

TRADITIONS AND MISSION: Resolving the Tensions

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I. The Perceived Tension

a. Worship is for Believers

i. Scripture never says “Worship God to reach the unbelievers!”

- For the Jews, first, right? Not the Canaanites
- The Upper Room wasn’t a tent meeting
- Hebrews 12 & 13 outline worship as the coming together of the brethren, while the “sacrifice of praise” is the “fruit of lips that acknowledge God’s name.”

ii. God cares about worship and prescribes much for His people.

- He gives a whole book of instruction in Leviticus!
- While many prescriptions no longer apply to us, as the ceremonial law has been fulfilled in Christ, prescriptions remain for our benefit. These are the traditions upheld in our Confessions. Some of which are essential to the Gospel (preaching, baptism, the Lord’s Supper) and others which are retained because they are beneficial. The righteousness of faith is not tied to ceremonies like the righteousness of the Law was under the old covenant. Yet there are ceremonies we retain: the ecumenical Creeds, the prayer our Lord taught us, even the church year and the order of the mass, the lectionary, and vestments, for the sake of good order and the instruction of the people.
- Traditions thus can be viewed as those things which were kept by our forefathers their wisdom as being good for the Gospel and not binding on consciences. That said, with due respect to our ancestors, we must remember the stock trader’s caveat that “past performance does not guarantee future results.”

iii. The Divine Service sustains and nourishes us in the one true faith.

- The Divine Service is, after all, the place where, gathered by the Spirit, we assemble to receive blessings of the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus on the cross: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation as they come to us through the means of grace.
- And our own spiritual sacrifices, the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, “encourage one another all the more as we see the day approaching.” Even as they do not merit forgiveness, they are good works – and only able to be performed by those already reconciled to God. (Apology XXIV:25). The early Church was very aware of this responsibility, as Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Tim. 2:1-3), to pray for all in authority, etc. Only we pray “in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father”

- b. Yet the Lord's Song is a Radical Witness
- i. "Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord" (Ps. 40:3b)
 - We may be not "of the world" but we are still in it. The Great Commission stands. Though worship is for the faithful, and only those hearts purified by the Spirit can offer it, it does not follow that our religion is private. The liturgy is, after all, a public work, done by the people of God, for the sake of the world God so loved.
 - ii. Paul and Silas singing as many listened (Acts 16:25-34)
 - Our acts of devotion are not limited to the Divine Service. Indeed, our whole lives are to be sacrifices of praise. Just as the disciplining of our bodies is constant. The Spiritual exercise of repentance is daily.
 - iii. Capitol Hill Baptist; Paroisse Wittenberg; Your Local Lutheran Congregation
 - The above illustrations were discussed. Capitol Hill Baptist is a strong-singing congregation that has used congregational song for missional impact in an urban setting. Paroisse Wittenberg, in Pointe-Noire, Congo, gathers people from the local marketplace for Matins each day and then students for Vespers each day, due to its open-air accessibility to foot traffic. The question was then asked, "How is your local congregation using the radical witness of the Lord's song?"
- c. And We Do Bring People to Jesus ("Come and See")
- i. Andrew and Philip (John 1)
 - How could they keep silent? How can I keep from singing?
 - ii. Psalm 67 and Our Evangelical Desire
 - The paraphrase was a common post-communion hymn of the Deutsche Messe and is included in LSB DS5. (CW 906, Mission Section)
 - iii. The Consequence of Emmaus (Luke 24:33-35)
 - Some see in this an outline of the Divine Service (Arthur Just, et. al.) The outline proposed here is that the account of Jesus "beginning with the Law and the Prophets" is a liturgical reference, as the synagogue liturgy began with a reading from the Pentateuch, then proceeded, after a psalm, to a reading from the lesser prophets, and then, after another psalm, to one of the greater prophets. This parallels the Christian pattern of OT-Psalm-Epistle-Verse-Gospel. Then "explained all things concerning Himself" parallels the sermon. Faithful rabbis of the first covenant pointed people forward in time to the Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. Faithful pastors today point people back to that same central event of time: Jesus, Crucified for Us Sinners, on the Cross. Our Lord, here, preaches about Himself. Then Emmaus pivots to a fellowship meal with Jesus, just as in the Divine Service we have table fellowship with Jesus. Our Lord even "gives thanks" over the bread in the account, such as we do in our eucharistic feast.

