

“Ecclesia Semper Reformanda and the Eucharist:
Are We Lutherans Falsely or Rightly Accused of Abolishing the Mass?”

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The Eucharist, Lord’s Supper, or Sacrament of the Altar is, at one level, at least, called the “repeatable” sacrament of initiation into Christ and the Church. And because of this much of what I said in my previous presentation about could be applied equally here. That is, if our theme “*Ecclesia semper reformanda*” is a baptismal theme, so also is it Eucharistic since these two sacraments go together in Christian faith and life. And with regard to this relationship I’ve always liked Aidan Kavanagh’s statement that: “in baptism the Eucharist begins, and in the Eucharist baptism is sustained. From this premier sacramental union flows all the church’s life.”¹ And elsewhere, “although no person has a right to baptism, the baptized *do* possess rights to confirmation and the Eucharist.”² Or, recall the similar words in LBW that “Holy communion is the birthright of the baptized.”³ I will return to this later at the end of my talk.

As with Baptism, there is, of course, certainly nothing that needs reforming with regard to our Lutheran confessional theology of the Eucharist. The great and central gift of the Eucharist affirmed in our classic confessional documents could not be clearer. As Article X of the *Augsburg Confession* states: “It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine are there distributed

¹Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 122.

²Aidan Kavanagh, “Initiation: Baptism and Confirmation,” *The Sacraments: Readings in Contemporary Sacramental Theology*, ed. Michael Taylor (New York: Alba House, 1981), 93.

³LBW, Minister’s Edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 31.

and received.”⁴ Melancthon’s *Apology* says as well: “that in the Lord’s supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and *substantially* present and are truly offered with those things that are seen, bread and wine.”⁵ And vol. III of *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, rightly affirms this confessional position, stating: “We affirm that in the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, *is present wholly and entirely, in his body and blood*, under the signs of bread and wine.”⁶ Indeed, the Eucharist *is*, in the words of Luther’s *Small Catechism*, “the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and drink,”⁷ and that Real Presence of Christ there “in, with, and under” is objective and not dependent on the faith of the communicant, received by the believing Christian toward “forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.” Nothing needs further reform here, other than perhaps our renewed appropriation, appreciation, and celebration of this gift and reality!

That our Eucharistic theology, however, does not need reforming does not mean that, like baptism as well, it is not also being challenged today at its core. In fact, the same arguments calling for “radical hospitality,” promoting Eucharistic participation before Baptism, constitute also a frontal assault not just on baptism but on our Eucharistic theology. That is, if we need to articulate more clearly our baptismal theology as the *inception* of life in Christ and the paschal pattern for baptismal living in the world, it should also raise for us the question of our theological understanding of the Eucharist itself. For, if the Eucharist is little other than a mere memorial meal, a communal symbolic commemoration, or intellectual remembering of Christ’s redemptive act with the ritual sharing of bread and wine, then the question of who participates in it may well

⁴ *The Augsburg Confession*, Article X, in Tappert, 34

⁵ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Art. X, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 179-80 (emphasis added).

⁶ *The Eucharist as Sacrifice*, in Paul Empie and T. Austin Murphy (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, III* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), 192.

⁷ *The Small Catechism* in *Ibid*, 351.

be understood differently than if we affirm our classic Lutheran theological stance, then the question of who participates or not is placed on a different level than a position of “radical hospitality” at the altar might imply. Please understand. Exclusion of the unbaptized from the Eucharist is not to protect the Eucharist from some kind of profanation. The Eucharist *is* what it *is*, to use a modern cliché. Rather, exclusion of the unbaptized from Eucharistic participation is out of pastoral care for the unbaptized themselves and to keep them from making a public statement or commitment about faith in Jesus Christ by receiving Him in Holy Communion that they may be neither prepared nor ready to make! Or, in classic Lutheran terms, it is to assist them in not eating and drinking condemnation on themselves (*manducatio indignorum*). If, however, they have been catechized, are prepared and ready to make such a faith commitment, then why would they not be seeking Baptism? For, as Wartburg Seminary teacher of liturgy Thomas Schattauer says, “participation in the supper involves a person in a costly discipleship in the way of Jesus.” And the meaning of “costly discipleship” is best learned by what we might call apprenticeship in the community of faith through its formation process known as the catechumenate leading to baptism.

