to be amalgamated, providing for the blessing of rings and tokens of espousal, a nuptial mass with blessing, and a blessing of the bed. Only in the eleventh century do we find vows of betrothal, with a promise to marry within a certain period of time, appearing as part of the liturgical provisions. The vows of betrothal in the future tense were repeated again in the present tense before the older liturgical ceremonies commenced. In fact, despite the protestations of churchmen and busybodies, right down to the eighteenth century in England marriage was still frequently a private domestic affair among certain social classes — hence the term "common law" marriages. Liturgically, only with medieval concern for legitimacy and inheritance did it become necessary for the private betrothal to become public, and repeated later in public using the present tense of the verb. The first textual evidence of the vows as part of the liturgy comes from the coastal areas of Northern France. Thus, the vows were the last addition to the rite, put there by the demands of canon lawyers. At the heart of the early rites were blessings of the ring, bride and groom, and the home. The Church blessed a marriage; it did not contract it. In making blessing secondary, the Church has provided liturgies expressing canon law. It is surely significant that Luther's rite gave minimum attention to vows, leaving them outside the church building, and concentrated on the theme of blessing inside the building.

Because the Eastern rites reflect Eastern culture, many of their features would seem strange to those accustomed to Western marriage rites. However, perhaps the blessings of the ring in those rites helps to focus on a neglected feature in Western rites; namely, the ring comes to symbolize the unilateral covenant of

God's grace, typified in the union between Christ and his bride the Church. The ring is a symbol of this, and not simply of a vague "unending love." These themes are usually only hinted at in exhortations and collects in the Western marriage rites. In the Eastern rites, they are built into the symbolism and gestures of the rites themselves. In this sense the Eastern rites reflect the biblical vision far more adequately than the Western rites.

The history of Christian funeral rites also yields some interesting observations.[19] In the old Roman Ordo much of what later became prayer for the deceased was recited at the moment of death, with washing and preparing the body for its final procession for burial. The prayers celebrate God as the giver of life, the recreator, and the resurrecter. The dying person identifies with Christ through the reading of the Passion, is fortified by the Sacrament of the Altar, and dies within the assurance of eternity in the community of saints. Words such as "May the choir of angels welcome you and lead you to the bosom of Abraham; and where Lazarus is poor no longer may you find eternal rest" expressed a confident mood expressed in vivid biblical images. If the moment of death was not precisely pinpointed, it did not matter greatly, since many early Christians inherited the Jewish belief that the soul lingered close to the body for three days. The funeral was a triumphal procession into perpetual light.

From the sixth century, however, a change began to take place. The mass for a death developed from a commemoration to a purification of the dead. From Spain came the idea of anointing the sick for inner wholeness rather than a return to health, and from the Irish Celtic tradition the concept of anointing for purification of souls. The need for purification and absolution began to be stressed over the confident expectation of salvation. The Roman chants were moved from the process of dying to a place after the mass, and were linked with a petition for deliverance from the bitter pains of death. The process can

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[19]See Geoffrey Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* (London: SPCK, 1977); Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

be traced through Benedict of Aniane's Supplement of the Hadrianum, the Sacramentary of St. Denis, and the Lorsch Manual, which became the foundation documents of the overly penitential and petitionary rites of the later Church. From this brief outline it emerges that the earlier Christian rite was a rite of passage for the deceased Christian, and only indirectly through its joyful and triumphant tone, did it serve as a rite for mourners. Prayers for the deceased were a commendation of the Christian person, framed within an anthropology that did not sharply distinguish the disruption of body and soul at the exact moment of death. When Reformation Churches devised rites solely addressed to the mourners, we may detect an over reaction to medieval superstition; rites as bare as that of the Church of England (1552), or the even more extreme Westminster Directory, represent an abdication of eschatology and show a hesitancy about the salvation of the baptized and justified.

Luther did not have the benefit of the wider knowledge we now have. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that, working within his own terms, he came close to agreeing with the substance, if not the precise forms, of the core of the ancient marriage and funeral rites. The key ecclesiastical duty at marriages was blessing; at funerals, to proclaim the resurrection, and thereby to comfort the mourners, and to maintain the ancient duty of prayer about the departed, providing such prayer did not bargain with God and present itself as an *ex opere operato* passport to the divine throne room.

Some Modern Lutheran Rites

Let us now consider the provision made for marriage and funerals in two recent Lutheran compositions from the United States: the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, and the *Christian Worship* of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. As a foil we will also consider those rites as found in the *Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).[20]

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[20] *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978); *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern

The marriage rite in *LBW* is brief, and if it reflects Lutheran antecedents rather than American frontier brevity, they are those of the short German orders. The grace and opening prayer place the liturgy within the presence of Christ and in the context of joy, and the liturgy of the Word is celebrated. But after that it would seem that the vows of medieval canon law are the central part of the rite. Rings are given, but no blessing of the rings, or, what we might expect, a blessing of God in the context of the salvific symbolism of the rings. God is blessed in the later prayers, but there is no profusion of nuptial imagery and nuptial blessing; any eschatological significance of Christian marriage is passed over. It all seems a very human work, with little need of the grace of God. The rite does provide for the Eucharist, but the proper preface is weak, and there is no special nuptial blessing. Luther's special blessing by the Word and Prayer seems to have slipped out, and nothing of comparable significance is put in its place. Finally, those American Lutherans of Swedish descent will look in vain for the canopy and blessing of the nuptial home.

At first sight the Wisconsin Synod's *Christian Worship* seems more promising. The initial "call to worship" celebrates and affirms God's goodness and grace. The liturgy of the Word follows, and an exhortation that does utilize Ephesians 5, though in rather a dull and uninspiring manner. Then come all the eggs in one basket—the marriage promises. An exchange of rings follows, a declaration of the marriage that would make medieval canonists purr with delight, and a meager blessing that could apply to any situation. A few prayers and the Aaronic blessing conclude the rite.[21] Luther's Word blessing has gone, and blessing and celebration are muted in favor of a legal contract. In both rites, that which Luther identified as being of

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Publishing House, 1993); *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). These works will hereafter be abbreviated *LBW, CW,* and *BCW* respectively.

[21] It must be noted that the marriage rite in the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* does no better ([St. Louis: CPH: 1984], 120-128).

the world—the vows—is made the center, and Luther's concept of blessing, or any substantial euchology, are omitted.

BCW, in its Rite II, does much better. Following the Anglican tradition in fundamentalistic fashion, it begins the rite with an exhortation. It then, in the declaration of intent, links the couple's union with Christ in the Church through Baptism. The vows come after the liturgy of the Word, and are certainly prominent. However, the rings are more prominent than in the two Lutheran rites, and even if not utilizing the rich imagery of the eastern prayers, the ring is linked in the prayer with the covenant between God and the Church. The prayers are more imaginative, though this might reflect modern liturgical prayer fifteen years on. However, it is in the eucharistic liturgy that the Presbyterian rite makes up for lost opportunity, with special nuptial blessings applicable to a married couple, and a special eucharistic prayer that picks up on many of the images of marriage found in Scripture. At least the making of the legal contract is set within a richer theology and euchology.

The Burial of the Dead in *LBW* begins by blessing God, and allows for a pall to be placed upon the coffin and a procession. Of the rite, Eric E. Dyck says: "The *lex orandi* has been converted from an Office to a eucharistic structure; from prayers to encourage the faith of the living to inclusion of the deceased as a symbol of the paschal experience."[22] He suggests that no longer is the prayer of the rite only for oneself at the time of death—as in previous burial offices—but rather it seeks to integrate the deceased and thereby recognizes the unity of the Church. Joined to Christ in Baptism, this corpse in the assembly's midst symbolizes the completion of the sinful Adam's drowning and God's creation of a new Adam.[23] However, the actual prayers do not fulfill Dyck's expectations. True, provision is made for the Eucharist. The prayers that introduce the liturgy of the Word, however, hardly reflect the confidence of the resurrection for this particular person. God is

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[22]Dyck, "*Lex Orandi*," 63.
[23]Dyck, "*Lex Orandi*," 69, 65.

thanked for the life of the person, but the consolation of the mourners remains the main concern. In the material that follows, the person is entrusted, commended, and committed, but all with a certain diffidence and uncertainty as to whether Baptism, justification, grace, the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ—those gifts that the Lord gives his children—are sufficient to assume the person is with the Church triumphant. The nearest such confidence is ever expressed in the rite is at the commendation, with its reference to "a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your redeeming."[24] Now, undoubtedly Luther's concern that belief in the resurrection must be proclaimed is here. But surely there is a difference in proclaiming belief in resurrection in a general objective manner, and proclaiming that we actually believe that it does happen to individual Christians, and to this person who is being buried! There is in this rite a loss of eschatological nerve.

CW's burial rite is honest enough in its opening explanatory rubric to spell out its limited intentions. "With the Word of God, the Christian Church comforts the bereaved family and friends and confesses its lasting hope in the resurrection of the dead in Christ."[25] The deceased is mentioned indirectly in a prayer for the mourners, and he/she is "remembered." But on the subject of whether the person is now with the saints, the service is agnostic to a point of cynicism. Like the Church of England, this Synod is unsure about the fate of its own adherents, and so Luther's permissible use of prayer for the departed is a talent buried fair and square in the ground.

By contrast again, the Presbyterian *BCW* seems to have grasped the implications to be gleaned from the history of the funeral rites, and the logic of the classical Reformed concept of the elect. The "Comforting of the Bereaved," a counterpart to the Roman Catholic prayer or vigil by the body, witnesses to a bold recapture of a service that is about resurrection in three

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[24] *LBW,* 211.
[25] *CW,* 144.

particular aspects: Christ's, those who mourn, and the deceased. It includes passages echoing the old *In Paradiso deductem*, and has confident expectation that those who believe do, by God's grace, receive the unfading crown of glory and are received into God's merciful arms. Indeed, the funeral rite itself is interesting in that it assumes that the deceased has been a member of the Church militant, and is now therefore a member of the Church triumphant. The initial part of the service takes place in the church building. For outsiders, it is recommended that the service take place elsewhere, and that certain parts of the service be omitted because they are inappropriate. Koinonia and participation in the sacramental life of the Church are not necessarily regarded as assurance of salvation, but as significant enough to allow for the expression of a confident eschatology. Dare an Anglican suggest that what one might have expected from Luther's teachings on justification by grace through faith and the Sacraments is expressed far more confidently in the Presbyterian rite than either of the two Lutheran rites.[26]

Conclusion: Core and Adiaphora

To suggest that there is one all-purpose formula for arriving at the ideal marriage or funeral liturgy would be ludicrous, and would ignore Luther's observation about "many customs." But given our knowledge of liturgical development, it should be possible to identify both core material and adiaphora in these rites.

The history of the marriage rite confirms Luther's opinion that blessing is central to what the Church does. Luther either knew or sensed that the vows were indeed a domestic, or at least a civil issue, and were not the substance of the Church's rite. Whether we take the Eastern rites, or the Roman, Spanish or Gallican usage, they are concerned with blessing and celebrating marriage, and not primarily with contracting it. That may not be

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[26]Again, I note that the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* provides an excellent commendation of the dying (*Agenda*, 162-168). Yet, why does not its counterpart to the *In Paradiso deductem* find a place also in the actual burial of the dead?

an adiaphora in civil terms, but may be as far as the Church is concerned. Of course, many countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, allow the Churches to continue to oversee that legal responsibility, and that privilege must be carried out properly. For example, in England the form of the vow is strictly controlled by law. This in no way suggests that the Church cease to take that responsibility where it is offered; neither does this argue that the vows should be exchanged outside the church building! But if this late comer to the marriage rite is allowed to take over and eclipse blessing and celebration with rich euchology, then something has gone wrong. Luther used reading of the Word over the couple as blessing, together with a special nuptial prayer with outstretched hands. The Swedish rite retained a traditional nuptial blessing under the canopy, and the blessing of the home. Other rites have made much of the ring and its symbolism as regards the covenant of grace between Christ and the Church. The Roman rite had its special nuptial blessing within the mass. The East has its crowning entwined with rich euchology. These are adiaphora in so far as they depend on custom. They are not adiaphora in terms of what is central about marriage; that is, while the form and symbol may vary and is adiaphora, their focus and purpose in terms of blessing and appropriate celebration with nuptial imagery is not.