II. Our American Context

a. Revivalism, Heterodoxy, and a New Language

i. The Second Great Awakening; Charles Finney

- First Great Awakening was a pietistic movement, paralleling the growth of Methodism. It inaugurated revivalist practices – the first outdoor mass gatherings to hear preachers like George Whitefield numbered up to 15K! – but the focus was on getting Christians to have an “inner experience,” such as Wesley’s Aldersgate Experience. Rooted in Reformed Theology, the goal was to give hearers the “consolation” of having their salvation “confirmed” by a new “inclination of the heart.” Lutheran worship was unaffected by this, though the growth of pietistic hymnody in our churches can be seen as a parallel movement of the times.
- The Second Great Awakening, though, was expressly missional. It was also particularly American. The meetings were not just large but long: camp meetings would last a full week, with a prescribed arc guiding people through a methodical soteriology. Denominational lines were blurred and even Presbyterians revised their theology to accommodate for the emphasis on decision-making commitments. Prominent Awakening leader Charles Finney brought in innovations as the “anxious bench” as a means of highlighting and rewarding public confession and repentance. The movement was very influential on many communities – including Lutherans.

ii. Samuel S. Schmucker’s “American Lutheranism”

- Schmucker wasn’t a revivalist, but certainly was an accommodationist. Just as Finney abandoned orthodox Presbyterianism out of a missional zeal, so did Schmucker jettison confessional Lutheranism. He argued for believer’s baptism, an Anglican view of the Sabbath, acceptance of freemasonry, and denied the Real Presence in the Lord’s Supper. He aligned with Lutheran revivalists (The short-lived Franckean Synod was founded in 1837 on a platform of abolitionism, revivalism, and doctrinal revision.) While Schmucker’s and his allies “Definite Synodical Platform” – a.k.a. “The American Recension of the Augsburg Confession” - was accepted by only 3 of 23 synods of the General Synod, the ready capitulation to the surrounding culture for the sake of “success” in America was intrinsically an embrace of Finney’s missiology, if not his methods. And it foreshadowed the stresses to come when the confessional synods of immigrant Lutherans were to make the transition to English of a few decades later. Here we see how pragmatism is a real danger, even as we must be pragmatic as we seek to find and save the lost.

iii. Transition to English

- Thanks to being rooted in a confessional identity and being nurtured by generations of genuine Lutheran formation on American soil, the synods of the old Synodical Conference were not at risk of jettisoning the sacraments or tolerating freemasonry. But the temptations remained and so did honest questions about inculturation. After all, Jesus was not a German. And the Church Fathers did not sing our chorales or wear our vestments. Certainly for the sake of the Gospel salutary changes could and would be made. Even the most conservative understood that English mission and ministry had to be more than just speaking in English and doing everything else the same, even as there was legitimate fear of some of our theological inheritance being lost in the transition.
- Some of the first efforts were quite good. “Hymns of the Evangelical Lutheran Church for English-Language Mission” (1881, Concordia). This hymnal had but 33 hymns. The wisdom of our spiritual great-grandfathers was the same as done by liturgically mindful missionaries today: teach a few, curated hymns – and teach them well – while honoring what is already sung (so long as such accords with pure doctrine). Thus, in English-language mission in the US in the 1880’s a mission pastor would teach, for example, “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You,” one of the 33 hymns in the mission hymnal, to the English congregation and sing it for *every Sunday in Advent*. Repetitio mater memoria. Meanwhile, they would continue singing acceptable well-known English songs. Similarly, in franco-African mission, the author experiences local songs pre-service, during the offering, toward the end of distribution, and as a closing song, while the congregations sing the Lutheran liturgy in French and sing hymns from the francophone missional hymnal, *Édition Africaine* (LHF-Africa), for the Hymn of the Day and as the first communion hymn.
- Yet, as is well known, other influences were not so good – and led to the loss of the Synodical Conference, and division in both the WELS and the LCMS. While many of the core issues that caused these divisions were not directly tied to worship – the military chaplaincy, Scouting, “Levels of Fellowship” vs the Unit Concept – worship was nonetheless affected as liberals in the LCMS promoting ecumenism embraced a liturgical agenda as a means of creating unity between churches. LCMS pastors and musicians involved with the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship were, with a few exceptions, embracing the Anglican Formal Principle writ large: using liturgy to create unity rather than allow liturgy to flow from the unity created for us in Christ Jesus through our evangelical confession of the pure Gospel. With the liberal forces pushing this agenda, confessional Lutherans began to view liturgical promotion with suspicion. A contrast to Walther, Lohe, and Lochner, for sure!