It seems to me, then, that *the* question is what is the meaning of the Eucharist and what are the implications of participating in the Eucharist for ongoing life in Christ? Hence, to keep with our focus of “*Ecclesia semper reformanda*” what needs to be reformed in our own day, first of all, is not the Eucharist itself, but a renewed articulation of the theology of the Eucharist in general along with our Lutheran confessional stance in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. I know I may get in trouble here but no matter what we might say to the contrary, the ELCA acceptance of “full communion” with various Reformed Churches in the United States and, more recently, with the United Methodist Church, does call into question, at least

theoretically, the overall theological credibility of the Lutheran confessional position on the Real Presence of Christ "in, with, and under" the Eucharistic elements. Here certainly all of us have heard or heard of Lutheran pastors, who try to explain the Lutheran position viz Catholicism on the Eucharist saying that Lutherans don't believe that the Eucharist is *actually* Christ's Body and Blood like Catholics do! And all I can say here is that I guess Ulrich Zwingli won the debate with Luther at Marburg after all. Recall this anecdote from the great Southern US Catholic novelist Flannery O'Connor, from *The Habit of Being*:

"I was once, five or six years ago, taken by some friends to have dinner with Mary McCarthy and her husband, Mr. Broadwater. (She just wrote that book, "A Charmed Life.") She departed the Church at the age of 15 and is a Big Intellectual. We went at eight and at one, I hadn't opened my mouth once, there being nothing for me in such company to say. . . . Having me there was like having a dog present who had been trained to say a few words but overcome with inadequacy had forgotten them. Well, toward morning the conversation turned on the Eucharist, which I, being the Catholic, was obviously supposed to defend. Mrs. Broadwater said when she was a child and received the host, she thought of it as the Holy Ghost, He being the most portable person of the Trinity; now she thought of it as a symbol and implied that it was a pretty good one. I then said, in a very shaky voice, *Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it.*" That was all the defense I was capable of but I realize now that this is all I will ever be able to say about it, outside of a story, except that *it is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable.*"

"If it [the Eucharist] is just a symbol, then to hell with it." No, Lutheran theology of the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist was **not** an issue with Rome in the Reformation and is not today, in spite of the fact that almost everyone thinks it is, including almost all of the Roman

Catholic undergrads and even several grad students at Notre Dame. How it was phrased was but not what it was. To say that another way – the argument was not whether the Body and Blood of Christ are there in the bread & wine, under the form of bread & wine, and with the bread & wine. The issue is whether after consecration bread and wine are there anymore. So with Rome the argument is not about the presence of Christ but about the presence of bread and wine. But while I am willing to grant some kind of belief in Real Presence to the Anglicans, Reformed and United Methodists, isn't part of the question still the relationship of that Presence to the Bread and Wine? Is this bread the Body of Christ or not? Is this Wine Christ's Blood or not? I know this sounds very un-ecumenical of me but I am still much more willing to say with Luther, "I would rather drink blood with the pope than wine with Zwingli," and I am intrigued by the words of Carl Braaten that "where Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist is no longer affirmed, Christ is simply no longer present at all except as an 'Idea' or some kind of 'disembodied spirit.'"⁸ Indeed, *finitum capax infiniti* is still our Lutheran theological approach, to both Eucharist and the Incarnation of Christ. And, of course, Christology and Eucharistic Theology go together intimately.

To speak of a renewed articulation of the meaning of the Eucharist and our Lutheran confessional position about Christ's Real Presence therein, also means we cannot separate that theology from what is actually done liturgically. And here I would suggest that our focus *Ecclesia semper reformanda* does suggest several things needing reform today. That is, while there may be many things that fall under the classic Lutheran category of *adiaphora* in liturgy, there are several foundational issues that do not. What do we do in worship and how does what we do shape us as Christian believers? Is the Eucharist central to the worship life of Lutherans? If so, what does that mean for liturgical practice?

⁸ ????

In one of our mid-western cities there are two large churches across from each other separated by a busy road, a large Mega-Lutheran Church, let's call it Joy (or Let's Be Happy) Lutheran, and a more recently built Roman Catholic Church called St Clare of Assisi. Both are impressive structures though one of them could easily be an office building, while the other looks like it was flown in from a village in Umbria, Italy. Joy has a chapel in it for the small number of members who want a more traditional service at 8:00 on Sunday morning. But the real worship event takes place later, there is an evening service as well, in the "worship center," a large auditorium with stadium seating, including coffee holders (and coffee can be purchased in the book store/coffee shop in the lobby) and looking down on a large stage. Unlike some other Mega churches there is actually a large cross in the worship center (though not in the center), with a large water fall on one side of the stage (presumably for baptisms), and, while not exactly an altar in the center, a small table (resembling a food cart with wheels) does sit in the center, though of course it is easily movable. And, there are large screens upon which to project words to songs or for multi-media presentations. The worship, of course, is dominated by the praise band. There may be one or more scripture readings, though not necessarily from the Church's lectionary, and, of course, the pastors of this church are neither vested, other than at the 8:00, nor even in clerics. The sermon may well be a series focused on contemporary events or popular movies. Both *The Davinci Code* and the ever popular Notre Dame movie *Rudy*, complete with film clips have been homily series subjects. Across the busy road at St Clare of Assisi, one cannot even enter the nave without walking around the huge, suitable for immersion, cruciform baptismal font in the floor, next to which, of course the large Paschal Candle is set outside of Easter. Hanging over the central and beautiful free-standing altar is a large replica of the San Damiano Crucifix, from which, tradition says, St Francis heard the voice of Christ calling him to

