



# PROPTER CHRISTUM

*Christ at the Center*

Essays in Honor of Daniel Preus

Edited by

Scott R. Murray

Aaron M. Moldenhauer

Carl D. Roth

Richard A. Lammert

Martin R. Noland

Charles L. Cortright

Michael J. Albrecht

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IN HONOR OF  
**THE REVEREND DANIEL PREUS**

ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RETIREMENT  
FROM FULL-TIME SERVICE AS DIRECTOR OF  
THE LUTHER ACADEMY

*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Hebrews 12:1-2

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**



## CENTER AND PERIPHERY IN THE LUTHERAN LITURGY

### Confessional Identity and Ecumenical Perspective



The Lutheran liturgy is uniquely difficult to pin down phenomenologically. If one were to venture into an Eastern Orthodox church in Germany, Scandinavia, or anywhere else, no one would mistake it for a Baptist church. It would be clear to all that the liturgy was ancient and very Eastern. Candles burning before icons, clouds of incense, the holy doors, and profuse signings of the holy cross would make it clear to all observers that this was the liturgy of the Eastern Church. If one were to attend a mass in a Roman Catholic church in Switzerland, the United States, or anywhere else it would be clear that this was the Church of Rome. The words and actions of the Roman liturgy are everywhere the same regardless of the language and ethnic identity of the priest and people. However, if one were to enter a Lutheran church in the present day, he might be somewhat confused. He could be forgiven for thinking in one place that he was worshiping among Baptists and in another place that he was in a Roman church.

Neither in the Reformation era nor since has there been any single liturgy in Lutheran churches that one could describe as normative. Already in the Reformation era each individual territorial church adopted its own particular liturgy based on the pattern of the medieval mass. The American Lutheran liturgical historian Luther D. Reed counted no less than 135 different Lutheran liturgies used in Lutheran territories between 1523 and 1555.<sup>1</sup> The German historian Emil Sehling in his multivolume study *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnun-*

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1. Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Service of the Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 88.

*gen des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (The Evangelical Church Orders of the Sixteenth Century)<sup>2</sup> describes in great detail the large number of Lutheran liturgical forms used during the first century of the Reformation.

Consequently one may ask what made all of these liturgies Lutheran and what should be considered the irreducible heart of Lutheran liturgy? Luther is a logical starting point for an answer to this question. He states that it is not his desire to follow the example of the Roman Church by preparing a liturgy that all were obliged to use. His *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe* were offered as suggested usages, but he requests "that those [who use it] make no law concerning it"<sup>3</sup> (WA 19:72.6–7).

The sixteenth-century territorial churches reformed the medieval mass using the example of Luther's suggestions but adapted them according to their own preferences and needs. Were one to visit Mark-Brandenburg in the days of Joachim II (reigned 1535–1571), he would find a highly embellished liturgy, including even an offertory. A casual observer might well think that this was a Roman mass. Were one to go to Württemberg in the same period, he would find there a very different pattern of worship, where many elements of the *missa catechumenorum* had completely disappeared, leaving only a hymn, the sermon, and the Creed. Still the Württemberg Lutherans could emphatically state that they were, to a man, Lutheran to the core.<sup>4</sup> Again, were one to go to Henneberg in South Thuringia, he would find a liturgy from which the traditional ceremonies had been rooted out and most vestiges of medieval practices had been eliminated. The duke objected even to chanting the words of institution, since, as he said, "Christ did not sing them in the upper room." At the same time he would have been highly insulted if anyone had accused him of not being Lutheran. Finally, if one found himself in Sweden in the days of John III (reigned 1568–1592), he would be shocked, as indeed many in the Swedish Church were, by the liturgy of the Red Book. The king insisted on a form of mass that reintroduced many features of the medieval rite. Many Swedes complained that it was a betrayal of the Reformation. The king insisted that it was an ecumenical service and held out hopes for the reunion of the divided Western church with a rite acceptable to both Wittenberg and Rome. Although the accompanying notes make no reference to Luther and Melancthon, it clearly rejected any

2. Emil Sehling, ed., *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Reisland, 1902–).

3. "das sie ja keyn nöttig gesetz draus machen."