- b. The Music of the Synodical Conference (Arnold Otto Lehman, “The Music of the Lutheran Church, Synodical Conference, 1839-1941,” Case Western, dissertation, 1967)
- i. Robust Beginnings
 - While both the WELS and the LCMS shared pietistic roots, each member of the synodical conference embraced the confessional revival among 19th-century Lutheranism in its own way. While liturgical practices varied – largely according to the traditions their founders brought over with them – the recovery of the Kernleider and the promotion of orthodox hymnody (Anna Hoppe, writer, and Fritz Reuter, musician, from WELS alongside Friedrich Lochner at CSL).
 - ii. Lost in Translation
 - Yet many early efforts to translate our hymns were weak. The popularity of the LCMS’s Sunday School hymnal (while August Crull’s hymnal languished in committees) that included many Anglo-Methodist hymns, and the desire post-WWI to “be American” took its toll. While certainly the Anglophile Common Service in TLH serves the Gospel well, it also reflected at least somewhat the accommodationist spirit. Here, with p. 5 and p. 15, we had a service we could be proud of. It was almost Episcopalian! And yet a more evangelical approach almost prevailed: the WELS representative wrote in favor of the subcommittee’s proposal to have just the ordo in the front of TLH – with options for “Anglican, Gregorian, Hymn Paraphrase, and Modern” in the back. A man ahead of his time, he would have loved the *Christian Worship SERVICE BUILDER!*
 - iii. Ecumenical and Social Agendas
 - After WWII, fault lines really began to separate. The liberals in the LCMS were after as much Lutheran Unity as they could get, and pursued as many joint projects as possible. With the spirit of Vatican II in the air, the “Liturgical Renewal Movement” within Lutheranism, the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, forged ahead with their new hymnal project. While there was much good that came out of their efforts, particularly in the area of hymnody, the underlying premise was to create unity by advancing uniformity in worship – even to the degree to returning much of the Roman canon of the mass back into the Divine Service (via a form of Eucharist Prayer). Other social agendas reflected in their work were inclusive language and social justice hymns.
- c. The Promise of “Evangelical Style; Lutheran Substance”
- i. David Luecke and David Anderson
 - While Missouri rejected LBW in favor of creating their more conservative book, LW, post-split Missouri continued on its path of seeking forms of worship that would aid church growth. Now, though, the promoted changes would come not from ecumenical liberals, but from the heirs of the revivalism: America’s neo-Evangelicals. Five years after the publication of LW, the Andersons started “Fellowship Ministries.” For 15 years they held their “Created to Praise” Conferences. In 2000, they published BOB (their “best of the best” contemporary worship songs).

