

“Unity in the Way of Worship (*Ordo*): Altar & Pulpit Fellowship and Liturgical Integrity”

D. Richard Stuckwisch – LCMS International Church Relations Forum, Milwaukee, WI – 1 August 2023

The *Augustana* confesses and identifies the Church as “the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the Sacraments are administered rightly” (AC VII). That is to describe and define the Church in terms of the Holy Ministry (as confessed in AC V). I have long been struck by how closely that description matches the picture of the Church that Dr. Weinrich drew for us from St. Ignatius of Antioch back in the day – that of the bishop and the people gathered around the Lord’s Altar for the giving and receiving of Christ Jesus in His Word and Sacrament. Various theologians have referred to this sort of picture as a “Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” and I have found that way of thinking (in general) to be salutary. As we all eat of the one Bread which is the Body of Christ, and as we all drink from the one Cup which is the New Testament in His Blood, so are we all together one Body in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

To think and speak of the Church on the basis of “the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments” (AC V) is to identify the Church *liturgically*, that is, with reference to the Divine Service. Really, the *Holy Ministry*, the *Divine Service*, and the *Liturgy* all refer to more or less the same thing from slightly different angles; each at its heart comprises the Gospel as it is preached and administered. Or, to say it another way, as the Apology explains, “the term ‘liturgy’ squares well with the ministry.” It is an ancient word for “public service,” which coincides “with our position that a minister who consecrates shows forth the Body and Blood of the Lord to the people, just as a minister who preaches shows forth the Gospel to the people” (Apology XXIV.80-83). A *liturgist* cares for and/or administers public goods.

The “Liturgy,” in this respect, is narrowly defined and understood as the public reading and preaching of the Holy Scriptures, unto repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, and the administration of His Holy Supper in the Name and remembrance of Jesus, according to His Institution (1 Cor. 11:23-26). At this point we do not yet have in view any particular forms of the Liturgy, nor any of those “human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men” (AC VII), which have developed over the course of the Church’s life on earth. To begin with we are dealing with those things that are constitutive, definitive, essential, and necessary to the Church, her life, her unity and fellowship. In this respect, the Liturgy is not incidental or irrelevant but foundational and fundamental, because the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of the Eucharist are the means whereby God “gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel” (AC V). And as the Church, properly speaking, “is the assembly of saints and true believers” (AC VIII), there is no Christian Church apart from the Liturgy of the Gospel.

My point in laying out the *liturgical* character of the Church is to emphasize the *liturgical* aspects and parameters of Church Fellowship. It is the Liturgy of the Gospel that we have in common, not only as individual congregations, and not only within our respective synods and regional churches, but also in our relationships with each other in the communion of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Indeed, the Liturgy is what connects us to one another as fellow members of the one Body of Christ, across the ages and around the world; not simply in the sense that we are all doing these same things, but more profoundly, that these sacred things of Christ Jesus – the faithful preaching of His Gospel and the right administration of His Sacraments in accordance with His Word – are the very things that bind us to Him and unite us with each other in Him. It is no accident or coincidence that St. Justin Martyr’s second-century description of the Divine Service still serves as an adequate and accurate summary of

the Church's liturgical life and activity on any given Sunday (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 66-67); for the Lord in His mercy and providential care has preserved the Liturgy of His Gospel for His Church on earth, and He has preserved His Church on earth by the Liturgy of His Gospel.

Of course, heterodox, heretical, and sectarian churches also read and preach the Bible in some fashion and make use of the outward rites and ceremonies of Baptism and the Supper to some extent; yet, we do not enter into Pulpit and Altar Fellowship with those churches. We do acknowledge that heterodox Christians belong to the fellowship of the Church catholic by faith in Christ Jesus, notwithstanding their erroneous teaching and confession. But we do not condone or participate in their heterodox doctrines and practices by exchanging pulpits with their preachers, communing them, or communing with them. In many cases, unorthodox teaching will manifest itself in unorthodox liturgical practices – and by the same token, we should add, unorthodox liturgical practices will often result in unorthodox doctrines. What is more, since the preaching of the Gospel is itself a constitutive part of the Liturgy, it will always be the case that teaching and practice – *doctrine* and *doxology* – rise or fall together over time. But the point remains that even impeccable rites and ceremonies are not sufficient in themselves to establish Church Fellowship where there is no harmonious agreement in the teaching and confession of the faith.