Of course, enthusiasm for such symbolism should not lead to stupidity. In the *Manual on the Liturgy,* Pfatteicher and Messerli write: "Crowns of flowers (chaplets) may be placed on the heads of the bride and groom by each other, by their parents, or by attendants after the minister has announced the marriage."[27]

The rite itself, however, gives no rubric, prayer, or formula to accompany this appropriation of an Eastern custom. Why not instead have everyone pick their noses, or spray red paint at the couple? Ceremonies without significance, such as this, are quite meaningless and give liturgy and liturgists a bad name. Of

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[27]Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 353.

course, items such as music and bridal attire, among others, are also adiaphora. But the yard stick is whether they are appropriate, or at least, do not contradict, the Christian vision of marriage that the rite proclaims.

With funerals two things seem central: commendation and comfort. The joyful commendation of a Christian person—created in the image of God, for whom Christ died, and who is justified by faith through grace—is pivotal. Death results in termination of membership of many things, but not of God's Church. The rite needs to express that. Precisely because of this, the rite should be a comfort to the mourners. And both of these things rest on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the good news of salvation. These also are proclaimed in the rite. The white pall, which *LBW* and *LW* allow, is a symbol of baptismal grace. The meeting of the coffin and placing of the pall are gestures of Christ's compassion. H. P. V. Renner has recently described it thus: "The scene is reminiscent of, in fact it is almost a replica of, the triumphant encounter between Christ and the death of a youth at Nain's gate. . . . The depressing cluster of mourners, bearers, and corpse are met here by the symbols and representatives of hope—the ministers of Christ—who bear Christ in their ministry."[28] Like all adiaphora, such things must be judged as to whether they express or contradict the central message of the Gospel in this particular ritual setting.

Dare I suggest that these core elements, which are not contradicted by Luther's insights, together with Luther's proverb, "many lands, many customs," are a sound basis for the compilation of evocative Christian marriage and funeral rites.

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[28]H. P. V. Renner, "A Christian Rite of Burial," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 26 (1992): 72.

Come Sing of Christ the Lamb

James P. Winsor

Come sing of Christ the Lamb
Who takes our sins away
Whose sacrifice beneath the bread
And the wine does lay.
O think on Him
Who thought of thee
And took on flesh in flesh to die.

Come sing of Christ our Groom
Who for His bride did die
To spare her from the wicked foe
And silence his lie.
O joy in Him Who joys to dine
At wedding feast and call thee "mine."

Come sing of Christ our Host
Forth to His Banquet Hall!
His Father welcomes prodigals
And pardons them all.
O feast with Him
And with His saints.
Death's veil is torn; sip heaven's joy.

To the Tune *Love Unknown* (*Lutheran Worship* 91)

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Religion, Culture, and Our Worship

Gene Edward Veith

Those who believe that ways of worshiping should change according to the trends of the culture should prepare themselves for the next step, which has already been taken in England. The newspaper *The World* describes the work of a clergyman named Dave Tomlinson, author of a book entitled *The Post-Evangelical.*[1] After complaining about the tendency of traditional evangelicals to be overly strict in doctrine and morality—both of which he describes as untenable in our postmodern age—he describes a more relevant approach to worship being used by his congregation. "Post-evangelicals," he writes, are "rethinking the traditional notion of church."

> This has led some of us in south London to experiment with a more radical approach by holding meetings on Tuesday nights in a pub. These are invariably conducted in a relaxed atmosphere with people sitting around tables rather than in rows; smoking and drinking are permitted, there are no preachers, sermons or hymns, and the group decides what subjects it would like to discuss.[2]

Here is the ultimate in culture-friendly worship. People today like to sleep in on Sunday mornings, so why not have service on Tuesday nights? In an age of electronically-reproduced music, few non-professionals sing anymore, so why not eliminate hymns? No one today is used to listening to long speeches, so why not get rid of sermons? The implied hierarchy of a preacher authoritatively pontificating to the passive pew-sitters hardly fits with today's democratic society, so why not sit in circles, move to a discussion format, and let the whole group decide what it wants to talk about? Many people today do not feel comfortable in a traditional church building, so why not move services to a bar? Certainly the pub has a deep social resonance in English culture, and allowing smoking and drinking in divine

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[1]London: Triangle, 1995.
[2]"Culture-friendly Worship," *The World*, January 11, 1997.

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service helps to get rid of the negative image many Christians have of moral stodginess.

Of course, as most Lutherans know—but perhaps evangelicals and post-evangelicals do not realize—sitting around drinking and talking about whatever one wants to talk about is what goes on in pubs anyway. If going to church is the same as going to a bar, why does one need the Church?

The problem with Rev. Tomlinson's capitulation to the bar culture is that distinctly Christian worship utterly dissolves to the extent that it apes the secular culture. This is because secular culture is, by definition, oblivious to religion. Nothing will be left of the sacred when it succumbs to secularism. Determining worship styles by surveying the preferences of non-Christians and not by theological reflection and study of the Word of God can only result in the loss of the supernatural. This, after all, is what the word "secular" means. Those who advocate jettisoning the historic liturgy in favor of more culture-friendly styles should be asked whether they find anything wrong with Rev. Tomlinson's approach. Does he go too far? If so, in what ways? What are the lines he crosses over and, if there are biblical and theological lines that define Christian worship over and against the demands of secular culture, might they also be applicable in assessing other experiments in contemporary worship?

Church growth worship reformers should also realize that if liturgical worship is culturally out of step, the same could be said of the elements of traditional worship they themselves usually retain—congregational singing (even of "praise songs"), preaching (even of practical tips for successful living), and congregating in large communal groups (even in mega-churches). About the only place Americans sing, listen to long, oral exhortations, and gather together every week is in church. If such rituals are still comprehensible to a godless culture, perhaps the other elements of historic Christian worship might likewise continue to be relevant after all.

As today's Church struggles with controversies over worship, the efforts to untangle the various theological and cultural issues   involved   are   hampered—on   both   sides   of   the

controversy—by two kinds of misunderstandings. First, there is widespread confusion about what culture actually involves. Second, there is widespread begging-of-the-question about what the relationship between Church and culture is supposed to be. This paper will examine the various dimensions and levels of culture as they relate to worship. It will then explore how the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms establishes a distinct relationship between Church and culture, which ensures that worship is both culturally relevant and supernaturally transcendent.

The Complexities of Culture

Culture is more complex than is often assumed. Sometimes the reach and significance of culture are exaggerated beyond all reason. Sometimes the role of culture is trivialized. There are many different kinds and levels of culture. Discussions about the relationship between worship and culture need first to be clear about their terms.

Today's use of the term "culture," in the sense of an all-encompassing social world view characteristic of a particular group, is extraordinarily recent. It is nowhere to be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1933), which lists raising a crop (as in agriculture) and, by extension, the cultivation of the mind. The *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1976) finally gives as one of the new meanings of the word, "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group." What we today refer to as cultures were in the past termed "civilizations," with the different regions of the world developing their characteristic governments, customs, and art forms. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars in the newly developed social sciences, influenced as they were by the primitivism and organicism of the romantic movement, began to minimize "civilization"(referring to a society's tangible accomplishments), in favor of "culture"(referring to the organic, unconscious identity of a people).

If theology was the queen of the sciences in the premodern era and the physical sciences wielded the scepter in the modern era,

the social sciences rule all other fields in these postmodern times. Consequently, the concept of culture has been extended to include every facet of human knowledge and behavior. For many postmodernists, even scientific and mathematical knowledge is nothing more than a cultural creation. So-called objective knowledge is actually nothing more than the penchant of Western culture to dominate, control, analyze, and exploit, applied to nature as to everyone else. Tribal societies, they say, exist in greater harmony with nature, and who are we to say that we understand the universe better than they do? Religion is understood solely as a cultural phenomenon and is defined by many contemporary cultural anthropologists as nothing more than a means of exerting social control by giving cultural norms a sacred status.

Modernists tended to reject supernatural religions such as Christianity on the assumption that the material universe constitutes the only kind of existence; since the only permissible knowledge was what is measurable by the methodology of the natural sciences, theology was excluded on principle, unless theology adopted the quasi-scientific methodology of, for example, the historical-critical approach to the Bible. Postmodernists tend to reject supernatural religions such as Christianity that claim to represent absolute, transcendent truth. (They also reject the natural sciences on the same grounds.) Religions that are overtly cultural, such as Islam, Hinduism, and tribal nature religions, or that are purely inward looking and private, such as New Age mysticism, fare better than Christianity, which teaches that Christ is the only way to salvation and whose founder sent his followers into all the world to spread the Gospel to every tribe and nation. Since postmodernists tend to reduce all other disciplines to the social sciences, as modernists did for the physical sciences, traditional disciplines must adopt their methodology and philosophical assumptions. Thus the reliance on surveys, opinion polls, and other sociological instruments even in addressing theological issues.

Thus, for much of contemporary thought, culture is all-inclusive, all-determining, and inescapable. A corollary, of

course, is cultural relativism, the idea that since every culture has its own construction of reality, one is just as valid as another. Not just customs and governments, but morality and truth become relative.

If these postmodernists are correct, if culture does embrace everything, then any kind of orthodox Christianity, strictly speaking, is ruled out of consideration. A discussion of the relationship between religion and culture is out of the question; there is only culture. On the other hand, though popular postmodernists might urge us to change the way we worship and the way we believe to correspond with our culture, the more thoughtful postmodernists know this too is impossible. If we are culturally determined, our worship and beliefs are already culturally determined. Culture is not a malleable force that can be accommodated or changed. We do not manipulate culture; culture manipulates us.

My contention is that this postmodernist apotheosis of culture is grossly exaggerated. God transcends culture, and so do morality, science, and art. Culture is not all there is. The diverse cultures of the world do not in fact teach different moralities; rather, all are descended from Adam, giving us all a common humanity, a common sin, and a common Savior. We are not slaves to our culture; human beings shape their cultures through their own deliberations and creativity.

If it is wrong to exalt culture out of all measure, however, it is also a mistake to minimize culture. It is not necessary to adopt the totalitarian definition of culture to recognize that cultural issues can be very important. It is certainly true that every group, large and small, has an identity—the customs, history, language, and symbols by which it defines itself. These together can be said to constitute the group's culture. Culture in this sense does not determine everything, but it does define a sense of community and belonging. Human beings are social creatures, existing in families and communities, and are not simply autonomous individuals. Nations, regions, and other populations with a common history will have their culture, though culture should not be confused with ethnicity or race. A

black man from America, a French-speaking black Haitian, an Hispanic black Cuban, an Ibo from Nigeria, and a Hutu from Rwanda all have extremely different cultures—and the African-American, though having a cultural identity of his own, will still be culturally an American. On a smaller scale, every group—a family, a school, a workplace, even a congregation—thus develops its own culture, its own group identity.

Sociologists point out that such group cultures are defined largely by their rituals. Americans have their sports; a workplace has its formalized ways of doing things; a family has its particular Thanksgiving menus and procedures for opening Christmas presents. Setting theology aside for the moment, local congregations have their customs, theological traditions have their defining signs, and the Christian Church through the ages has always had its ceremonial observances. A Church defines itself and expresses its deepest beliefs in its rituals, in the way it worships, and this is just as true for Baptists and charismatics as it is for Lutherans. Blithely throwing out a time honored liturgy or adopting someone else's rituals instead of one's own can be devastating to a Church's identity, amounting to an act of cultural suicide.

Rituals are not to be taken lightly, as sociologists will testify. A culturally-defining ritual is a product of a community, a history, and an ideology, and is not something that can be made-up and revised at will. If church growth advocates sometimes put too great an emphasis on culture (that is, in adjusting to the culture of the unchurched), they also sometimes take culture much too lightly (that is, the culture of the Church). The notion that a group should change its culture in an attempt to make it appeal more to those outside of the group, is sociologically naive. Destroying a group's identity does not make it more attractive; it makes it cease to exist.