- ii. “Church Growth Movement” in the LCMS; “Created to Praise” Conferences
 - The Created to Praise Conferences were alongside a missional movement in the LCMS that included PLI (Pastoral Leadership Institute) and other parachurch organizations. In collaboration, they put on over 250 worship conferences and promoted ‘contemporary worship’ in hundreds of venues – from the church worker conferences of sympathetic districts in the LCMS to the promotion of Karl George’s “Prepare Your Church for the Future” at Concordia-Mequon’s “lay ministry” curriculum and the popularization of David Luecke’s *Evangelical Style; Lutheran Substance*. The core idea: one would preach Lutheran sermons but that we should leverage our freedom in the Gospel to use “proven methods” to grow the church. While the pastors who promoted this do confess that the Spirit works through man-made devices, they thought we needed “Evangelical Style” so that worship in our churches would not be an IMPEDIMENT to the Spirit’s work. Simply put, “we’re free to sing what we want, so why not sing what people want to hear?”
- iii. Fellowship Ministries and Other Songbooks
 - BOB was short-lived, as soon the internet and CCLI license provided even more of the latest, popular evangelical music. Here was inserted Heath Curtis’ “Out of the Shopkeeper’s Prison” (available online) with the caveat that this is not questioning motivations but is a helpful story to relieve conservative pastors of the burden that they need to be uber-traditional in order to be faithful as well as a parable teaching against the idea that we have to pick the right songs in order to win souls for Christ.

III. Worship Wars in Missouri

a. Accelerants of Technology

- i. Resources – Anyway, the CCLI and the internet combined to give everyone more songs than they could ever ask for . . . leading to the Top 100 list. The Kieschnick administration had the LCMS Commission on Worship (COW) then publish a list of acceptable CoWo songs – a list the COWboys resisted making lest it be taken as prescription and endorsement . . . which it was. Years later, after the CCLI world had moved on to new playlists (as the songs of Contemporary Worship by definition reflect popularity which is constantly changing), many middle-of-the-road Missouri congregations were using the songlist for their “blended” and even some “contemporary” services.
- ii. Networking – Outside of CCLI, you also have the internet facilitating social networks. Including heated debates on the blogosphere and alliances formed across geographic lines on both sides of the worship music issue.
- iii. Equipment – And, in the 2000s, you get screens. More fuel for the fires. I could do a separate session on screens, their influence, and their hazards alone. A good summary of the problems with screens – one person turning the page for everyone being the chief problem for congregational song – is found at Jonathan Aigner’s “Ponder Anew” blog on Patheos.

b. Confessional Reaction

- i. President Barry's "Epistle" to the Synod – "Unchanging Feast in a Fast-Changing World" COWboys offer "Real Life Worship" conferences, and play some catch-up with HS98.
- ii. Good Shepherd Institute – A decade later, the confessionals get organized.
- iii. 2010 Convention – worship tensions were a key driver in the movement to elect Matthew C. Harrison. Ironically, the Kieschnick effort to circumvent the commission – like the Commission on Worship – that hampered his CGM efforts – passed. But then the convention gave the keys to the Ferrari to Matt!