Written confessions are obviously of significant importance in this respect, as the Lord has revealed His Word in the Holy Scriptures, and as His Church has inscribed her confession of His Word in Creeds and the like from the start. Our own Lutheran Confessions function as a means of both teaching and testing the preaching and practice of our pastors, and we rightly pledge ourselves to those objective writings in the Rites of Ordination and/or Installation to the Office of the Holy Ministry. The seriousness with which we treat the orthodoxy of our pastors is especially appropriate in view of the topic at hand, because our Church Fellowship is exercised, not in written documents, but in the actual preaching and administration of the Gospel by our pastors in the liturgical life of the Church – in fellowship with one another.

In short, Church Fellowship is *pastoral fellowship*, that is, a fellowship of *pastoral care* in all those things that pastors are called, ordained, and sent to do in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This takes us back to the *Augustana's* confession of the Church in terms of the Holy Ministry, but now in consideration of the unity and fellowship of churches with each other. What does that entail, and what does it look like? As the Church is the assembly of saints and true believers gathered *by, around, and for* the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel (AC VII), churches live in true unity and enter into genuine fellowship when their pastors are preaching the same Gospel in harmony with each other and likewise administering the Sacraments in conformity with their preaching. That's not to say or suggest that the pastors will all be preaching exactly the same sermon; neither will they all be conducting the Liturgy in a kind of lock-step uniformity that allows no discernible differences. But pastors in fellowship with each other will be recognizably consistent and similar in their preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins in the Name of Jesus; and so will their liturgical practice be consistent and resonate with their preaching and teaching of His Word.

It bears noting that the right preaching and teaching of the Word of Christ Jesus is integral and essential to the right administration of His Holy Sacraments, both Holy Baptism and the Holy Communion (as well as Holy Absolution). Holy Baptism is given and received along with the teaching and observance of all that Jesus has commanded (St. Matt. 28:18-20); and not only is the Holy Communion given to *disciples* of Jesus (St. Matt. 26:26-28), that is, to those who are Baptized and *being catechized* in His Name, but it is administered in His "remembrance," in proclamation of His death "until His comes" (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

It is precisely for these reasons that the preaching of Christ Jesus is a constitutive part of the Liturgy. And that is also why an outwardly “correct” conduct of the external rites and ceremonies of the Liturgy is not sufficient in itself for the true unity and fellowship of the Church; orthodox preaching is also necessary.

In respect to both preaching and the entire conduct of the Liturgy we are dealing with pastoral practice and *pastoral care*, which are the heart and soul of Church Fellowship. By “pastoral care” I have in mind preaching, baptizing, catechizing, hearing confession, speaking Holy Absolution, administering the Holy Communion, visiting the sick and homebound, and exercising the cure of souls with the Word of Christ. Admitting individual Christians to the Sacrament of the Altar, whether the first time or any other time, is itself an exercise of pastoral care, which happens within an entire context of ongoing pastoral care. This point is fundamental to the orthodox practice of Closed Communion, which is nothing else and nothing less than the expression and actual practice of Church Fellowship. That is to say, pastors commune those Christians who are under their own ongoing pastoral care, as well as those Christians who are under the ongoing pastoral care of brother pastors with whom they share the same preaching and practice. Along the same lines, orthodox pastors will *not* commune Christians who are under a different pastoral care; nor will they commune individuals who have no pastor, although they will certainly invite and welcome such individuals to come under their pastoral care and to become part of the Church through catechesis.

In all of this, it is not so much that Church Fellowship is the prerequisite for Pulpit and Altar Fellowship, although that is also true; but it is more to the point that the Holy Communion *is* the actual embodiment of Church Fellowship in the exercise of pastoral care – in the preaching and practice of the Liturgy. So, the challenge that faces the Church on earth is discerning where such *pastoral fellowship* is located, and how it should best be carried out and practically expressed. And that challenge is all the greater where we have also to deal with differences in language and nomenclature, history, experience, and resources.

As previously noted, there is no expectation that pastors in fellowship with each other will conduct the Liturgy with absolute uniformity in every detail. Such an expectation would not be reasonable, nor even possible; pastors are all different, congregations are all different, church buildings are different in their architecture and furnishings, and any number of other differences enter into the equation. Thankfully, absolute uniformity in liturgical practice is not necessary to the exercise of pastoral fellowship. But all the differences do beg the question, as to how our pastoral fellowship *shall* be manifest and recognized.