New members do need to be assimilated into the group, initiated into its ways and accepted into the community—a process often neglected by closed, self-contained groups and congregations. Thus, the true focus for church growth should be

assimilating outsiders into the congregation, not assimilating the congregation to outsiders.

The Levels of Culture

Another aspect of culture that needs to be understood more clearly in today's controversies is that culture exists on several levels. The more or less unconscious, traditional, and historical traits and norms of a group constitute its folk culture. (This is the sense of the term that I have just been using.) Another level of culture refers to the achievements of people in that culture, the contributions of artists, inventors, and constitution writers. This is the high culture, what older writers meant by "civilization."

Certainly the folk culture, in the guise of family life and social expectations, shapes individuals. It is also true that individuals shape culture, contributing to their society as a whole. Children's songs and fairy tales emerge out of the folk culture—they were not written by one author but have a communal authorship, as they were passed down orally from parent to child. The high culture is forged, to a large measure, by education. Knowledge, talent, and sophistication are marks of the high culture, which is the realm of expertise, specialization, and creativity. A Beethoven symphony and a novel by Dostoevsky are creations of the high culture. It took individual genius to write them and it takes a fair amount of education and knowledge on the part of the audience to understand and enjoy them.

Most societies have both a folk and a high culture, but today's technologies of mass production, mass communication, and mass consumption make possible a third level of culture: the mass culture, also known as popular or pop culture. Artifacts are made neither by craftsmen or artists, but by machines. Music is approached not through home instruments or concert halls, but by electronic recordings. Products are designed not primarily to meet a need or attain a level of excellence but to sell vast quantities. Mass communication—such as the great engine of pop culture, television—erases regional distinctions, with their distinct local cultures, so that everyone in the nation

watches the same programs, listens to the same music, and buys the same products. The pop culture is grounded in the entertainment industry, which, like the accompanying consumer economy, gives instant gratification. A tale from the folk culture seeks to instruct. A work of literature from the high culture seeks to challenge and explore. A television show seeks only to get good ratings, and its makers will give the audience anything it wants.

We can see the three levels of culture in, for example, food. Folk culture would be a family's Thanksgiving dinner; high culture would be dinner in a gourmet restaurant; pop culture would be fast food, a hamburger wrapped in paper, mass produced, tasty enough, and produced instantly. In African-American music, the folk culture would be expressed in traditional forms such as spirituals and the blues; high culture would be the sophistication and technical virtuosity of jazz; the pop culture of the moment would be rap. In politics, folk culture encourages love of country and civic responsibility; high culture, problem solving and party platforms; pop culture, the sixty-second sound bite and image consultants. Other triads might be a Sunday School Christmas Pageant, a play by Shakespeare, and "Married with Children"; the fairy tale, Dostoevsky, and Stephen King; the national anthem, Mozart, and Heavy Metal.

Pop culture, by its very nature, must appeal to the lowest common denominator, otherwise it cannot attain its mass audience; therefore it values simplicity, shallowness, and accessibility. The high culture is intellectual and demands effort on the part of its audience. The pop culture, on the other hand, must be instantaneously accessible and is thus received passively, requiring neither the communal context of the folk culture, nor the creative perception of the high culture. The only real ideology of pop culture is commercialism—the need to sell products by indulging consumers—and thus, while market-driven, it cares little for ideas or morality. While the folk culture tends to be conservative and the high culture is inter-generational, the pop culture is governed by the dynamics of fashion, and so must be in a state of constant change.

Perhaps this sounds too critical of pop culture. To be sure, it is a real blessing to live in an age of such prosperity that, instead of working all day in the fields and reading by candlelight, we can spend six hours a day watching television and buy everything we could imaginably want at a shopping mall. I am neither a snob nor a Puritan. I enjoy Hollywood movies, cable TV, and my CD-player as much as anyone.

The problem, as many observers have pointed out, is that the pop culture is now pushing out and taking the place of the folk culture and the high culture. Many children today cannot recite the old nursery rhymes or fairy tales; instead, they sing jingles from TV commercials and karate-kick like characters on Saturday morning cartoons. Artists no longer paint landscapes; they paint Brillo Boxes. Folk culture games such as baseball mutate into the big-bucks star-worship of show biz. Education, the foundation of the high culture, is held captive by the pop culture, so that the priority becomes entertaining children, with the help of VCR's and computer games. The consumer mind set of instant gratification, running roughshod over both the folk and the high culture, destroys sexual ethics, the stability of families, and the self-control that every society in the history of humankind has found essential.

Kenneth Myers, in his brilliant book *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: The Christian and Popular Culture*—to which the preceding discussion is indebted—has observed that Christianity can be supported by the folk culture (the rich family and community associations of going to church) and by the high culture (the Church's cultivation of education, theology, and the arts).[3] It cannot, however, according to Myers, be supported by the pop culture. Self-gratification is incompatible with God-centeredness. Pop culture enthrones our sinful flesh. Myers believes that contemporary Christians can enjoy the artifacts of the pop culture, but they must do so carefully and with the realization that the Word of God calls them to a life of grace and service that far transcends the television mind set. But just as pop culture has been invading and taking over other spheres in

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[3]Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1989.

both the folk and the high culture, it is also attempting to absorb the Church.

Strictly speaking, today's controversies over worship are not actually   about the relationship between Christianity and culture. No one is arguing that our worship adjust itself to today's high culture—that our music should experiment with Schönberg's tonal structures or that sermons should take into account contemporary literary theory. Nor is anyone arguing that worship adjust itself to the folk culture, employing more early-American hymns or reestablishing the old custom of church raisings. The controversies are actually about the desire for worship to accommodate the pop culture.

The church growth movement is all about pop Christianity. Every one of the marks of pop culture are evident in the theory and practice of the church growth movement: consumerism, instant gratification, large scale mass appeals, anti-intellectualism, permissiveness, entertainment focused, technology dependence, fashion consciousness, novelty seeking, purposeful superficiality, and the like. Church growth advocates favor pop music and pop psychology over folk culture hymns and high culture theology. It stresses convenience, music synthesizers, and impersonal social-scientist-designed programs. Church buildings are designed on the model of theme parks or shopping malls. The critic used an extremely accurate cultural metaphor when he called the new mega-church mentality "McChurch."

The cultural genius of liturgical worship—again, to set aside for a moment its theological significance—is that it satisfies and brings together both the folk culture and the high culture. The liturgy establishes continuity between generations and between eras, with its roots deep into the history of Christian Church. To say that the divine service comes out of German culture is absurd. Its roots go back to Rome and Greece, North Africa and the Middle East, but its very text is drawn from the Word of God. The liturgy, in its history and use, is of no culture and of every culture—to use a technical term, it is "metacultural"; that is, it offers a framework that both transcends and accords with

all cultures. Liturgical worship carries a profound psychological and cultural resonance, comprised of memories, time tested truths, feelings of continuity, and a sense of belonging—hallmarks of the folk culture.

But liturgical worship also satisfies the demands of the high culture in its substantive content, its challenging theological nuances, the beauty of its language, its settings in fine music, and its aesthetic richness and use of the other arts. Liturgies, while keeping their roots in church history, are certainly subject to translation, updatings, and theological revisions. Designing a liturgy, however, is no light or easy undertaking. It demands the best and most careful work of high culture scholars, theologians, and musicians. Those who worked on *Lutheran Worship* spent years scrutinizing theological minutiae, with Missouri Synod Lutherans, eventually falling out with their now-ELCA collaborators, disputing over the wordings of hymns and debating the fine points of sacramental theology. "It Came upon a Midnight Clear" had impeccable folk culture credentials as a beloved Christmas song, but its Unitarianism and millennialism make it unsuitable for Lutheran worship. This kind of specialized, sophisticated theological analysis is eminently high culture and is extraordinarily important. The next book of worship, recently announcement by the LCMS's Commission on Worship, will take ten years to develop—a far cry from simply throwing together an order of worship in time to get it in the bulletin for next Sunday.

Those who wish to reform worship along church growth lines are likely to ridicule such efforts, because the pop culture tends to dismiss the high culture. Critics of the liturgy emphasize the need to update our music. The fact is, the musical settings in *Lutheran Worship*, composed in the 1980s, are actually more contemporary than most of the "praise songs" which date from the Peter, Paul, and Mary styles of the 1960s. Critics stress the importance of using contemporary language. But a "praise song" is almost as likely to use "Thee's" and "Thou's" as a hymn. Again, the issue is not being contemporary but being pop.

The Two Kingdoms

Thus far we have been examining culture. Even if we come to a perfect understanding of cultural dynamics, we will not thereby solve the dilemma of how the Church in a particular culture is to worship. Those who attempt to sort out the issues of culture and worship must also factor in a major theological point, dealing with what the relationship between the Church and the culture—whether folk, high, or pop—is supposed to be.

H. Richard Niebuhr, in his classic book *Christ and Culture*, outlines the different possibilities, each of which has had its advocates in the history of the Church.[4] One option is to put culture above Christ. In this view, Christianity serves culture, or, in the words of the National Council of Churches slogan, the world sets the agenda for the Church. When the culture changes, Christianity must also change. This is the path of liberal theology.

Certainly few in the church growth movement seem to be liberals as such; they are evangelicals, committed to Scripture and evangelism. But there are different kinds of liberalism according to the time and culture to which they wish the Church to conform. Liberals of the Enlightenment wanted to make Christianity into a religion of reason; liberals of the Romantic era wanted to make Christianity into a religion of feeling. The modernist liberals of the twentieth century wanted to make Christianity relevant to the modern man by demythologizing outdated supernatural doctrines and by applying scientific-critical methods to the Bible.

In our postmodern age, scientific rationalism has lost its authority, and the supernatural is no longer excluded. Thus, postmodern liberals may well admit to supernatural beliefs, but they will adjust them to fit the cultural demands of the moment, whether the nationalism of an ethnic folk culture, the social-constructivist theories of the high culture, or the consumerism of the pop culture. What makes a person a liberal is not any one set of beliefs or unbeliefs; rather, a liberal in theology is defined

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[4]New York: Harper, 1951.

by his willingness to make culture authoritative over the Word of God. The church growth movement is thus, in the most technical sense, a manifestation of liberal theology.

Niebuhr discusses other ways Christianity has related to culture. In the Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions, the Church rules the culture. In the Anabaptist and monastic traditions, the Church is to be utterly separate from the culture. Lutherans have the doctrine of the two kingdoms.

God rules both the Church and the world, but he exercises his sovereignty differently in the different realms. God rules in the hearts of believers by the grace and forgiveness communicated in the Gospel of Christ. God rules the world by his creation, his power, and his Law. God's rule extends to both the secular and the sacred spheres. Christians live in both kingdoms, and may serve God in their earthly callings no less than in the Church. His two kingdoms, however, must not be confused with each other—the Law is binding on non-believers, but Christians are freed by the Gospel; Christian forgiveness is not to be used as an argument against capital punishment or just wars.

The doctrine of the two kingdoms is usually discussed in the context of the role of government or the Christian's political duties, but it applies directly to issues of culture. God is sovereign over culture. This means, among other things, that the folk culture, the high culture, and the pop culture are subject to God's moral law. This also means that a Christian may participate in the various levels of culture, in all of their secularity. Christians have the freedom to love their country, become highly educated in technical fields, and watch TV. They will do such things under God's Law, and thus can be expected to get involved in politics, criticize secularist ideologies, and demand that Hollywood clean up its act. They will be full and active members of their culture.

The other part of the doctrine of the two kingdoms is that the Church must be set apart from the culture. The Church, Luther said, is governed solely by God's Word, and its prerogatives are not to be surrendered to the world. In Hitler's Germany, the idolaters of the folk culture sought to take over the Christian

Church and to purge it of its Jewish elements, namely the Old Testament. The confessional Christians opposed such doctrinal compromises with their lives. Throughout the twentieth century, scholars from the high culture have attacked the reliability of the Bible, but orthodox Christians have stood on the truth of God's Word. Today the Church must resist the dictates of the pop culture.