c. Overreach and Encampments

- i. Losing the Via Media: Error's Opposite is Not Necessarily the Truth – Sasse. And also Daniel Deutschlander – "The Narrow Lutheran Middle" Yes, we need to have houses of prayers that welcome the stranger. But God's love is different than what the world means by "love." Deutschlander preached at the NWC about the "promises and profession of the world" and how wonderfully superior God's steadfast love is. Our calling is to proclaim this, that, by the Spirit working His will through the Word, "many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord." Again, this is not to question the motives of those who play or enjoy radio music or high art music but rather to point to how we should not elevate entertainment or aesthetics over the Gospel. Rather, the third way is not some noxious "neither this nor that" compromise between "contemporary/modern worship" and "traditional worship" but rather providing faithful, Christian worship in engaging and beautiful ways.
- ii. Liturgical Legalism – this avoids the pitfalls of legalism on both sides. Because both the high church traditionalist and the low church "entertainment evangelist" are holding to the traditions and wisdom of men.
- iii. Styles as Identities: Old and New Traditions become Traditionalism
 - We see this in the branding of worship as "traditional" and "contemporary" or even "blended." As if the Christian worship service were akin to a coffee-shop menu. These identities can really divide a congregation. At one point, a large congregation in Nebraska had four services organized by style: "Traditional (TLH); "Valpo" (LW with sung propers); "Contemporary", and "Country Gospel."
 - Quote Pelikan: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name."
 - Your 2008 address, after explaining your sabbatical project: "The 'traditional worship service' in an LCMS congregation is whatever that congregation was doing whenever an alternative worship service was started." Since then, you learned that whatever 5% got that alternative service gets to say what it is and how its done, too. Hence the "new traditionalism" that takes place under the banner of "contemporary" or "modern" worship.
 - This is the consequence of making it about the music. And it is no surprise, really, that the congregations that most quickly embraced LBW

were the first to get on board with Contemporary Worship. Either for the sake of a high value on performance music OR for the sake of the new.

IV. Resolving Tensions

- a. Modern Hymn Movement in Evangelicals
 - i. The Contemporary Worship Movement Divides – CoWo v. Modern Worship
 - ii. Reformed Artists – Indelible Grace; Sandra McCracken; Stuart Townend
 - iii. Getty Music – and the growing constellation around them, inc. CityAlight
- b. International Mission Experiences
 - i. Similar Tensions in Global Music – these tensions are world-wide
 - ii. Global Music Filtered – most “global music” came via unionist motivations
 - iii. The Hunger for Hymnody – “We have our own praise songs. We want hymns!”
- c. The New Surroundings
 - i. The Big Sort
 - A Poli-Sci concept, socially applicable.
 - Fewer LCMS congregations branding worship – for good and not-so-good reasons.
 - Some of the sorting is very particular (lutheranliturgy.org), with even my traditional church viewed as insufficient by some.
 - ii. Who Is Keeping the Lights On
 - Yet the decline of attendance and membership has had a benefit. Those who keep coming are more motivated by the Gospel than “church membership,” and while some cling to “historic liturgy” as a mark of the good confession, more are simply happy to being among the body of Christ each Sunday and are less concerned with having their personal tastes met.
 - While attendance is down, giving is up.
 - Those who remain are attending more frequently.
 - iii. Gen Z
 - Most encouraging is the number of young families. While many Millennials were scared away or embarrassed as we shifted from “neutral world” to “negative world,” enrollment in church worker programs and LCMS seminaries is up now that the Zoomers are coming of age. Having grown up in “negative world,” they are inoculated against the opinions of the world and are seeking like-minded fellowship and substantive worship. Yet they are, as a whole, less devoted to particular traditions other than wanting good ones. Examples were given from the author’s recent experience: Brett Farson, a Baptist convert from Texas who sought out the LCMS based on conversations he had with a Catholic priest at a local hospital, and several young couples with children who have told the pastor they don’t want the service cut, don’t mind longer services, and love substantive liturgy, hymnody, and church music.

V. Well-Nourished Souls Care for the World

a. Jesus Is the Answer

- i. Keeping First Things First - and so we may well have arrived where we should have been all along . . . really where we have been along as Christ always holds His Church in His mercy. But now we are realizing it more as some of the promises of America have faded and Lutheranism has gone through the growing pains of maturing here in the New World.
- ii. Tradition vs. Traditionalism – Pelikan again. Mention variety of GENRES!
- iii. Righteousness of Heart Not Found in Rites and Ordinances (AC VII; Ap. VII) – Reminder. This is not just a rejoinder against what it originally confessed against – uniformity for the sake of justification – but also against American consequentialism, pragmatism, and utilitarianism.