There are those foundational givens which *are* necessary to Church Fellowship, such as we have already discussed. There must be the right preaching of the Gospel in all its truth and purity, in accordance with the Holy Scriptures – all centered and fulfilled in Christ Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead – unto repentance and faith in His forgiveness of sins. And there must be the right administration of the Holy Sacraments, in conformity with the Lord’s Institution and in harmony with the preaching of His Gospel. These are the most important and essential matters, so fundamental as to be cliché, and no Lutheran (indeed, no true Christian) would presume to argue otherwise.

But what of all the details that are not determined by the clear and explicit Word of God? It is in those areas of “*adiaphora*” that the Church has struggled to find the sweet spot between legalism and chaos. Within the Missouri Synod, for example, there has been increasing diversity in worship practices since the early 1980s, resulting in a decade or more of “worship wars” (throughout the 1990s), then settling into a *status quo* in which congregations are predominantly defined and identified by their particular “style” of worship, ranging from full-bore free-form “contemporary” practices that mimic Protestant Evangelicals, to carefully-ordered traditional “high church” practices replete with all the ceremonies.

Every man appears to do whatever seems right in his own eyes; which is admittedly “biblical,” but not in a good way (Judges 17:6; 21:25)! Whether all of these styles actually maintain the fundamental integrity of the Gospel Liturgy in Word and Sacrament is debatable at best. In any case, even allowing for the sake of argument that all these things are permissible (1 Cor. 10:23), such a plethora of divergent practices is surely not edifying or beneficial to the unity of the Church or the tangible exercise of our fellowship. It is confusing and offensive to the people of God, misleading to those outside of His Church, and distracting from the One Thing truly needful. Albeit *adiaphora* are free in themselves, they are often so intimately connected to the preaching and administration of the Gospel that they cannot easily be distinguished in practical perception; so care must be taken that the actual Liturgy not be treated as if dispensable. If we do not wish to have “a king in Israel” (Judges 17:6; 21:25) – nor a Pope, for that matter – there must yet be some way for our pastors and bishops to manifest, measure, and recognize *in practice* our common confession of Christ Jesus, the unity of His Body, the Church, and our fellowship in His precious Gospel.

As Luther writes in his “Christian Exhortation to the Livonians” (1525):

For those who devise and ordain universal customs and orders get so wrapped up in them that they make them into dictatorial laws opposed to the freedom of faith. But those who ordain and establish nothing succeed only in creating as many factions as there are heads, to the detriment of that Christian harmony and unity of which St. Paul and St. Peter so frequently write. Still, we must express ourselves on these matters as well as we can, even though everything will not be done as we say and teach that it should be. (*Luther’s Works* AE 53, p. 46)

It was around that point that Dr. Luther finally consented to work on a German Mass (*Deutsche Messe*), after resisting the request to do so for some time. He feared that anything he might produce along these lines would be made into “a rigid law,” binding consciences in violation of Christian liberty. Yet, he saw “the widespread demand for German Masses and Services and the general dissatisfaction and offense that [had] been caused by the great variety of new Masses,” which so many others had rushed to make. So, then, while urging the freedom of the conscience before God in respect to “differences in liturgical usage,” Luther did set forth “The German Mass and Order of Service” in 1526. It was not his intention “that all of Germany should uniformly follow our Wittenberg order,” but he wrote that “it would be well if the Service in every principality would be held in the same manner and if the order observed in a given city would also be followed by the surrounding towns and villages” (*Luther’s Works* AE 53, pp. 61-62). In making this observation Luther acknowledges the blessing and benefit of having free things in common.

There *is* freedom and flexibility in human ceremonies. That there are many things which the Lord has neither commanded nor forbidden (*adiaphora*) is simply a fact, which we also teach and confess (FC X). The Lord has not specified every detailed nuance of New Testament worship; He has left most of those details to be worked out by His Church on earth and by the ministers of His Word in their pastoral care of His people in each parish. While the principles of *adiaphora* are often misunderstood, misconstrued, and/or misapplied, the actual freedom involved in that which God has neither required nor prohibited remains a blessing and a gift that He has granted to His Church for the sake of His Gospel, that it should have free course and be preached and administered to the joy and edification of His people in a wide variety of circumstances, across broad differences of time and place. But the freedom of *adiaphora* also means that the Church and her pastors are free to work toward common and consistent practices.