4. Aemilius Ludwig Richter, ed., *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts* (Weimar: Verlag des Landes-Industrie-comptoirs, 1846), 2:137.

notion of the mass as a propitiatory sacrifice to benefit the living and the departed. A dispassionate study of the Red Book today indicates that its features did not necessarily represent a return to Rome. In fact, the Roman Church would emphatically reject it as far too Lutheran.

In answering the question of what is essential to Lutheran worship, this essay considers only the classical European liturgies and leaves aside any consideration of the so-called modern liturgies, such as the "Thomas Mass" and other exotic forms, as somewhat problematic. Still, within the classical tradition there are a large variety of Lutheran liturgies. In examining these liturgies one must determine what is central to them and what is peripheral. Some consideration also must be given to the impact of the modern ecumenical movement on the contemporary liturgies of Lutheran churches.

### CONFSSIONAL CHARACTER OF THE LUTHERAN LITURGY

Since a wide variety of liturgies flourished in the earliest days of the Reformation, a purely phenomenological examination will not yield an adequate answer. Albert Niebergall in his examination of North German liturgies identified six important liturgical strains: Bugenhagen, Brandenburg-Nürnberg 1533, Herzog-Heinrich Agenda 1539, Kurbrandenburg 1540, Württemberg 1553, and Hesse 1574. In addition to these one should also consider the numerous forms used in Southern Germany, Saxony, and in other imperial areas. Still further consideration should be given to the liturgies used in Sweden, Denmark, Courland, Livonia, and Prussia, as well as the liturgical traditions of several smaller regions where Lutheranism never predominated. Niebergall states that the chief difficulty faced by liturgical scholars is the classification of these liturgies according to their common elements, because no single line of classification seemed able to encompass them all.<sup>5</sup> Any attempt to identify a liturgy as Lutheran simply on the basis of ceremonies included or excluded is also inadequate, for as the Augsburg Confession states, "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places" (AC VII, 3; Tappert, 32).

What is essential to any Lutheran liturgy and what defines it as Lutheran is the faith confessed in it. Lutheran unity is not a unity created by the liturgy, but rather the faith confessed by Lutherans and expressed in their liturgies is

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5. Alfred Niebergall, "Agende," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977-2010), 2:13, 16-27.



unitive. Accordingly, while the expressed forms of liturgy may be many and varied, the faith is and remains the same. It is that faith articulated in the Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Small Catechism, and the other confessional writings in the Lutheran Book of Concord. Not many and varied confessions bound together by a common liturgy, as in the Anglican Communion, but one confession expressed in many liturgies epitomizes a fundamental Lutheran principle. The liturgy is not a mark of the church or her unity. From the Lutheran perspective, the outward form of this holy and divine liturgy is not a matter of primary importance.

### CENTER OF THE LUTHERAN LITURGY

Central to any Lutheran liturgy is its support of the gospel according to which Christ has secured man's eternal redemption by his sacrifice. Man is justified before God when the redemptive work of Christ is applied to him through the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. It is commonly supposed that it was Melancthon who summed this up by declaring that "the church stands or falls on the article of justification."

From this central point Luther critiqued the liturgy. Liturgy is not the work of man by which he appropriates for himself the saving work of Christ and in this way contributes to his own salvation, but it is instead the work of the Christ who is both God and man. He is the *leitourgos*, who by his holy nativity, baptism, fasting and temptation, his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion, and his victorious resurrection and ascension into heaven has accomplished redemption, as the church confesses in the Litany. Accordingly from the earliest times the liturgy has been described as *hagia kai theia leitourgia*—the holy and divine liturgy, that is, the service that Christ Jesus supplies for the salvation of sinners. Its direction is from God to his people, and in response to it those who have received the fruits of Christ's work offer God their sacrifices of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

Standing behind and giving substance to a Lutheran understanding of liturgy is the definition of the church as the assembly of believers gathered by and around the pure teaching of the gospel of Christ and the right administration of his sacraments. These marks of the church may be described as essential characteristics of Lutheran worship (AC VII).