The doctrine of the two kingdoms, when applied to worship and culture, might mean that a Christian might enjoy popular music — but not want it in divine service. A Christian might be a good businessman — but not want to turn the Church into a business. A Christian might love TV, movies, and computer games — but not look to the Church to be entertained. A worship style would be valued because it is not part of the dominant culture of the moment. Ways would be sought to keep the Church different from the world. The Church would seek to counter the ways of the world, not imitate them. The lost would see in the Church an alternative to the vanity, deceit, and futility of the world.

Our family has the custom of inviting people who have no relatives in the area to our house for Thanksgiving dinner. We do not change our time honored, invariable menu according to what our guests are accustomed. Not only would our children never allow it, but the sense of family established by our eating rituals is exactly what our homesick guests crave. Besides, it would be inhospitable to offer those who eat fast food every day a McDonald's hamburger instead of a Thanksgiving dinner. Our family's task is to invite the lonely and those with no place to go, bring them in, and make them welcome at our feast. This is also the task of the Church.

The Church Growth Movement and Lutheran Worship

Ernie V. Lassman

A Crisis in Worship

Although pastors may have different opinions about the value or the danger of the church growth movement, many, if not most, are aware of how divisive alternative worship styles have become in our midst. For some of us it is a crisis of worship, theology, and identity. This crisis is manifested in the dialogue between those who wish to use historic liturgical formats and customs and those desiring alternative formats. Many members sense that their Church is being taken away from them. Unfortunately, such concerns are sometimes belittled or minimized by telling those members that they must change if they want their congregation to grow. The worst case arises when guilt is heaped upon those who resist alternative worship forms. It is a grave mistake to ignore this crisis by assuming in a simplistic fashion that such opponents of alternative worship styles are simply set in their traditionalistic ways. It is an even graver mistake to dismiss much needed evaluation and discussion of alternative forms with the cry of "adiaphora!" as if there are no principles of or parameters for Scriptural worship.

In Lutheran circles, Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC) and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) have not been alone in raising concerns about certain church growth movement principles and assumptions that affect worship format. There have been individual voices in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expressing concern, as well as independent Lutheran journals such as "Lutheran Forum."[1] This is also a topic of discussion in the Wisconsin Synod.

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[1] David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

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It is also incorrect to think that this crisis is simply another parochial squabble in the LCMS or LCC. It involves most North American denominations. Already in 1970, Dietrich von Hildebrand warned of the dangers of secularism changing the Church and its worship.[2] In more recent times Thomas Day has chronicled the negative effects of secularism on Roman Catholic worship.[3] This crisis of worship format is also found among those within the Reformed and Evangelical traditions. Among Evangelical theologians, writers such as Os Guiness, David Wells, and Charles Colson have published books critical of certain elements of the church growth movement.[4]

This is only by way of introduction. There is a growing body of literature across Christian traditions that expresses grave concerns about church growth movement theology and its resultant worship styles. It is therefore imprudent to ignore the concerns of fellow Lutherans in the L CC and the LCMS.

The Worship Crisis and Culture

This crisis, however, must be put in the larger context of our culture. What we are dealing with is the relationship of the Church to the culture in which we live. The Church has always had this tension with culture. But an increasing number of observers of culture talk about a "Post-Christian society." It seems that many segments of the Church are trying to

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[2] Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Trojan Horse and the City of God* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1967).

[3] Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); Thomas Day, *Where Have You Gone, Michelangelo: The Loss of Soul in Catholic Culture* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

[4] Os Guiness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993); *No God but God: Breaking with the Idols of our Age*, edited by Os Guiness and John Seel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992); David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Charles Colson, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages* (Minneapolis: Grason, 1989); Charles Colson, *The Body* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992).

accommodate to culture at a time when that culture appears not only to be more hostile to the Church as an organization, but even to the Gospel message. Roger Lundin writes, "If the danger two centuries ago was that of a Christian faith become irrelevant, the present risk is that Christ may become so completely identified with the concerns of the present age that his person is rendered superfluous and his authority denied."[5]

There are two sources of the problem. One is our society/culture in general. The whole of western civilization is at a turning point. It is true that since the Enlightenment there has been a slowly unfolding crisis in Western civilization, which intensified in the 1960s and has taken on a new urgency. There are different nuances to this phenomenon. Some of its elements include an exaggerated individualism, consumerism, pragmatism, popularism, emphasis on technology, statistics and methods (including management), focus on experience at the expense of truth, an ahistorical view of life (with emphasis on the present at the neglect of the past and indifference to the future), and stress on the psychological well-being of man as facilitated by a therapeutic mind set. Three terms seem to capture the essence of all these different traits: modernity, secularization, and narcissism. Os Guiness defines modernity as ". . . the character and system of the world produced by the forces of development and modernization, especially capitalism, industrialized technology, and telecommunications."[6] Concerning secularization he says ". . . the sharpest challenge of modernity is not secularism, but secularization. Secularism is a philosophy; secularization is a process. . . . The two most easily recognizable hallmarks of secularization in America are the exaltation of numbers and of technique."[7] Narcissism describes a personality that is shaped by the forces of modernity and secularization. Christopher Lasch described the relationship of

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[5]Roger Lundin, *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 79.

[6]Guiness, *Dining*, 16.

[7]Guiness, *Dining*, 49.

our culture and the narcissistic personality.[8] David Wells summarizes Lasch's description of the narcissistic personality:

> He means a person who has been hollowed out, deprived of the internal gyroscope of character that a former generation sought to develop, and endowed instead with an exaggerated interest in image as opposed to substance. Efforts to build character have been replaced by efforts to manage the impression we make on others. Behind this constant game of charades, this shifting of cultural guises, is a personality that is typically shallow, self-absorbed, elusive, leery of commitments, unattached to people or place, dedicated to keeping all options open, and frequently incapable of either loyalty or gratitude. This, in turn, produces a strange psychological contradiction. On the one hand, racked by insecurity, this personality is driven by a strong desire for total control over life. This accounts for the modern mania for technology. . . . On the other hand, this kind of person often proves unwilling to accept the limitations of life and hence is inclined to believe in what is deeply irrational. Thus primitive myths and superstitions are now making their appearance side by side with computer wizardry and rampant secularization.[9]

The influence of modernity and secularization is pervasive in our society. Unfortunately, many churches are accommodating these movements by incorporating some aspects of the church growth movement under the guise of "needs" (without questioning the validity of these "needs"). Many in the church growth movement seem to have forgotten that the culture we live in is not neutral to the message of the Church.[10]

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[8]Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

[9]Wells, *Wasteland*, 217.

[10]Wells notes (*Wasteland*, 35): "It is ironic that there are those in the church who view culture as mostly neutral and mostly harmless . . . while there are those in society who recognize that culture is laden with values, many of which are injurious to human well-being. . . . The church may choose to disregard many of today's cultural critics who are raising the alarms about

Os Guiness makes the remarkable statement that ". . . modernity simultaneously makes evangelism infinitely easier but discipleship infinitely harder. . . . The problem is not that Christians have disappeared, but that Christian faith has become so deformed. Under the influence of modernity, we modern Christians are literally capable of winning the world while losing our own souls."[11] Then he goes on to state five ironies:

> First, Protestants today need the most protesting and reforming. Second, evangelicals and fundamentalists have become the most worldly tradition in the church. Third, conservatives are becoming the most progressive. Fourth, Christians in many cases are the prime agents of their own secularization. Fifth, through its uncritical engagement with modernity, the church is becoming its own most effective gravedigger.[12]

Guiness does not merely diagnose the problem, however. He a serious challenge to American Evangelicals: "It is time once again to hammer theses on the door of the church. . . . Christendom is becoming a betrayal of the Christian faith of the New Testament. To pretend otherwise is either to be blind or to appear to be making a fool of God."[13]

There are many who fear that the church growth movement shows characteristic signs of modernity and secularization in trying to meet the needs of a narcissistic culture. Lutheranism has also been influenced by the church growth movement, including its concept of worship. In view of this influence, it seems that certain questions demand an answer if we are to be able adequately to evaluate worship forms. The form that

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the drift of western culture and its internal rottenness . . . but it does not have the luxury of disregarding what Scriptures says about our world. And today, what Scripture says about the 'world' and what these critics are seeing in contemporary culture are sometimes remarkably close."

[11]Guiness, *Dining,* 43.

[12]Guiness, *Dining,* 62.

[13]Guiness, *No God but God,* 290.

worship takes will to a large extent depend on the answers given to six specific questions. These questions are all closely related to one another and have other ancillary questions intertwined with them. It is hard to answer one question without reference to the others. But these six questions are at least a starting point to evaluate the present crisis. And the answers to these questions will not only determine what we do on Sunday morning; they will determine our future (and our children's future) as a confessional Lutheran Church. Let us, then, consider these six critical questions.[14]

Worship and Evangelism

One important question involves the relationship between worship and evangelism. Do we use worship to evangelize people or do we evangelize people so they can worship? Is worship *primarily* for believers or unbelievers? Is worship *primarily* for the "churched" or the "unchurched"? How one answers this question has significant implications. If worship is primarily for believers who already belong to the Church, then one would expect the worship form to reflect this. This would mean that language, concepts, symbols, and music would have an "insiders" feel. Such an approach would have an "alien" feel to an "outsider," that is, one who is not yet a believer and a member of the Church, because it would result in a form that reflects knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. The form/style would be in keeping with Paul's exhortation to be mature and to put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11;

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[14]Until recently, these questions were not being asked, especially in official gatherings of Lutherans. I, at least, have not heard them being asked in any formal presentation at conferences. Experience has proven to this writer that certain church growth movement principles have simply been stated as givens—as if the validity of these principles is obvious and thus beyond debate. Fifteen years ago I was on the road of the church growth movement because I wanted my congregation to grow and because I did not know at the time where the road was leading. Thus, I speak as one who has read church growth books and attended church growth seminars and conferences. I slowly changed course because I could not in good conscience maintain a Scriptural and confessional position and utilize church growth principles.

Ephesians 4:13; Hebrews 5:14). But if one uses worship to evangelize the non-Christian there could be a temptation to have a format that is lower in its expression of Christianity — the lowest common denominator, so to speak. For example, we hear these days of "seeker services." For whom are such services designed? If they are designed for non-Christians, there can be no worship format at all since they cannot worship God without faith in Jesus Christ. This is carried out to its logical conclusion in Bill Hybels' Willow Creek Community Church, which purposefully omits the cross from the building, striving instead to look like a concert hall or movie theater lobby. However, if most of the attendees are already professed Christians, what is the purpose of offering a "seeker service" to them? And if these services are held on Sunday morning, will not such services actually confuse what worship is for the "seeker" and for many members of the congregation? Indeed, George Barna, a close friend of Hybels, makes this very point:

> The concept of worship has no meaning to many people. A study among Baby Boomers who are lay leaders in their churches found that less than 1% said they participated in the church out of a desire to worship God. . . . The research also points out that we operate on the basis of assumptions — many of which are unfounded. One startling discovery from a survey among young adults who are lay leaders in their churches was that the very reason for attending church on Sunday mornings (that is, what we *assumed* was the "reason" for attending church) was but a foreign concept to 99 out of 100 of those individuals. Worship? These leaders readily admitted that they were involved in the church for a myriad of reasons *other than worship*. The problem was not that they rejected the idea of worshiping God, but rather that they were not clear what that meant. This absence of clarity did not stop them from pursuing what they thought their role in the church was.