In asserting that “it is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere,” the *Augustana* cites Ephesians 4 (verses 4-6) in affirming “the true unity of

the Church” in the pure and right preaching and administration of the Gospel; for “there is one Body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all,” etc. (AC VII). Interestingly, although Dr. Luther does not cite the Ephesians passage in the Preface to his *Deutsche Messe* (1526), he offers a comparable premise as a compelling reason to seek unity and harmony in liturgical practice, not as though it were necessary, but because it is appropriate and edifying: “As far as possible,” he writes, “we should observe the same rites and ceremonies, just as all Christians have the same Baptism and the same Sacrament [of the Altar] and no one has received a special one of his own from God” (*Luther’s Works* AE 53, p. 61). In other words, the very oneness of the Gospel which is entirely sufficient for the true unity of the Church is also, in its own way, the ground on which the Church is well able to establish common and consistent practices.

In fact, the Lutheran Church has generally followed Luther’s advice in seeking to adopt, adapt, and make consistent use of worship practices in common, by and large preserving the liturgical traditions, rubrics, rites, and ceremonies of the Church catholic (AC XXIV.2-3). Consider the Lutheran Church Orders of the 16th and 17th centuries, which specify to varying degrees the way that pastors and congregations within a given territory should carry out the work of the Church. Those Lutheran Church Orders give directives in matters that are theologically free before God, but which the Church in her freedom chose to arrange and govern for the sake of consistency and unity in practice. Such consistency and unity are beneficial, not only for peace and harmony between neighboring parishes, but also for the clarity and precision of the Church’s catechesis and confession of the faith within each parish and beyond. “After all, the chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ” (AC XXIV.3).

The whole world knows that actions speak louder than words, and as we use care in the words that we confess in preaching, teaching, and otherwise, so do we rightly exercise care in our liturgical practice at the heart and center of the Church’s life. Along the same lines, Luther’s recommendation that churches should ideally seek to have Services, rites, and ceremonies in common is analogous to his admonition, in his Preface to the *Small Catechism*, that we should choose “one fixed, permanent form and manner” of teaching the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Our Father, and make every effort “to teach the young and simple people these parts in such a way that we do not change a syllable or set them forth and repeat them one year differently than in another” (*Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, CPH, 2008, pp. 247-248). While Luther did not dictate any one particular “form and manner” for everyone, he did provide his *Small Catechism* for the use of the Church, and the Lutheran Church in freedom and love has chosen to continue using that beautiful contribution – to the great benefit of many generations.

Similar principles of pastoral care in respect to liturgical practice are exemplified in the case of Wilhelm Löhe’s *Agenda*, written for the mission of the Church in the United States, based upon the forms and practices he found “in one or the other of the many old Lutheran [Church] Orders” (*Liturgy for Christian Congregations of the Lutheran Faith*, Third Edition, tr. By F. C. Longaker, 1902, p. xi). To prepare and produce such an *Agenda* is, in itself, to make decisions and offer directions in matters that are free; and to do so on the basis of past precedent demonstrates the intention to be in continuity with those who have gone before us in the faith and confession of Christ Jesus. There is a deliberate embracing and fostering of catholicity with past, present, and future generations of the Church. Similarly, Friedrich Lochner, a student of Löhe and one of the first pastors of the Missouri Synod, in his thorough study of the history, theology, and practice of the Liturgy, likewise gives careful attention to the practices of the Lutheran Church Orders (see *The Chief Divine Service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated by Matthew Carver, edited by Jon Vieker, Kevin Hildebrand, and Nathaniel Jensen, CPH, 2020).

Not surprisingly, the Missouri Synod took these things seriously from the beginning. A conservative hymnal and liturgical agenda were among the first things that C.F.W. Walther and the congregations under his care took the time and made the effort to prepare and produce in the early years of the Synod's existence (the hymnal within a year, the agenda within a decade of the Synod's beginning). What is more, the Synod's Constitution has always stipulated, in one way or another, the necessity of "doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school" (LCMS Constitution VI.4, *Handbook* 2019, p. 13). As the Missouri Synod began to use the English language, they also adopted the "Common Service" of 1888, which had been developed by a joint venture of several Lutheran Synods in the Eastern United States. By deliberate intent, the "Common Service" was based upon "the common consent of the pure Lutheran Liturgies of the Sixteenth Century," or, in those parts of the Liturgy where there was not "an entire agreement" among the Church Orders, "the consent of the largest number of greatest weight" (Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, Revised Edition, Fortress Press, 1960, p. 183).