This establishes an essential difference from any notion that liturgy is the vehicle by which the church offers the person and work of Christ to the Father for her own benefit and that of others. While in many respects the Lutheran liturgy may appear similar to the medieval mass, it has been stripped of those prayers





and actions that obscure the gospel and the work of Christ and substitute the work of man. What is given to communicants in this liturgy is all that Christ gives for them and to them, not just his body, but his body and his blood. Lutherans were not the only ones to eliminate the canon and other objectionable features and give the cup to the laity. These are also eliminated in the liturgical rites of Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and others. However, these reformers went far beyond the Lutherans and also eliminated the body and blood of Christ in and under bread and wine as earthly means by which Christ communicates himself. To Zwingli the Lord's Supper is the communication of the remembrance of Christ's passion, and for Calvin the bread and wine stand as signs of the body and blood. Over against these Reformed doctrines, Lutherans learned to be more explicit in their statements concerning the nature of the sacramental gifts: "wahrer Leib" and "wahres Blut" (the "very body" and "the very blood").

Therefore one must ask by what means Christ conveys the fruits of his saving work, his liturgy, to man. In the confessional writings the means of conveyance are called the means of grace. Melancthon reduced the sacraments described in medieval theology to three: baptism, absolution, and the sacrament of the altar (Ap XIII). All three of these were directly instituted by Christ himself to convey to man the fruit of all that he has accomplished, the gift of salvation. In baptism forgiveness and newness of life are poured over man. In absolution they are spoken into his ear by one who has been called and ordained to speak the word of forgiveness by the command and in the stead of Christ. In the sacrament of the altar Christ gives his body to eat and his blood to drink in consecrated bread and wine. He does not make himself present only in such a way as to awaken one's reminiscences of his passion, or to stir hearts with pious thoughts, or to lift believers in a spiritual manner so as to bridge the infinite gap between God and man. Christ comes to lie upon the altar in and under bread and wine, over which his words have been spoken in consecration, to be received with the mouth of the body and by that means impart infinite blessings.

The pure proclamation of the gospel, that is, the sermon, is not in itself a means of grace in the same sense as the sacraments, but it does have a sacramental dimension. It calls and invites, plants and nourishes the seed of the word. By means of that word the Holy Spirit awakens faith.

All this stands at the center. It is the fruit of what the Lord gives, the fruit of what he has done. So too, the response of man to what the Lord gives stands at the center. It is not a peripheral matter that his people respond to what he does and gives by receiving it faithfully and by responding with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

## FROM THE CENTER TO PERIPHERY: THE TRADITION

All that stands at the center is to be described as liturgy in the most proper sense of the word. To portray the matter visually, at the center are the sacraments (joining earthly things and heavenly things), the preaching of the word, and the response of the people's priestly activity. All this must be clothed in some outward ritual form. Baptism stands within the context of a liturgical rite. So too, the celebration and administration of the sacrament of the altar is clothed in a formulary. The absolution is expressed in a particular formula spoken over the penitent. Preaching might seem to be least bound to a particular form in that every preacher has his own style, yet preaching shares certain common characteristics and from early times has stood within the context of what is called the pulpit office. To speak of these rituals and formularies is to speak of what is peripheral, that is, the nonessential form in which what is essential is communicated.

The same needs to be said about particular liturgical elements, such as the use of prayers and pericopes on specific occasions. Prayer stands in the center, but the particular words by which prayer is expressed are shaped by times and circumstances. The same may be said of the Old and New Testament readings. They are not to be omitted because it is in them that God reveals himself most clearly, not merely by acts but by the word he speaks. What passages are used on particular occasions is not as essential. It might be hard to imagine celebrating the Nativity of our Lord without the reading of Luke 2:1-14 or the Feast of the Resurrection without the reading of Mark 16, but other readings could and have been used on these days.

Moving outward from there are liturgical elements farther removed from the center: the rich clothing of decoration and embellishments not essential in themselves, but extolling what is at the center. Among these are Luther's baptismal prayer, the so-called Flood Prayer, the reading of the Gospel record of Jesus' blessing the children long associated with the baptismal rite, the form of the scrutinies, the confession of faith, and the apostolic blessing in baptism. These all extol what baptism is and does, yet those whose baptism incorporated these elements cannot be said to be more baptized than those whose baptism lacked them.