That role simply had little, if anything, to do with worshiping God, or encouraging others to do so.[15]

In addition, the phrase "seeker services" has the sound of revivalism, which is foreign to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions. Revivalism was one aspect of American Lutheranism as promoted by Samuel Schmucker. Revivalism is a distinct American phenomenon shaped by the culture of the nineteenth century. Speaking of the negative consequences of revivalism Mark Noll says "the combination of revivalism and disestablishment meant that pragmatic concerns would prevail over principle. What the churches required were results—new adherents—or they would simply go out of business. Thus, the production of results had to override all other considerations."[16] And this is part of the problem for these same forces are loosed in the church growth movement. Thus, a part of our current crisis is "Americanization."[17]

If one shapes the worship format according to the lowest common denominator, one is not only restricted in the use of the best of Christian expression, but opens the door for secular ideas and concepts to shape the worship service apart from God and his Word. I have been at pastors' conferences and heard Lutheran speakers say that the problem is our members who resist change because they do not want to grow. Church growth experts tell us we should be more concerned about meeting the

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[15]George Barna, *The Church Today: Insightful Statistics and Commentary* (Glendale: The Barna Research Group), 37, 39.

[16]Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 66.

[17]In other words the battle with Samuel Schmucker and the American Lutherans is repeating itself. David Gustafson, an ELCA theologian, writes (*Lutherans in Crisis*, 170): "The American Lutheran controversy [of the nineteenth century] is an example of an Americanization struggle, one that involved Lutheranism's very identity. The debate regarding the form Lutheranism is to take in America is not finished. It is as alive among Lutherans in American today as it was in the mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately, Lutherans do not always realize that the issues of Americanization and religious identity are ever-present and are a part of the various decisions they make."

needs of the unchurched person than meeting the needs of the very people who believe in Jesus Christ and support the Church with their faithful and regular involvement and monies. It is true that our democratic society is unfriendly to the idea of "outsiders" and "insiders," yet this is inherent in Christianity. Jesus made the distinction between "outsiders" and "insiders" when he was telling parables. In Mark's Gospel Jesus tells his disciples (the "insiders"): "The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables" (Mark 4:11). And Paul refers to "outsiders" and "insiders" in at least four different texts: 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; and 1 Timothy 3:7. The very name "Church," *ekklesia*, means "those called out" and implies this outsider/insider tension, as does Paul's familiar phrase "When you come together" (1 Corinthians 11:18).[18]

An unfortunate result is that faithful Christians — members of congregations, the believers, the insiders — are spoken of as if they (the baptized children of God) are the enemy, while the unbelievers — non-members, the "outsiders," people who are presumably spiritually dead — are considered the appropriate people to determine the worship practices of the Christian congregation. If these "seekers" are not spiritually dead, then they are already Christian. How, then, does this relate to "outreach"?

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[18]Charles Colson writes (*Against the Night,* 98-99): "Recently a neighbor told me how excited she was about her church. When I tried to point out diplomatically that the group was a cult, believing in neither the resurrection nor the deity of Christ, she seemed unconcerned. 'Oh, but the services are so wonderful,' she said. 'I always feel so good after I've been there!' Such misguided euphoria has always been rampant among those seeking spiritual strokes rather than a source of truth. But what about the church itself, that body of people 'called out' to embody God's truth? Most of the participants in Robert Bellah's study saw the church as a means to achieve personal goals. Bellah notes a similar tendency in many evangelical circles to thin the biblical language of sin and redemption to an idea of Jesus as the friend who helps us find happiness and self-fulfillment. These 'feel gooders' of modern faith are reflecting the same radical individualism we discussed in earlier chapters. . . . The new barbarians have invaded not only the parlor and politics but the pews of America as well."

Do we use worship to evangelize people or do we evangelize people to worship with us? If new Christians are properly instructed, worship makes much more sense.[19] Historic Christianity, including Lutheranism, has a long practice of catechetics for "outsiders" to help them make the transition to being "insiders." This is the process of learning the language of Christ's culture, that is, his Church. Indeed such evangelism and catechesis have been the norm throughout the Church's history.

Michael Green examines the various methods of early Christian evangelism under two heads: public evangelism and personal evangelism.[20] Under the category of public evangelism he includes the following methods: synagogue preaching, open air preaching, prophetic preaching, teaching (catechesis), and household evangelism. Under personal evangelism he includes: personal encounters, visiting, and literary evangelism (apologetics).[21] He does not mention evangelism (as primarily reaching the unbeliever) as a part of worship. Rather, his account is in keeping with Peter Brunner, who writes: "It is already becoming evident that the worship of the Church must, in its essence, be more than a missionary proclamation of the Gospel."[22] We must have a clear image of worship in our mind. Do we come together on Sunday mornings primarily to evangelize the unchurched (and why should they want to come if they are not Christian) or do we evangelize with the result that newly baptized believers join us in worship?

Entertainment and Worship

A second crucial question concerns the difference between entertainment and worship. Entertainment is man centered while worship is God centered. This too is a cultural

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[19]It is not uncommon for new members who have gone through the Adult Information Class to tell me how the sermons and the liturgy have become more meaningful with a fuller understanding and appreciation.

[20]Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

[21]Green, *Evangelism*, 194-225.

[22]Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, translated by M. H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 86.

phenomenon that is affecting the Church and its worship. Neil Postman lays the responsibility for this development at the feet of television, which "speaks in only one persistent voice—the voice of entertainment."[23]

Postman also devotes an entire chapter to television's affect on Christianity. He writes:

> Religion, like everything else, is presented, quite simply and without apology, as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away: there is no ritual, no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence. On these shows, the preacher is tops. God comes out as second banana.[24]

Postman refers to such broadcasts as the Trinity Broadcasting Network, hosted by Paul and Jan Crouch. But the religious programming so common on television is often duplicated in parts of the church growth movement. An entertainment mindset can also creep into local congregational worship. Entertainment focuses on what is pleasing and pleasurable to me—it is self-centered.

Entertainment comes into the Church through such concepts as pragmatism, meeting needs, and the role of the therapeutic

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[23]Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 80. Postman goes on to demonstrate the negative effects of entertainment on education and journalism. Television, he says, presents everything (even serious subject matter) in such a way that "the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure" (87). This was apparent in a dramatic way in CNN's coverage of the O. J. Simpson trial, with its melodramatic lead-in music and format that was hard to distinguish from a fictional murder drama. This idea is also related to an exaggerated emphasis in the church growth movement on the immanence of God and a neglect of his transcendence. God is often presented in ways that make him and his Son appear more like friends, at the expense of his "otherness" and holiness. God's transcendance cannot find expression in celebratory, user friendly worship formats.

[24]Postman, *Amusing*, 116-117.

in American Culture. Entertainment does not involve a Law and Gospel, sin and grace approach to worship. The Law is often missing (such as confession of sin), or if it is included, it is trivialized by the therapeutic approach to worship.

In *The Culture of Narcissism,* Christopher Lasch writes, "The contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation . . . but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health and psychic security."[25] In this therapeutic model each individual is portrayed as a victim of someone or something. Confession of wrong doing is unnecessary—we are simply victims who need comforting words to soothe our wounds. Thus, people come to church to feel good, to be soothed and comforted therapeutically. This is passed off as gospel, but is, in fact, no gospel, in the biblical sense, at all. And if this other gospel is not offered, people will seek and find it somewhere else. An entertainment approach to worship, which exaggerates the immanence of God, has forgotten God's transcendence, his holiness.[26]

The danger of much of contemporary worship is that it makes God so comfortable so common that our Heavenly Father is changed into a Sugar Daddy who spoils us with all that we want. Further, his Son becomes simply our "friend," whom we

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[25]Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism,* 33.

[26]David Wells writes (*God in the Wasteland,* 141, 145, 159): "In the church today, where such awe is conspicuously absent and where easy familiarity with God has become the accepted norm for providing worship that is comfortable and consumable, we would do well to remember that God is not mocked. . . . Until we recognize afresh the centrality of God's holiness . . . our worship will lack joyful seriousness . . . and the church will be just one more special interest pleading for a hearing in a world of competing enterprises. . . . The psychological fallout from this constant barrage of changing experiences, changing scenarios, changing worlds, changing world views, and changing values . . . is dramatic. . . . It greatly accentuates the importance of novelty and spontaneity, since each new situation, each new opportunity, each new alternative demands that we make a choice of some kind. We are, in fact, caught up in a furious whirlwind of choices that is shaking the foundation of our sense of stability.

introduce to others on "Friendship Sunday." God's immanence can be stressed to the point of neglecting his transcendence, his "otherness" and holiness.

The Means of Grace and Response

Another question that needs to be answered adequately is the relationship in worship between the objective (the Means of Grace-the Gospel-justification) and the subjective (our response-sanctification). What is this relationship? Does one try to get a fifty/fifty balance between these two elements? Or should one of these elements be purposely emphasized more than the other? And if so, which one? Clearly, even as the Gospel is to have a certain priority over the Law, likewise, the objective Means of Grace are primary in the worship life of a Christian. Not all Christians — specifically the Reformed Churches — agree on this Law/Gospel tension with the Gospel as priority. The Lutheran Confessions, however, have a very clear and definite understanding of worship as God's service to us by his Gospel in the Means of Grace (yet without falling into antinomianism). For example, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession says: "It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely, that we receive from what he promises and offers."[27] Again, "Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God, while the worship of the Law is to offer and present our goods to God. . . . [T]he highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness."[28] Finally, "But the chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel."[29] There can be no appropriate response apart from the Means of Grace-the Gospel-justification. Human nature leads us to emphasize the subjective side of worship, human response. This is simply another aspect of Law and Gospel. By nature human beings are oriented not to the Gospel but to the Law. This means that unless consciously monitored worship will

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[27] *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 114:49.

[28] Tappert, 155:310.

[29] Tappert, 221:42.

easily become dominated by the Law and our response with a focus on sanctification, not justification. This natural inclination toward the Law is reinforced and illustrated by our society's emphasis on entertainment and therapy. Left unchecked worship can be reduced to a purely human activity where man becomes the measure of all things. Confessional Lutheranism, however, has always held that, while Law and Gospel are both to be proclaimed, the Gospel is to predominate. As Walther reminds us: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching."[30] Thus, in worship the Means of Grace-the Gospel-justification will predominate in relation to our response and sanctification.

In view of this inclination, a conscious effort must be made to emphasize the Means of Grace-the Gospel-justification— not at the expense of response, but in its proper proportion to the Gospel. The liturgy revolves around and takes its form from the Means of Grace and not our response, feeling, or experience. The driving force, then, behind concern for worship formats is not "traditionalism," or "maintenance ministry mentality," or other such things, but stems from a concern for the Gospel as given through the Means of Grace. The church growth movement does not have a strong Means of Grace theology. Among other things, the Sacrament of the Altar does not fit well into "user friendly" formats that are based on methods with roots in revivalism. Tim Wright, one of the pastors at the ELCA's influential Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, Arizona, comments on the practice of close(d) communion by saying: "This policy will not work in a visitor-oriented service. 'Excluding' guests will turn them off. It destroys the welcoming environment that the Church tried to create."[31]

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[30]C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, translated by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), 403.

[31]Tim Wright, *A Community of Joy* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 122.

Style and Theological Substance

All of this leads us to a another closely related question. Can worship style really be separated from theological substance? Can a Lutheran congregation worship with a Reformed or Pentecostal style and maintain its Lutheran identity in its teaching and worship over a period of time? No doubt a certain tension can be maintained by conscientious people, but what about when they leave? What if our theology and tradition are forgotten in certain circles and the foundation deteriorates? What will future generations build on?

Is worship so much an adiaphoron, as many people say, that the style of worship is insignificant or indifferent? Common sense, experience, and church history would say that such a view is naive and misguided. Can it really be true that there is *no* relationship between theology and worship style? If this is true, then why would there be even a need for alternative worship styles? The history of the Christian Church shows that there is a relationship between style and substance. To deny this shows the influence of our culture, which sees everything in neutral terms. In the fifth century Prosper of Aquitaine summarized the practice of the early church with his saying *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* (the rule of praying [that is, worshiping] is the rule of believing). This principle existed long before Prosper articulated it for posterity. "The way in which Christians worshiped served to shape their understanding of the faith just as powerfully as reading the Bible."[32]

During the time of the Reformation style and substance in worship first became an issue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics and then between Lutherans and the Reformed. During the time of the Leipzig Interim Lutheran Churches were under pressure to return to certain forms of the Roman Mass. What Lutherans had deleted or changed in the received Roman Mass reflected the theological differences between Rome and Wittenberg. Clearly our Lutheran forefathers knew that style

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[32]Carl Volz, *Faith and Practice in the Early Church: Foundations for Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 148.

and substance went together. This is one of the main reasons for including Article X in the Formula of Concord, "The Ecclesiastical Rites That Are Called Adiaphora or Things Indifferent."