The point here is simply to say that the Lutheran Church, from the outset and throughout her history, has recognized the benefit of common and consistent liturgical practices and the corresponding need for direction and guidance in these areas. That has been true especially among those who take doctrine and confession of the faith most seriously, precisely because liturgical practice is indicative of what we actually believe, teach, and confess, as well as a means of ongoing catechesis in God's Word and faith. By the same token, the unity of a common confession of the faith is both embodied and substantiated by a unity of practice. It is true that Church Fellowship does not depend on a uniformity in *adiaphora*, but where there is fellowship in doctrine the Church will also tend to gravitate toward a common and consistent usage of *adiaphora* in the conduct of the Gospel Liturgy. And the beauty of it is, the Church is perfectly free to pursue that path. Indeed, it is not a violation but an exercise of faith and freedom when the pastors and congregations of a particular territory or jurisdiction of the Church mutually agree – in love – to order and conduct their liturgical life according to common rubrics, rites, and ceremonies.

The truth is that the Church cannot do those essential things that God *has* given her to do without *some* other rubrics, rites, and ceremonies to accompany them, even if those accompanying practices differ over time and from one place to another. The question is not whether to have and use such things, but how best to *choose* them – that is, by what criteria – and how best to think of them and use them.

In fact, the use of rubrics, rites, and ceremonies is fundamental to the Ministry of the Gospel in the life of the Church. So, it is useful to unpack these things a bit and explain what they are and how they work:

Rubrics are the rules or instructions that guide and govern the conduct of the Liturgy, whether instituted by the Lord or left to the freedom of the Church to determine in love. In the Lord's Supper, for example, the Rubrics given by the Lord are, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (and, "as often as you eat this Bread and drink this Cup, proclaim the Lord's death until He comes"). Examples of the rubrics determined by the Church would include information on the day and time of the Divine Service (e.g., Sunday 9:00 a.m.) and basic logistical instructions for the distribution of the Holy Communion (in writing or by the ushers). Such rubrics are necessary to any sort of coordinated group activity, and so also for the Church's life.

Rites are the words that are spoken, chanted, or sung by the pastors, cantors, choirs, or congregation, whether instituted by the Lord or left to the freedom of the Church to determine in love. In the Lord's Supper, for example, the Rites given by the Lord are, "Take, eat. This is My Body, given for you. Drink of it, all of you. This Cup is the New Testament in My Blood, shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

Examples of the rites developed by the Church in love include the Creed, the Preface, Proper Preface, and Sanctus, the distribution formula and distribution hymns, and the Post-Communion Collect, etc. All such rites are in keeping with the fact that we are *verbal* creatures, and that God Himself does and gives everything by and with His Word – which we are given to confess and pray to Him and to each other.

Ceremonies are all the actions, movements, postures, architecture, furnishings, vessels, vestments, paraments, artwork, and adornments involved in the conduct of the Liturgy, whether instituted by the Lord or left to the freedom of the Church to determine in love. In the Lord's Supper, for example, the Ceremonies established by the Lord are taking the bread and the cup of wine, consecrating them with His Word, and distributing them to His disciples to eat and drink as His Body and Blood. Examples of the ceremonies adopted by the Church in love include the Sanctuary, the Altar, the crucifix and candles, the stole and chasuble, the Communion vessels, the Communion rail, and the work of Elders and Ushers in directing "traffic." Some such ceremonies are inherent and inevitable to our life in the body, occupying space and time, as well as being unavoidably involved in the administration of the Holy Sacraments.

It is not possible to administer and receive the Means of Grace without ceremonies. However, not all ceremonies are created equal. Some ceremonies are better, and some are worse than others; and some ceremonies have no place in the Church, even if they would otherwise be "free." All things are lawful in Christ Jesus, but not all things are meet, right, and salutary (1 Cor. 10:23). Any ceremony or practice that might be considered for use in the Liturgy must be measured and evaluated according to its service and support of the Word of God, and thereby determined to be more or less helpful to faith and love.

Our Lutheran hymnals and service books, and even the old Lutheran Church Orders, do not specify every detail of liturgical practice. Whereas the rites and rubrics of the Divine Service, the Daily Prayer Offices, and various other occasions, are more or less adequately provided for the use of pastors in their care for the Lord's Church, certainly not all of the potential ceremonies are spelled out, prescribed, or described. As previously indicated, it is not necessary for all such human arrangements to be everywhere the same; nor would it be desirable for all of those details to be the same, even if that were theoretically possible. Practical matters can be dealt with pragmatically. But there are still a variety of *adiaphora* that may be practiced (or not) with theological significance for catechesis, confession of the faith, and pastoral care. And those choices and decisions do have some impact on the relationship of pastors with each other.