The same must be said of the chief divine service itself. In the course of time customs, traditions, and directives have been added to the celebration of the Eucharist and its administration to mark out its centrality. Among these are the Gloria Patri appended to the Psalms, the deacon's Ektania or the ves-



tige of it in the Kyrie eleison, as well as the Gloria in excelsis and the answering Laudamus or Decius's "All Glory Be to God on High." All these serve to extol the coming of Christ among those who are gathered by and around his word and gifts. The same may be said of the salutation and Collect, the Gradual and Alleluia, and the Creed (Apostles' or Nicene). These too extol the gospel. In the same way the eucharistic Preface paves the way for the consecration and distribution of the sacrament in the *missa fidelium*. The admonition to the communicants and Luther's paraphrase of the Our Father proved to be inadequate substitutes for it. No longer is it widely thought that the Our Father and the so-called *nuda verba* adequately extol Christ's sacramental gifts and make superfluous any word of praise and thanksgiving. Most contemporary Lutheran liturgies appear to provide for the inclusion of such a prayer in connection with the *verba*. At least to some measure, this seems to introduce an ecumenical perspective while at the same time marking it as Lutheran, particularly with its understanding that the consecration is accomplished by the word of Christ and not the works of man. The Agnus Dei, originally introduced to cover the action of the breaking of the bread into fragments for administration to the communicants, has in the course of time assumed the significance of a prayer of adoration to the Lamb upon his throne now present in his body and blood on the altar. Other liturgical elements have been introduced such as the postcommunion prayer of thanksgiving, the salutation, Benedicamus, and benediction, all of which bear witness to the nature of the word proclaimed and the sacramental gifts given. Their form is not the same everywhere, but the form they take still serves to draw attention to what the Lord has done and given.

These elements mark a continuity of faith and tradition. What the church confesses and does in her liturgy is not newly constructed or put together for the occasion; instead it stands in continuity with what the church has done in the past, what she has believed and confessed concerning what her Lord has done for her and gives to her.

Lutheran churches did not wholly abandon the liturgical tradition and practices of earlier times and create a Reformation liturgy *de novo*. As Paul Tillich suggests, one may speak here of "Catholic substance" and "Protestant principle" (the gospel principle).<sup>6</sup> Tradition has no power to bless as though it

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6. Gordon W. Lathrop, "Gottesdienst im lutherischen Kontext," in *Handbuch der Liturgik: Liturgiewissenschaft in Theologie und Praxis der Kirche*, ed. Hans-Christoph Schmid-Lauber, Michael Meyer-Blanck, and Karl-Heinrich Bieritz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 151.

were of equal importance to that which it proposes to extol and embellish. It is equal neither to the word nor to the sacramental gifts. It extols what stands at the center. In itself it is peripheral, yet it remains highly significant.

### THE PERIPHERY EXTENDED: CEREMONIES

As one moves away from the center, he enters into areas less closely related to what is essential. Here ceremonies find their place. Ceremonies are not in and of themselves worship. Although they have no innate power to bless and save, their function is to train one in reverence for holy things. They are not unimportant. Luther could say of the outward ceremonies in baptism that they did not frighten the devil. However, the value of ceremonies does not depend upon their ability to frighten the devil. Luther retained the exorcism in his *Taufbüchlein* not because if he were to omit it the devil would not be cast out, but rather to bear witness to what God does in and through baptism. In the same *Taufbüchlein* he stated that the presence of sponsors and the giving of the candle and white gown in baptism could be done without, but he chose not to do without them (AE 53:95–105).

The chief divine service has always been marked with ceremonies, including, but not restricted to, traditions of standing and kneeling, or the sign of the cross at the Invocation, at the closing words of the Creed, over the bread and wine at consecration, and at the benediction. The shape and constitution of the eucharistic host, the laying on of hands in absolution, and the use of incense to symbolize prayers ascending to heaven all belong to this category. So too the use of liturgical vestments, such as the traditional eucharistic vestments or the black talar, falls in the category of ceremony. In both cases the vestment covers over the street dress of its wearer and draws attention to his office. These matters all stand at the periphery, somewhat farther removed from what is essential. All of them have their positive value, but they are clearly peripheral and Lutheran churches do not stand in judgment over other churches because of the superfluity of their ceremonies, their relative lack of them, or the fact that their ceremonies differ.

Even in the eighteenth century, when many of the traditional ceremonies were laid aside, new ceremonies were introduced to replace them, the foundations of what might loosely be called new traditions. An example from Eastern Europe is the tradition where the congregation rises every time the phrase "Holy, holy, holy" appears in a hymn.