> We believe teach, and confess that at a time of confession, as when enemies of the word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the Gospel, the entire community of God, yes, every individual Christian, and especially the ministers of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated to confess openly, not only by words, but also through their deeds and actions, the true doctrine and all the pertains to it, according to the Word of God. In such a case we should not yield to adversaries even in matters of indifference, nor should we tolerate the imposition of such ceremonies on us by adversaries in order to undermine the genuine worship of God and to introduce and confirm their idolatry by force of chicanery.[33]

The cry of "Adiaphora" too easily and too frequently obscures the discussion of worship forms. Too often those who try to raise some red flags about certain worship practices in our midst are tuned out with the cry of "maintenance ministry," "traditionalism" or "adiaphora."[34] However, David Wells strikes a similar note:

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[33]Tappert, 612:10.

[34]Peter Brunner (*Worship,* 227) reminds us that: "The legitimate historical change of the form of worship takes part in the legitimate historical change of the form of testimony. The legitimate change of form is not a matter of convenient accommodation to the questionable needs of a certain era. The history of worship in the Evangelical [Lutheran] church since the era of Enlightenment demonstrates so clearly how the form disintegrates and its service of testimony is rendered doubtful and impossible by such a wrong adaption of the form of worship to the pattern of this world (Rom. 12:2). Secularization is assuredly not adapted to the form of worship. Just as the witness of the Gospel faces the world vested in a peculiar and singular strangeness, so also the form of worship dare not surrender—precisely in view of its testimonial service—its singularity and strangeness, which is well-nigh incomprehensible to the world."

The important contrast lies not so much between those who define themselves theologically and those who do not but between two different theologies by which people are defining themselves. Those who voice dissent with classical evangelicalism at this point do so not because they have *no* theology but because they have a *different* theology. Their theology is centered on a God who is on easy terms with modernity, who is quick to endorse all of the modern evangelical theories about how to grow one's church and how to become a psychologically whole person.[35]

Such differences are manifested in worship practices. David Luecke's *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*[36] evokes comparison with Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, with its terms "accident" and "substance." Briefly put, this doctrine teaches that bread and wine are no longer a part of the supper but only have the appearance of bread and wine, while the substance is the body and blood of Christ. To these Lutherans respond: "If it looks like bread, it is bread. If it looks like wine, it is wine. The body and blood of Christ are surely present, but there is also the substance of bread and wine and not simply the appearance, the "accident" of bread and wine. A rose by any other name is still a rose. If a Lutheran worship service takes on the appearance of a non-Lutheran service, that is exactly what it is—non-Lutheran. The format of a worship service will reflect some kind of theology.

Worship and Music

Closely related to worship style is the question of music. Is music neutral? Is some kind of music more suited to the worship of God than other kind of music? Both common sense and studies have shown that music is not neutral. Both television and the movies use music to call forth the desired emotions to fit the action on the screen. If one gets scared while watching a movie on television, all one has to do is hit the

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[35]Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 290.

[36]David Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance: Facing America's Mission Challenge* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988).

"mute" button and the anxiety immediately goes away. Postman notes the powerful ways in which television uses music:

> All television news programs begin, end and are somewhere in between punctuated with music. I have found very few Americans who regard this custom as peculiar, which fact I have taken as evidence for the dissolution of lines of demarcations between serious public discourse and entertainment. What has music to do with the News? Why is it there? It is there, I assume, for the same reason music is used in the theater and films — to create a mood and provide a leitmotif for the entertainment. If there were no music — as is the case when any television program is interrupted for a news flash-viewers would expect something truly alarming, possibly life-altering.[37]

Regardless of the music that is used in worship, no music should dominate the Word of God, but serve the proclamation of the Word.[38]

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[37]Postman, *Amusing*, 102-103.

[38]Thomas Day (*Why Catholics Can't Sing*, 73-74) comments on the impact that an informal, non-liturgical style with folk type music has had on the Roman Catholic Church: "GLORY AND PRAISE [a song book] and the whole reformed-folk repertory have been responsible for a radical redistribution of power. What power the liturgical event once contained is now handed over to individuals who take turns showing off their newly acquired strength. *Priest.* The reformed-folk repertory creates a casual ambiance which permits the priest to spend every moment of a liturgy trying to manipulate a congregation with the power of his charm. *Congregation.* That 'now' repertory in GLORY AND PRAISE and similar books — virtually untouched by any indebtedness to the past — reassures the congregation that the Catholicism of history, church authority, experts, and authorities of all kinds have no power over them. *Musicians.* Folk musicians are big winners in this redistribution of power. The music itself allows them to pull a large portion of the liturgical 'time' to them. If all the music in GLORY AND PRAISE and derivative publications could be stretched out and measured by the inch, you would find that several hundred feet are for the congregation but miles and miles belong to the special performers, the local stars, who must always.be placed where everyone can admire the way they feel the meaning of words. The congregation, awestruck, merely assists."

Has the question about music become too important? We cannot escape our cultures's view of music, which includes such songs as "I believe in Music"(with its spiritual overtones about the value and worth of music), or the idea that music is the international language that can unite the world, or its emphasis on emotion.[39] Is the concern in many churches about up-beat music another example of the influence of the culture on the Church that is not entirely good? Is there a danger of exchanging a Word and Sacrament ministry for a Word and music ministry? Richard Resch summarizes the early church's attitude toward music:

> Music was respected as a power (even without a text). Music was regarded as one of the best teachers available for both good and bad. Music was expected to serve the glorification of God and edification of man. Music was feared as a carrier of pagan influences to young and old. Music required and received vigilance by church authorities, and concerns were addressed decisively by modifying the practice of the church.[40]

It is clear the one danger of music in the Church is that it can easily fall into the category of entertainment, with the goal or result that feeling good about the music overshadows the message of the music and the glory of God. There is a danger that worship will not be about truth, but having an experience, and that the *words* of the music will become secondary to the beat, the sound, or the feeling produced. The practice of having Gospel songs prior to the beginning of the worship service is designed to "prepare our hearts for worship." Why is such singing *preparation* for worship and not worship itself? What is the role/purpose of this music? It may be nothing more than emotional manipulation. Two powerful forces combine to denude worship of its theological content: one is the role of

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[39] One of the Seattle's Rock n' Roll, Golden Oldies, stations advertizes itself as the "feel good station."

[40] Richard Resch, "Music: Gift of God or Tool of the Devil?" *Logia* 3 (Eastertide 1994): 35.

pragmatism over truth and theology. The other is the therapeutic model of our society which is not concerned with theology but our psychological well-being—experience over truth.

All of this leads to not only a diminution of the value of words, but of theology in order that the music may produce the desired therapeutic affect. A Word and Sacrament ministry calls for a different form than a Word and music ministry. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul says, "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (NIV). Everything is obedient to Christ, including music, which is to serve the Word of Christ and not compete with it or dominate it. This subjection to Christ is true not only of the music but of those who are playing the music—they are servants in a corporate setting, not individuals entertaining. In Philippians Paul says, "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (4:8, 9 NIV). These are the standards that are to be applied to the use of music in the Church. The music of worship is to be noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

The danger is that the anti-intellectual currents in our culture will gravitate toward weaker texts and music. We must be aware of this element of anti-intellectualism that accompanies "user friendly" formats and a stress on feelings and emotions.

It is this kind of evangelicalism of the church growth movement that wants us to modify our worship and our music. Many fear that we are in danger of giving up our intellectual heritage, our theology, for emotional pottage. Emotions have a place in worship—no credible person would deny this. But emotions are secondary and are monitored by the intellect. The place and role of emotion in worship is an important part of the current debate on worship styles.

Worship and Meeting Needs

All of the above mentioned questions come from one of the most basic principles of the church growth movement—meeting

the "needs" of people. As Robert Schuller is fond of saying: "Find a need and meet it." This principle needs to be evaluated carefully in view of the Scriptures and our society. There are differences between wants and needs. The Church in some sense has a responsibility to meet genuine needs, but not wants and whims. In a culture that has an extreme view of individualism and a society "consumed" with consumption, how does the Church make distinctions between valid needs as compared to whims and wants? Through marketing techniques and other methods the Church is being heavily influenced by the consumer mentality of our society, which exists on a narcissistic level.[41] The consumer mentality is based on individualism gone rampant.[42]

By treating culture and the things of culture as if they were neutral, the church growth movement opens the door to marketing the Gospel as just another product to be sold. This is characteristic of "American Christianity" as it has been shaped by culture and revivalism. "American evangelicals never doubted that Christianity was the truth. . . . What they did do, however, was to make most questions of truth into questions of practicality. What message would be most effective? What do people most want to hear? What can we say that will both convert the people and draw them to our particular church?"[43]

In the concern for marketing and meeting the needs of the hearers when does one cross over the line so that the "audience" has replaced the message as the driving force in the service? Tim Wright expresses a familiar church growth movement theme

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[41]Wells (*Wasteland,* 61) writes: "Malls are monuments to consumption-but so are mega-churches."

[42]Charles Colson (*Against the Night,* 103) captures the essence of the problem when he says: "I don't want to generalize unjustly or be overly harsh, but it's fair to say that much of the church is caught up in the success mania of American society. Often more concerned with budgets and building programs than with the body of Christ, the church places more emphasis on growth than on repentance. Suffering, sacrifice, and service has been preempted by success and self-fulfillment."

[43]Noll, *Scandal,* 67.

when he says: "in preparing a message, the question is not, 'What shall I preach?' but, 'To whom shall I preach?'"[44] Without careful evaluation of our culture and how it affects the Church how can we guard against an ever increasing secularization of the Church as it becomes more and more defined and formed by secular images, concepts and techniques? Good intentions are not enough. Many well-intentioned activities can have negative consequences. What is the purpose of the Sunday morning worship service? To entertain? To be therapeutic? To give one a break from a busy, hectic week? To meet wants that pass off as needs? Or is the purpose to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments that result in a godly response of corporate praise and thanksgiving and in holy living for God?

Conclusion

Whether we like to admit it or not we are in the midst of an ecclesiastical crisis. The crisis extends beyond our denomination. My personal position is not one of liturgical fundamentalism that says there is only one right way to do liturgy. Perhaps in years past it was proper to make fun of ourselves for not deviating from page five and fifteen in the Lutheran Hymnal. Those were the days when there was a greater consensus about liturgical forms. But we live in a new era where the opposite is the case. Because of our general culture and because of the church growth movement, the historic liturgies are often dismissed and criticized to such an extent that anyone who does the historic liturgy runs the risk of being labeled a traditionalist, interested not in a growing church but in maintenance ministry. Indeed, our current struggles with worship questions associated with the church growth movement have no doubt helped us to come to a better understanding of liturgy and worship. We can learn a great deal from our struggles over these issues. But what has been lacking is a willingness for Lutheran proponents of the church growth movement to consider seriously and respond to constructive criticism based on legitimate theological concerns. By its own admission the church growth movement is heavily

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[44]Wright, *Community of Joy*, 86.

indebted to sociology and popular culture. There is a certain naivete that thinks that such things are neutral and can be used indiscriminately. Jesus warns us that while we are *in* the world we are not to be *of* the world. Motivated by the sincere desire to makes disciples of Jesus Christ the church growth movement has been incredibly naive about using the things of the world in service to the Church. It seems rather ironic that at the very time Western civilization is becoming more pagan and hostile to Christianity, the church growth movement would have us try to meet its needs and standards. Based on the premise of being relevant and meeting the needs of people, the Church is in danger of becoming more and more worldly and becoming nothing more than a mirror copy of society itself.[45]

Toward the end of the Scriptural crisis in the 1970's someone from Seminex said that liberalism would not kill the Missouri Synod—Fundamentalism would. Missouri's superficial tie with Fundamentalism seems two-fold. One is the belief in a trustworthy Bible. And the other is a concern for evangelism. But the Fundamentalist/Evangelical camp is in disarray. This historically conservative group of Christians is heavily influenced by our culture, and Lutherans are experiencing the same phenomenon via the church growth movement. Such cultural realities as therapy, individualism, and pragmatism come into our Churches by two channels. One source is less organized and informal: the people sitting in the pews who, consciously or unconsciously are affected by the culture in which they live. And the other source is more organized and formal: the church growth movement. In order to respond to all the calls for changes in our Churches, and especially changes in

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[45]Guiness outlines the process as follows (*Dining*, 57): "The fourth step toward compromise is assimilation. This is the logical culmination of the first three. Something modern is assumed (step one). As a consequence, something traditional is abandoned (step two), and everything else is adapted (step three). At the end of the line, Christian assumptions are absorbed by the modern ones. The gospel has been assimilated to the shape of culture, often without a remainder."

worship, we need to be more profound in our evaluations and less simplistic.