The boundaries and parameters of the Church's freedom in worship are established and contoured, not only by explicit commands and prohibitions, but also implicitly by the constitutive rites and ceremonies of Holy Baptism, the Preaching of the Law and the Gospel unto repentance and the forgiveness of sins, and the administration of the Holy Communion in remembrance of Jesus. These divinely given Means of Grace are the foundation, the beating heart, and the central high point of the Church's faith and life in Christ. Whatever else may be done in worship is determined in relation to these constitutive Means.

Beyond those basics, the measure of any given ceremony's worth and benefit requires more than the avoidance of overtly false doctrine. The best ceremonies are not simply true, as opposed to false; they are positively helpful in teaching and confessing the Word of God, and they are beautiful in adorning His Liturgy of the Gospel. It is indeed appropriate and salutary to adorn the Liturgy with artistic beauty, as a confession of faith in the Word and work of Christ Jesus, and as a catechesis in the hidden Mysteries of His great Salvation. One may consider such examples as chanting, the sign of the Cross, chasubles, the elevation of the Sacrament, genuflecting at various points in the Liturgy, and the use of incense.

The broadest criteria for the consideration of any liturgical practice are faith toward God and love for the neighbor; which can also be summarized in terms of *reverence* and *courtesy*. That which is harmful to faith and love is not free but forbidden. And that which is irreverent, rude, or frivolous, is likewise not free but forbidden (FC SD X.1, 7, 9). The Second Commandment requires that God's Name be kept holy, and that God must be sanctified by His priests and His people (Ex. 20:7; Num. 20:12; Lev. 10:3).

Courtesy and love for the neighbor do suggest a steady consistency and continuity of practice, which are so conducive to peace and rest in the Liturgy of the Gospel, because they allow for a ready participation of the entire congregation in the Church's worship of Christ Jesus. By contrast, frequent fluctuations and diversity in practice are unsettling to the people of God and easily distract them from His Liturgy of the Gospel, because they require a level of literacy, attention, energy, and effort that tends to frustrate or prevent the participation of many members in the Church's worship of Christ Jesus.

In considering various possible *adiaphora*, pastors should also take into account the larger fellowship of the Church catholic, including those who have gone before us in the faith and confession of Christ Jesus, as well as those who will follow after us (our children and our children's children), and those with whom we are in fellowship in the present (and those with whom we are working toward Church Fellowship). This, too, is another exercise of love for the neighbor, a ready willingness to set aside our own personal proclivities and preferences for the sake of having "all things in common" (Acts 2:42-44).

Tradition is generally more conducive to the Gospel than novelty (1 Cor. 11:1-2, 16-26), because what is handed over is received as a gift or inheritance from the past, rather than being fabricated for ourselves and our own purposes in the present. Lutherans have therefore been evangelically conservative when it comes to tradition, in contrast to the legalism of Rome on the right and of the Reformed on the left.

Along similar lines, *catholicity* in practice is generally more conducive to love than personal innovation, because it belongs by definition to the entire Church, to the household of faith and the whole family of God, rather than being the unique invention or private property of an isolated individual or small group.

What is more, the collective wisdom of the Church is usually wiser than the personal insights of any one individual. True, the nature and needs of pastoral care require the free exercise of pastoral discernment and discretion, just as the Church in each time and place is free with respect to human customs. Yet, the starting point should be what has been given and received within the life of the Church, rather than the novelty of personal ingenuity. Consider the great value and benefit of the Church Year and Lectionary, the Ordinary and Propers of the Divine Service, and the use of customary vestments and furnishings.

These are some of the key criteria that should help to guide a pastor in caring for his congregation in the freedom of faith and the service of love. The same criteria are also of help to bishops and the churches under their care in working toward harmony and unity of liturgical practice, both within their respective jurisdictions and in the exercise of Church Fellowship with one another. To whatever extent we are able to share rubrics, rites, and ceremonies in common, those practices demonstrate, express, substantiate, and support our common confession of the faith, even as they also serve and support the preaching and administration of the Gospel Liturgy. What is more, those recognizably *Lutheran* liturgical practices also help the laity to distinguish and identify our Church Fellowship wherever in the world it may be found. Certainly, as we share the ecumenical Creeds and our Lutheran Confessions in common, it is also meet, right, and salutary that we should share those things that govern and guide our liturgical practices.