While what is peripheral in the Lutheran liturgy stands outside the center, it stands close to the center and revolves around it, variously glorifying and



extolling Christ and the gifts he brings to his people. These ceremonies are not in themselves the means by which God's blessings are conveyed and for this reason they are not worship in and of themselves. Their work is to point to what stands at the center and their usefulness is judged on this basis. They are adiaphora, but not in the sense of being unimportant or easily done without. They are adiaphora in that none of them are commanded as essential as the Church of Rome does, or forbidden as idolatrous as the Reformed do.

### ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVES

The commonly accepted definition of ecumenism today refers to the endeavor that seeks to join churches differing in doctrine, history, and practice into a greater unity. This definition differentiates ecumenism from the activity of so-called nondenominational or nonconfessional churches and from endeavors to promote some sort of greater unanimity among different religions.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of doctrine, history, and practice, Lutheranism seems most closely related to Roman Catholicism. Concerning the liturgy Melancthon states in the Augsburg Confession: "Our people have been unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass. But it is obvious, without boasting, that the Mass is celebrated among us with greater devotion and earnestness than among our opponents" (AC XXIV, 1; Kolb-Wengert, 68). The form of liturgical worship in most Lutheran churches is based upon the shape of the Western mass, most particularly the medieval mass as practiced in German dioceses at the beginning of the sixteenth century. While it is said that Luther's views on worship were very conservative, one may question to what extent Luther thought of himself as a liturgical conservative. It would be more accurate to state that he regarded the Western mass as fulfilling what he understood to be the needs of authentic Christian worship, as defined in terms of its expression in a congregation gathered by and around the word of God and the sacraments. He insisted on eliminating those elements of the mass that he judged to be accretions, added in the course of history with little or no consideration of the whole. He also insisted on the elimination of erroneous doctrinal additions that espoused a righteousness built on works over against a proper understanding of the true nature and operation of the grace of God.

From the standpoint of the Church of Rome, Luther's teachings, and of course also his liturgical suggestions, were considered anticatholic and anti-ecumenical, and the papal bull referred to him as "a wild boar loose in God's

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7. "Ecumenism," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenism> (accessed 12 January 2013).

vineyard."<sup>8</sup> However, from the standpoint of Luther and the Wittenbergians, the reform of the mass was precisely an ecumenical activity meant to suppress medieval accretions that did violence to the church's catholic faith and worship. Accordingly Philipp Melanchthon could write in the Augsburg Confession that those who supported this Confession in no way departed from the Scriptures, the catholic church, or even the Church of Rome as far as the ancient church could be known from its writers. He further stated that among those who signed the Augsburg Confession, the ancient rites were for the most part still diligently observed (AC Conclusion of Part One). He went even further to state that the canons of the church had never been so severe as to demand that rites should be the same everywhere. Nor, as he stated, had the rites of all the churches ever been the same everywhere, echoing the words of AC VII, that for the true unity of the church it is sufficient that there be agreement concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It should not be deemed necessary that human traditions, rites, and ceremonies instituted by men be everywhere the same. Accordingly Lutherans have understood their liturgy to be related to the historical liturgical traditions of the Christian West to an extent neither found nor desired among the followers of Zwingli and Calvin, neither of whom attempted to maintain continuity with the liturgies or traditions of the past.

Lutheran worship is not as closely related to the churches of the East. There appears to be a common core or common shape that obtains both in the East and the West, since the Eastern liturgy and the Western mass include many common elements, but the services themselves bear little similarity in terms of outward ceremony and intention. Melanchthon could quote the example of the liturgy of the Greek Church at some length in Apology XXIV, indicating that the Lutheran understanding of the divine service is more in line with that of the Eastern Church and the centrality of its understanding of *sacrificium eucharisticum* than that of the Roman Church and its theology of *sacrificium propitiatorium*. In this sense Lutherans could regard their liturgy as theologically more attuned to the East, but liturgically closer to the West.<sup>9</sup>

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8. "Ein Wildschwein trachtet danach, ihn zu zerwühlen, und ein wildes Tier frisst ihn ab" (Leo X, "Bannandrohungsbulle von Leo X 'Exsurge Domine': Gegen Martin Luther, 15. Juni 1520, [http://www.efg-hohenstaufenstr.de/downloads/texte/exsurge\\_domine\\_dt.html](http://www.efg-hohenstaufenstr.de/downloads/texte/exsurge_domine_dt.html) [accessed 12 January 2013]).