> In the early eighties when the Christian right was the dominant trend, criticism of the movement was often treated as treason. Today, when the trail of its debris-strewn illusions is all too obvious, many former enthusiasts wonder why they did not recognize its shortcomings earlier. Could it be that the church-growth movement in its present expansionist phase is also a movement waiting to be undeceived? It would be wise to raise our questions now.[46]

And this is the whole point of this paper—to raise these questions now—for the future of confessional Lutheranism, our identity as Lutherans, and the kind of Church which we give to our children and our grandchildren will depend on how we answer these questions.

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[46]Guiness, *Dining*, 89.

Theological Observer

Charles Finney on Theology and Worship

"Without new measures it is impossible that the Church should succeed in gaining the attention of the world to religion. There are so many exciting subjects constantly brought before the public mind, such a running to and fro, so many that cry 'Lo here!' and 'Lo there!' that the Church cannot maintain her ground without sufficient novelty in measures, to get the public ear."[1]

If one knew no better, one might conclude that this quote dates from 1998. Everywhere we turn it seems that we hear one call after another for the church to "get up to date," "get in line with the times," or to "go contemporary." Actually, though, the quote dates from the 1830s when Charles Finney first published his noted *Revival Lectures*. It is not too much to say that Finney has been the single most influential theologian in America—not because he was the most profound, not because he was the most subtle and careful, but because he understood the crucial link between democratic individualism and market capitalism, and then wedded those two with Arminian theology. The results for worship practice and doctrine? The classic American revival and its theological counterpart, "decision theology"—the precursors of today's "contemporary worship."

Who was Finney, and why are we beginning to hear so much about him in our circles? Briefly, Charles Finney was born in Connecticut in 1792, but his family moved to upstate New York two years later. It was there that he received his education in frontier schools. As a young man, he studied law and set up practice at Adams, New York, in the northern reaches of the state. While reading Blackstone's *Commentaries on Law*, he noted continuous references to the Holy Scriptures, which Blackstone viewed as the highest authority. This, along with repeated urging from a clergyman friend, moved Finney to buy a Bible, and he soon was reading it more than law. The circumstances of his conversion are telling. On October 10, 1821, out in the woods by himself, far away from the Church

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[1]Charles Grandison Finney, *Revival Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Flemming H. Revell, n.d.), 309.

gathered by God around Word and Sacrament, he made his decision to give his heart to Jesus.

He soon began conducting revival meetings. Finney's reputation grew from his use of the "New Measures" — worship devices that were designed to inflame the passions of people and to put them into the right emotional state so that they would make a decision for Christ. Most notorious among these was the "anxious" or "mourner's" bench, where those who were disturbed over their sin, would be driven into making the leap toward God and salvation. He held revivals all over the eastern seaboard, including Rome, Utica, Auburn, and Troy, New York, as well as Wilmington, Philadelphia, Boston, and New York City. Later, he systematized his theology during his long tenure as a professor at Oberlin College.[2] He died in 1875.

What was the content of Finney's Christianity? Very simply, he disagreed with Scripture on some fundamental points. First, he denied original sin. In spite of the clear words of Psalm 51:5, he claimed that man does not come into this world at war with God and with a disposition to sin. Rather, his will is intact and he can choose to do good spiritual works apart from God's Spirit working in his lifes. "Let him [the preacher] go right over against them, urge upon them their ability to obey God, show them their obligation and duty, and press them with that until he brings them to submit and be saved."[3]

This leads to the second and much more grievous error. If man can turn himself to God, then why does he need a Savior? The answer for Finney is, basically, man does not need a Savior—at least not in the scriptural sense! He is his own Savior. Finney does not view Jesus' death as payment for the sins of human beings who cannot save themselves. Rather, Jesus' death demonstrates God's anger over sin and his great love for humankind. Jesus becomes merely an example of what

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[2]Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, volumes two and three (Oberlin, Ohio: James M. Fitch, 1846, 1847). Volume one never appeared.

[3]*Revival Lectures*, 224-225. Not surprisingly, Finney denied that Baptism worked regeneration and forgiveness of sins.

we should do for God if we really love him—give ourselves totally up to him. This notion, the so-called "moral government" theory of the atonement, compromises the biblical doctrine of salvation, where Jesus came to offer his life as a ransom for imprisoned and helpless sinners (Matthew 20:28).

And that really brings us to the heart of the matter. We are not saved by grace, according to Finney, we are saved by our own works. "Sinners ought to be made to feel that they have *something* to do, and that is, *to repent;* that it is something which *no other* being can do for them, neither God nor man; and something which *they can* do, and do *now*. Religion is something to *do*, not something to *wait for*. And they must do it now, or they are in danger of eternal death."[4]

Now, what does all this mean for worship practice? Finney's own words clearly show us that there can be no false dichotomy raised between "style and substance," content and form. The two are inextricably linked. The way one believes forms the way one worships and the way one worships forms the way one believes. To Finney's credit, he admitted as much.

> All ministers should be revival ministers, and all preaching should be revival preaching; that is, it should be calculated to promote holiness. People say: "It is very well to have some men in the Church, who are revival preachers, and who can go about and promote revivals; but then you must have others to *indoctrinate* the Church." Strange! Do they know that a revival indoctrinates the Church faster than anything else? And a minister will never produce a revival if he does not indoctrinate his hearers. The preaching I have described is full of doctrine, but it is doctrine to be *practised.*[5]

What was *the* form of preaching and worship that Finney saw bound up inseparably together? Theater, drama, and high emotion! Those are the things of true religion for Finney.

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[4] *Revival Lectures*, 232.
[5] *Revival Lectures*, 246.

> Now, what is the design of the actor in theatrical representation? It is so to throw himself into the spirit and meaning of the writer, as to adopt his sentiments, and make them his own: to feel them, embody them, throw them out upon the audience as a living reality. Now, what is the objection to all this in preaching? The actor suits the action to the word, and the word to the action. His looks, his hands, his attitudes, and everything, are designed to express the *full meaning* of the writer. Now, this should be the aim of the preacher. And if by "theatrical" be meant the strongest possible representation of the sentiments expressed, then the more theatrical the sermon is, the better.[6]

Hopefully, applications to the present situation of American Lutheranism should be clear by now. The greatest advocate of revivals and decision theology clearly tells us that there is no division to be made between substance and style. He is absolutely right! What is troublesome is the setting in the LCMS today, which argues that if we keep the substance of the message—salvation by grace through faith—then we can use any "style" of worship that appeals to us or to our hearers. Finney will have nothing of the sort. His "style" of worship is inextricably linked to a specific theology, and vice versa. To adopt one for Finney, means to adopt the other. But while Finney is right on the relationship of theology and worship practice, he is dead wrong theologically. His theology is at odds with the scriptural doctrine of justification by grace through faith. It is a theology that confuses the Law and the Gospel. It is a theology that minimizes the work of Christ to save sinners. It is a theology that puts the responsibility for salvation squarely on the shoulders of human beings. *"Religion is the work of man.* It is something for man to do. It consists in obeying God. It is man's duty."[7] Therefore his practice is wrong, too. Still, those in our midst clamoring incessantly for "contemporary worship" would do well to note the words of their teacher.

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[6] *Revival Lectures*, 247.
[7] *Revival Lectures*, 1.

Finney's words cited at the opening of this little paper show a man who believes that God is not ultimately in control of his church—that human beings are the ones running the show—and that unless they start meeting the world on its own terms, the church is doomed. There is only one word that can summarize such a theology: faithless—without faith in God's promises, but full of faith in the works of men. Consider again his words with a bit of emphasis added: "Without new measures it is *impossible* that the Church should succeed in gaining the attention of the world to religion. There are so many exciting subjects constantly brought before the public mind, such a running to and fro, so many that cry 'Lo here!' and 'Lo there!' that the Church *cannot* maintain her ground without sufficient novelty in measures, to get the public ear."[8] And then consider the words of Christ, again with a little emphasis added: "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was *not* revealed to you *by man,* but *by my Father in heaven. And I tell you* that you are Peter, and on this rock *I will build* my church, and *the gates of Hades will not overcome it"* (Matthew 16:17-18).

<div align="right">Lawrence R. Rast Jr.</div>

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[8] *Revival Lectures,* 309.

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Braswell, Jr., George W. *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996. xii + 338 pages. Paper. $24.99

Bredero, Adriaan H. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996. xiv + 320 pages. Cloth. $30.00

Kinnamon, Michael, and Brian E. Cope, editors. *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997. xiv + 548 pages. Paper

Kuklick, Bruce, and D. G. Hart, editors. *Religious Advocacy and American History*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1997. xx + 233 pages. Paper. $24.00

Wendland, Ernst H. *The Diary of a Missionary*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996. viii + 319 pages. Paper. $12.99

Wenham, David. *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1995. xvi + 452 pages. Paper

White, L. Michael. *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, volume 1: *Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews and Christians*. Harvard Theological Studies 42. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996. xi + 211 pages. Paper. $17.00

Link, Geo. *Family Devotions for Every Day of the Church Year: Gathered from the Writings of Dr. Martin Luther*. Translated from the German by Joel Baseley. Dearborn, Michigan: Mark V Publications, 1996. 688 pages. Cloth. $22.00

Levinskaya, Irina. *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, volume 5: *Diaspora Setting*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996. xii + 284 pages. Cloth. $38.00

Placher, William C. *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996. xii + 222 pages. Paper

Prickett, Stephen. *Origins of Narrative: The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xvi + 288 pages. Cloth. $ 54.95

Quill, Timothy C. J. *The Impact of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism*. Drew Series in Liturgy, No.3. Lanham, Maryland/London: The Scarecrow Press, 1997. xv+ 253 pages. Cloth. $45.00

Schlatter, Adolf. *The History of the Christ:: The Foundation of New Testament Theology*. Translated by Andreas J. Koestenberger. Original German edition, 1923. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997. 426 pages. Cloth. $29.99

Volf, Miroslav, Carmen Krieg, and Thomas Kucharz, editors. *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996. xviii + 298 pages. Cloth. $35.00

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. x + 326 pages. Cloth. $59.95. Paper. $18.95

Book Reviews

CHRISTIAN PLAIN STYLE: THE EVOLUTION OF A SPIRITUAL IDEAL. By Peter Auski. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995. xii + 371 pages. $49.95.

With the exception of some of the more "exotic" recent developments in rhetorical theory, the long standing rapprochement between preaching and rhetoric should be explored because mastery of the latter imparts a degree of artistry to the former, and, conversely, the latter is ennobled by its relationship with the former. Peter Auksi has crafted a book that rewards those who desire to cultivate the field with a rich history of classical and medieval rhetorical doctrine, along with a close survey of the various positions taken by church fathers with respect to the place of pagan doctrine in Christian eloquence. The book should interest historians of rhetoric as well as seminarians who are inclined toward the study of homiletics from an historical and scholarly point of view.