b. Give Me Jesus

- i. Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19) – one of the few instructions we have in the NT. Let’s sing what Moses & Elijah would want to sing. (The heavenly conversation & the Mount of Transfiguration!)
- ii. People Like What They Know (Tradition) – Even ubermissionals sing carols.
- iii. People Share What They Love (Mission) – Let’s face it, nobody says “Come to my church, where what divides us is more important than what unites us!”

c. How Can We Sing the Lord’s Song in This Land?

i. The Song of the Church is Word-Driven

- The whole point is caring for one another. God’s not looking at His watch waiting for us to entertain him on Sunday AM! The Lord’s song is a gift, given to us for the care of our souls. We magnify the Lord when we sing the Word of God, allowing it to dwell richly in our hearts. And the indwelling of the Word brings us spiritual blessings: comfort, joy, strength, peace, and confidence in the Lord.
- Whatever your instrumentation, the melodic element reigns supreme because it carries the Word. And the melodic structures need be for the folk, the “non-singers who come without rehearsal.” This can be done with guitar & flute, piano and cello, organ & trumpet, or a small a cappella choir. The author has helped congregations find their voice by helping them discover the talents the Lord has placed in their midst and how to use that talent to lead the Lord’s song. God wants us to be good stewards of the talents He has placed in our congregation – and the song that results from that is sufficient because, ultimately, the Lord’s song is for His people, not to provide some sort of entertainment for God. Thus there is no need for professionals to give us some “holy sound” – whether live or by track. If we think we gain merit by such, we should hear again the Lord’s admonition through the prophet Amos: “Away from me with your noisy songs!”
- For a better way, see the excellent video on accompanying congregational song from Aaron Christie’s congregation, provided on the WELS website - welscongregationalservices.net/worship-led-by-a-

[modern-ensemble](#). Here was see an excellent example of all the talent of a congregation being leveraged for the purpose of leading the faithful in psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles.

- ii. You Can't Give Away What You Don't Have
 - Don't be someone else; be who you are.
 - Take music to heart. Better to sing fewer songs more often. Remember, the traditions are not just for the sake of good order, but for the sake of "teaching the people." Do we sing good hymns often enough for their Gospel content to be taken to heart? Have you taken those words to heart yourself?
- iii. Nurturing Core Hymnody Appropriate for Your Context
 - Bryan Gerlach: "Creative implementation inoculates the congregation against inferior choices."
 - Be sure to sing a cappella.
 - Sing together outside the service. Meetings, Bible studies, other gatherings.
 - Involve a wide range of members in determining your core.

d. Christ for the Nations

- i. The Church Must Teach, for Who Else Will? For instance, the presenter's favorite African name is that of one Breznev Gorbachev Mampua, a convert to Lutheranism in Congo who was raised by communists. He came to every session of a two-week liturgical workshop even though he was not a church worker. He took time off from his work to do this. Why? Because he wanted to learn the song of the church. He had been catechized by Pastor Joseph Mavoungou and baptized but knew that such was only the beginning. We are called to baptize and TEACH. Miraculous knowledge of Christian doctrine in not one of baptism's gifts. We must be taught, and the Church is our teacher. Similarly, the Church must teach the Lord's song.
- ii. Liturgical Formation for Witness – Marva Dawn & being formed in the church's vocabulary & being equipped that way for witness. After all, the liturgy gives us everything we really need to say: "Amen," "Thanks be to God," "Alleluia (Praise the Lord)," "Lord, have mercy," "And also with you." And then the hymns build on that. "What a friend we have in Jesus . . ." "God really is a Mighty Fortress," "Trust not in rulers, they are but mortal . . ."
- iii. Embracing the Heritage; Confessing Christ for All
 - We have a rich, living heritage. We get to sing it. And the world needs to hear it.
- iv. Honoring the Talents and Hearts of All the Called and Gathered
 - Let the young and old sing each other's songs.
 - And let's honor the nations the Lord bring to our communities. God has named them too! (Eph 3:15)