9. Historically, of course, Lutheranism has always been identified with Western Christendom and the early attempts to connect theologically with the Eastern Church were short-lived. More recently attempts have been made to create a Lutheran liturgy incorporating



The first instance of an ecumenical liturgy to be used by Lutherans was the Berlin Agenda of 1822. This agenda was meant by its author, the Reformed King Friedrich Wilhelm III, to be the effective outward sign of the full visible unity of Lutherans and Reformed in Prussia. His approach was clearly restricted to historical, liturgical, and aesthetic considerations. Confessional identity and dogmatic theology were left completely out of the picture. Neither the Lutherans nor the Reformed warmly embraced his agenda. The Reformed thought it far too Lutheran, indeed even Roman Catholic. The Lutherans regarded it with suspicion because it was meant to accommodate the Reformed and it artfully rearranged and adapted Lutheran services according to the king's predilections. This ecumenical agenda had to be imposed on both churches by royal cabinet order in 1834, after it was modified to include some alternative forms and elements meant to satisfy both churches. There remained Lutherans and Reformed who were unwilling to accept it because it so inadequately expressed their beliefs. Neither the Lutherans nor the Reformed of that time could produce an ecumenical liturgy, nor did they have any desire to do so. The king simply took the whole matter out of the hands of the churches and theologians and composed the new union liturgy himself.

To its credit, the Prussian Union Agenda did play a role in extending the vision of Lutheran churches and liturgiologists not only to long-forgotten elements of earlier Lutheran liturgies, but also to ecumenical perspectives not previously given consideration. New interest was aroused about the Introit, its construction and significance in the opening service. The restoration of the eucharistic Preface, an element common to both East and West but dropped by many church orders in favor of Luther's admonition and paraphrasis, was restored.

Some Lutheran theologians engaged in discussions concerning the inclusion of a prayer to continue the note of thanksgiving beyond the Sanctus, and particularly the inclusion of an invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) in connection with the words of consecration and the Our Father, the so-called Eucharistic Prayer. This had not previously been found in the Western mass. The majority of Lutherans include both an *anamnesis* and *epiclesis* in their

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Eastern traditions and liturgical forms. About seventy years ago such a Lutheran version of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom was prepared for use in the Ukraine among converts to Lutheranism from the Orthodox and Uniate Churches and German Lutherans who had adopted the local language. In this case the primary consideration was concern for ethnic and patriotic Ukrainian identification rather than any ecumenical perspective. The creation of this rite was not occasioned by any ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox.

liturgies today. However, while in the Eastern tradition the Holy Spirit is invoked over the elements as an act of consecration, in the Western tradition the *verba testamenti* have always been considered consecratory. What constitutes consecration stands at the center and this calls into question whether or not an *epiclesis* should be included at all and, if so, what place it should occupy. Questions have also arisen as to what is to be consecrated by the *epiclesis*: the communicants, the elements, or both. Here the ecumenical perspective stands in tension with Lutheran theology. Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber has suggested that liturgical ecumenical agreements call for a respectable compromise between the ecumenical perspective and confessional concerns.<sup>10</sup> One must ask to what extent confessional positions may be altered because of ecumenical concerns.

Examples of such compromise can be found in the *Evangelisches Gottesdienstbuch*, 2000, of the Evangelical Church of the Union (Evangelische Kirche der Union) and the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Germany (Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands), where one Eucharistic Prayer calls for the use of the following words after the words of consecration: "Send us your Spirit and bless to us this supper."<sup>11</sup> Such a petition may lead to the impression that now the elements have been consecrated two times, once by the *verba* and once by prayer, a notion far removed from the original Lutheran understanding that it is the *verba* alone that consecrate the sacrament. Schmidt-Lauber states that this prayer is taken from Hippolytus.<sup>12</sup> The prayer of Hippolytus is found in the present Roman Catholic Missal as the Second Eucharistic Prayer, but reproduced in such a way as to adhere to the Western tradition that the words of Christ consecrate. Therefore the Roman Catholic version does not include the *epiclesis*. However, as Schmidt-Lauber must reluctantly admit, it is precisely with reference to the Eucharistic Prayers that ecumenical openness and a multiplicity of usages are to be found.<sup>13</sup>

The liturgical revisions instituted in the wake of the Second Vatican Council also must be considered. Roman Catholic services are now celebrated in the vernacular. The distribution of both species in the sacrament is, if not univer-

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10. Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber, "Die Eucharistie," in *Handbuch der Liturgik*, 237.