Auksi first establishes the need for his work by discussing how plain style (as opposed to grand eloquence or the middle style) has suffered relative neglect in studies of pulpit oratory. The competition between plain and grand style is evident especially when training preachers because the embellished, colored, densely plaited grand style compacts the threads of discourse and colored figures together far more imposingly and magnificently than the coarse monochrome of the simple mode ever could. Still, the maker of simplicity could reply that he needed nothing of the tone, color, and paint assigned to the grandly statuesque, heavily embossed or engraved, and magnificently timbered construct of the inflated artisan (page 41). Chapter two serves as a decent primer on classical rhetoric (pages 36-40).

When the author begins to explicate Augustine's doctrine regarding plain style in Christian preaching, his thesis fully emerges. Like many earlier Fathers, Augustine observes that the Bible contains and uses all of the schemes, tropes, and rhetorical modes "more abundantly and copiously" than the classical models usually studied, and therefore, to understand Scripture fully, Christians must know rhetoric (pages 120-121). Auksi points out that, though Augustine appreciates each for its particular

excellence, he privileges the plain style in homiletics, and that, for Augustine, "Paul represents a model of stylistic humility; in this he is the scriptural source of the plain style. . . . powerful, careless of models, rules and grammar, and without the need to display or ornament discourse" (page 127). Auksi's analysis of Pauline rhetoric is, as the following illustrates, noteworthy for its refinement and insight: "Paul's essential style involves short, quick sentences, energetic imperatives and questions, an oscillation between questions and answers, sudden changes of tone, incantatory lists, and strong elements of dialogue. The small units placed beside one another in parataxis facilitate parallelism and a poetic, cadenced quality" (page 135).

Chapters five through nine constitute a tour de force of rhetoric in homiletic pedagogy and practice from the early medieval through modern times. Auksi discusses the likes of Jerome, Origen, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Clement, Basil, and a host of minor figures. Of special note is the section entitled "The Provocative Link with the Reformation." Auksi there explores how the ideal of plainness in Reformation preaching (and also worship) is traced to the medieval "call for substance and spiritual meaning or truth, which one achieves by scorning the trivialities of style, sensuous adornments, worldly rhetorical embellishment, or materializing strategies of presentation" (page 202). For Auksi, the hallmark of Reformation renewal is a rejection of the sensuousness and superfluity of the secular or pagan culture revived by Renaissance scholarship. He posits that this rejection predominates the teachings of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. Let us, in deference to the likely interests of the readers of this journal, focus on Luther.

Whereas Augustine identifies Paul as the epitome of plain style in Scripture, Auksi shows that Luther grants that place to Christ: "Christ instructs through parables in order to reach the understanding of every listener, confident in the knowledge that the unlettered are seized more by the pleasure which accompanies an image, comparison, or allegory than by recondite explanations" (page 209). Plainness was not only an ideal for preaching, but also in worship and hermeneutics, as illustrated by Luther's claim,

when translating the Bible into German that, "This is my last and best art, to translate the Scriptures in their plain sense. . . . the literal sense does it—in it there's life, comfort, power, instruction and skill. The other is tomfoolery, however brilliant the impression it makes" (page 213). For Luther, dialectic is the body which rhetoric clothes and adorns, so rhetoric without dialectic is worth nothing. Inspired by Paul's antitheses in 1 Corinthians 1:25 ("the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men"), Luther makes his own famous judgment in a series of dramatic oppositions: "truth is more powerful than eloquence, spirit is preferable to intellectual skill, and faith is greater than erudition" (page 214). It is interesting to note how utterly indispensable stylistic artifice is when one wishes to underscore a thought. Did Luther use the antitheses tongue-in-cheek, subconsciously, or did he fully appreciate that, though they need to be chastened, schemes and tropes are unavoidable'? I also appreciate the delightful irony in the way Auksi's study immerses the reader in a tradition that is itself held as problematic throughout most of the history that the author deftly sketches!

Writing later of the Baconian Revolution, Auksi claims that the drive to describe nature did not call for the colors of the imagination or the bias of the passions. The numerous attacks against the older ideal of luxuriant, inspired, and highly rhetorical prose in the last quarter of the seventeenth century occur at least in part because experimental science needed a clear, unfigured, and accurate medium of expression and in part because the excesses of religious enthusiasm and its hyperbolic language generated a counter movement of fearful criticism (pages 306-307).

These important motives notwithstanding, a few questions remain. First, does plain truth (*veritas*) equal "the pure milk of the word"? If so, is it not telling that that scriptural ideal (pure milk) is itself expressed metaphorically? It seems manifestly clear that Scripture teems so with figuration that the claim is mitigated, if not nullified, regarding the appropriateness of plain style when transmitting truth. What is more, I have trouble with the above presupposition, because I have always viewed rhetorical devices as a means of painting clear pictures with words (as opposed to

clouding truth). It is, to be sure, a power that can be used to enchant or charm an audience, but it seems that it all depends on one's moral purpose. Of course the fathers had to deal with those ubiquitous enthusiasts and various other gnostics; how better to elevate special knowledge than to render it incomprehensible through ostentation? Bacon and his progeny had to establish a niche for the new learning, but, as time has shown, a sterile scientism is no substitute for an elevating humanism.

Second, if plainness is a Christian ideal, why did Christ speak so often in parables? Jesus rarely spoke plainly. His followers actually asked that he speak more clearly (Matthew 13). It seems that Jesus veiled the truth, in part, so as not to cast his "pearls before swine. " (He appears to have taken particular delight in baffling the scribes and Pharisees.) Lady wisdom would be somewhat cheapened if, from the byways, the town gates, and the marketplace, she called those who lack insight while entirely disrobed. So much for naked dialectic. Still, insofar as preachment is not about calling, but about building faith, Auksi's (and the fathers') point is well taken.

Christian Plain Style is, at once, both a treasury of rhetorical theory and history and of homiletic pedagogy. It is yeoman's work, finely crafted; a happy combination.

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REFORMED CONFESSIONALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA: ESSAYS ON THE THOUGHT OF JOHN WILLIAMSON NEVIN. Edited by Sam Hamstra Jr. and Arie J. Griffioen. ATLA Monograph Series, Number 38. Lanham, Maryland and London: The American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press, 1995.

One of the more pleasing developments in the historiography of Christianity in the United States over the past several years has been the rediscovery of the theological and philosophical work of

John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886). Nevin, born a Presbyterian, spent the most productive years of his life as a theological professor at the German Reformed seminary at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania (1840-1853). His thought ranged over some of the most important issues of his day: the place of tradition, the nature of the sacraments, ecclesiology, the doctrine of the ministry, and the relationship of the Church to American culture. This volume is a great benefit in offering both overview and detailed treatments of Nevin's thought. It is a most welcome addition to the scholarship on American Christianity in general and expressions of confessionalism in America in particular.

The volume is a collection of essays that feature some of the well-established names in Nevin interpretation (Richard Wentz, Walter Conser Jr. and Charles Yrigoyen Jr., among others), as well as some newer lights (Arie Griffioen and Glenn Hewitt). The plethora of scholars offers a variety of interpretations and perspectives on Nevin's work.

Divided into two parts, *Reformed Confessionalism* treats the historical and intellectual context of Nevin's work and the main theological issues that he addressed. James D. Bratt's "Nevin and the Antebellum Culture Wars" examines Nevin's running battle with the cultural peculiarities of the United States. Of foremost concern to Nevin was the degeneration of the divinely and sacramentally instituted Church into a mere aggregate of like-minded individuals. For him the Antichrist was not the papacy, but the "spirit of sect and schism" — namely, Arminian theology and revivalistic practice — which permeated American politics, economics and theology, and stretched and tore at the fabric of the true Church. Nevin argued that the stress on the decision of the individual to give his or her heart to Jesus, or the idea that the Church was simply a voluntary association paralleled American political thought in that both

> run into low cunning, disingenuous trickery and jesuitic policy. Religion [like politics] degenerates with it into a trade, in which men come to terms with God [the nation] on the subject of their own salvation [citizenship and office], and lay

away their spiritual acquisitions of outward property for convenient use (page 10).

In contrast, Nevin argued that the human will could achieve no spiritual good apart from the work of God working through Word and Sacraments. Speaking in Edwardsian (and Augustinian) terms, Nevin described the manner in which God brings people to faith.

> What we all need . . . is not just good doctrine for the understanding, or good direction for the will, or good motives for the heart, but the power rather of a new life, which, proceeding from God and being inserted into our fallen nature, may redeem us from the vanity of this present evil world, and make us to be in such sort "partakers of the divine nature" (page 11).

Put another way, as Bratt duly notes, "Nevin searched the Church Fathers for the constitution of Christianity and found the creed and the sacraments" (page 11). While Nevin's notion of infusion may make Lutherans somewhat uncomfortable, his critique of the pernicious effect Arminianism has on Christian theology is well directed.

Richard Wentz's piece is one of the high points of the work (one may also see his recent book on Nevin, *John Nevin: American Theologian* [New York: Oxford, 1997]). Correctly noting Nevin's conviction that "revivalistic evangelical tradition is very much in harmony with utilitarian individualism," which is primarily geared to the "maximization of self-interest," Wentz then provides a careful and positive examination of Nevin's "catholic" ideal and the means he proposed for its realization in an antagonistic setting.

In the second part of the book the pieces by Conser, Griffioen, and, especially, Hamstra. stand out. Hamstra's "Nevin on the Pastoral office" has much to contribute to the continued debate over Church and Ministry in Lutheran circles. Here the author, through Nevin, shows us that the questions raised by Vehse, Walther, Grabau, and Löhe had their counterparts outside the

Lutheran tradition. In brief, Nevin taught that because pastoral office has its origin in Christ and is an extension of the ministry of the apostles, the properly called and ordained pastor dispenses objective and spiritual realities that one cannot obtain anywhere else. Flying in the face of utilitarian individualism, which stressed the right of private judgement and the priesthood of *every* believer at the expense of the priesthood of *all* believers (to borrow Dr. Jeffery Oschwald's phrase), Nevin argued that

> The office is of divine origin, and of truly supernatural character and force; flowing directly from the Lord Jesus Christ himself, as the fruit of his Resurrection and triumphant Ascension into heaven, and being designed by him to carry forward the purposes of his grace upon the earth, in the salvation of men by the Church, to the end of time (page 171).

Not surprisingly, Nevin viewed Matthew 28:19-20 as directed to the disciples—a commissioning service in which Christ gave the keys to the apostles and set them apart to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. In sum, Nevin fought "the Americanization of the ministry" (page 185). Whether one accepts Nevin's conclusions or not, his serious engagement with critical questions and formidable arguments will challenge his readers.

The book does, however, have its low points. Due to the collaborative nature of the text (it is a collection of articles, after all), much of the historical material regarding Nevin's life appears again and again. More problematic, though, are two articles. First, John Payne's "Nevin on Baptism" suffers from a rigid chronological treatment. A more synthetic/thematic examination of the topic would have been more satisfying. Second, Yrigoyen's "Nevin and Methodism" seems totally out of place. It is more an apologetic for "true" Methodism—a critique of Nevin's critique of Methodism—than it is a fruitful consideration of Nevin's work. Yrigoyen tries to excuse the aberrations of nineteenth-century Methodism by arguing that "as in the matter of baptism, American Methodists did not precisely follow their founder's teaching of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper" (page 225). Wesley scholars may affirm this assertion, but it has little to do

with the accuracy of Nevin's historical/theological appraisal of American Methodism as it existed in his time. He reacted against the unchurchly failings of Methodism as he experienced it. It is unfortunate that such an article sullies an otherwise outstanding collection. Finally, the book is marred by inconsistent endnote form and far too many typographical errors.

Despite its somewhat prohibitive cost, students of the history of Christianity in America will want to have this book on their shelves. Books on Nevin tend to go out of print quickly. This fine collection of essays, along with its very fine bibliography, offers a snapshot of this multifaceted and eminently articulate proponent of confessional Reformed theology. An honest reading might also help to remove the scales of caricature from the eyes of many Lutherans regarding the Reformed tradition.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

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