11. *Evangelisches Gottesdienstbuch: Agende für die Evangelische Kirche der Union und für die Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands* (Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 2000), 646.

12. Schmidt-Lauber, "Die Eucharistie," 239.

13. *Ibid.*, 242.





sal, at least widespread among Roman Catholics. Congregational participation in the mass and hymn singing is widespread. Roman Catholics attending Lutheran services are often heard to remark: "Your mass is just like ours," a statement which strikes terror in the hearts of some Lutherans. In addition, many Lutheran churches have adopted the three-year *Ordo lectionem missae* to replace the old traditional lectionaries.

In the relationship of Lutheran churches with the Reformed, liturgy has played a very minor role in the development of ecumenical relations. Traditionally the Reformed church has had little use for any medieval forms or ceremonies. Not even Friedrich Wilhelm III, the *summus episcopus* of the Prussian Evangelical Church, was able to construct a form equally acceptable to the Lutherans and the Reformed. Clamorous protests from the Reformed against the imposition of a "Lutheran liturgy" forced him to allow the inclusion in the Prussian Union Agenda of alternative forms for use by the disgruntled Reformed. Today ecumenical concerns have concentrated on the composition of ecumenical consensus agreements, and liturgical concerns have largely been laid aside. With the important exception of the Evangelical Church in Germany (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*), most of these agreements have had only secondary effects on liturgical practice. In any case, what is considered central to these agreements is unity in communion fellowship, witness, and service (*diakonia*) rather than common liturgical forms.

By necessity there is always a certain tension between Lutheran liturgical identity and ecumenical activity. Peripherally and in terms of outward ceremony the Lutheran Eucharist may continue to look very much like the Roman mass, but there are essential differences at the core, central concerns that the Lutheran church cannot sacrifice if it is to remain true to its Confessions. With reference to the Reformed, liturgical ecumenical direction must also take into consideration what is central and what is peripheral from the Reformed perspective.

For Lutherans what is central is the church's confession of the nature of the gift, the very body and blood of the Lord in and under bread and wine consecrated by the words of Christ spoken over them by the men ordained to do so. The Reformed appear to have no intention to, and indeed cannot, adopt the Lutheran doctrine of the corporeal presence of Christ in the supper. What is most important, indeed, even essential from their perspective, is the ceremony of the breaking of the bread. Tension must necessarily remain, despite the fact that many European Lutheran churches now provide "ecumenical hospitality" and welcome Reformed communicants to their altars.



## CONCLUSION

One cannot make sense of the great variety of Lutheran liturgies unless one is aware of what is central to all of them. That uniting point is to be found in Luther's doctrine of justification, according to which God has done all that is needed for the redemption of man and that man himself adds nothing to it. According to the Lutheran understanding, the liturgy is a service that God offers to man and to which man can only respond with his faithful "Amen." This "Amen" includes within it all the priestly activity of God's people, their prayers, their praise, their confession of faith, their thanksgiving for the gifts of God conveyed through word and sacrament. All this may be summed up in the Greek word *eucharistia*. This is the essence and center of the Lutheran liturgy. It is what cannot be done without—the proclamation of the pure word of God and the right administration of the sacraments by and around which the congregation gathers.

What is central and what is peripheral are quite distinct. They complement each other. They are congruent so that what is derivative flows naturally and faithfully from what is central. At the same time what is derivative or peripheral forms the basis of the church's tradition, a potent form of its self-identification. The forms, expressions, pericopes, and ceremonies used are drawn from the tradition and from what each generation may add to it. These elements are neither unimportant nor superficial. They lift up and extol the word of God and the means of grace. They serve as a witness to the faithfulness and the completeness of what God has done and gives, the church's witness to the truth of the word that stands behind them.

Lutheran liturgy is ecumenical in that it bears witness to a certain commonality that it shares with the Western catholic tradition. It is catholic but not Roman in that it calls forth expressions of that commonality. It is at the same time evangelical in that it refuses to raise any human form or works to the level of the activity that merits God's favor and blessing and by so doing displaces the centrality and completeness of the work of Christ. 