rebuild his Church. Together with the prominent Ambo, on which the Lectionary sits, the sides of the nave in various niches contain beautifully painted images the Virgin Mary, Joseph, and various Franciscan saints (Francis, Clare, and Anthony, if my memory is correct). There is also, of course, a lovely Eucharistic Reservation chapel to one side, where daily Mass is celebrated. There is no mistaking at St Clare, what is primary: Word and Sacrament, rooted in baptism unmistakably as entrance into Christ and the Church and focused on the Altar with the crucified Christ. It is not so clear at Joy what is central. Now which one of these churches seems more Lutheran to you? I once used this illustration in a homily and said that if these were the only options open to me I would have to go to St Clare's as the more clearly Lutheran choice. But in my homily I made the mistake of saying where these two churches are and using their real names. And, of course, there was a visitor that day from that city visiting her elderly mother in South Bend, who knew exactly the congregations I was referring to. Luckily for me she was not a member of either of them and she at least said she agreed with me.

Two other worship experiences in different ELCA Lutheran settings that I refer to in the conclusion of my *The Church in Act*, raised the question of Lutheran liturgical identity for me in rather disturbing ways. The first experience was a festival Sunday worship at one of our ELCA schools in which both a choir and orchestra were employed to provide musical leadership for a gathering that included several alumni and current students. But apart from glorious music, though even here it was not clear what the relationship of the particular sacred music was to the liturgy being celebrated, the *only* reference to the Holy Trinity was the opening greeting, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." There was no Creed professed, nor a thanksgiving for or affirmation of baptism done. The so-called "Great Thanksgiving" consisted of the introductory dialogue (The Lord be with

you...Lift up your hearts...Let us give thanks), followed by some kind of make shift (spontaneous?) Words of Institution “prayer” directed to Jesus (called a “Eucharistic prayer” in the bulletin) and followed by the Lord’s Prayer. The Elements to be distributed at Holy Communion were not even on the altar during the “prayer” (only the presider’s host bowl and chalice were there) but on a table at some distance from the altar. There was no Proper Preface, no *Sanctus* (“Holy, holy, holy”), no *Agnus Dei* (“Lamb of God”), just as there had been no *Kyrie*, *Gloria in Excelsis*, or *Worthy is Christ* earlier in the Liturgy and, for that matter, no Old Testament reading, though the choir did sing an unrelated choral psalm at the place where that reading may have been expected, and, for that matter, the readings were not those assigned to that Sunday in the liturgical year but had been chosen for this particular event. And there was no final Trinitarian (or even Aaronic) blessing. In talking with several people afterwards, including retired Theology faculty at that institution, it was clear that many found the service to be a beautiful and inspiring one. I, however, wondered, and still do wonder, why a school of the ELCA with abundant musical and other talent could not provide a better model of Lutheran worship for such an event. At another large Lutheran church, where my second recent experience took place, the “Eucharistic” Liturgy followed *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* rather closely up to and including the Offertory Hymn, “Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful.” But the offertory prayer was not used and the pastor immediately began reciting the Words of Institution followed by the Lord’s Prayer leading directly into the distribution of Communion. In both of these occasions not only was there not a Great Thanksgiving, properly speaking, but “thanks” were not really ever given! Hence, no Preface, no *Sanctus*, no *Agnus Dei*.

I have no idea as to how normative my two experiences of Sunday Lutheran worship are throughout the ELCA, but I have enough experience, at least among Lutheran congregations in

the Midwestern United States, to conclude that what I witnessed was not atypical. And I begin to wonder if our Lutheran confessional statement from *The Augsburg Confession* XXIV holds true any longer, that is, “our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. Actually, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained.”⁹ Indeed, would anyone even think to accuse those two liturgical assemblies in my examples of retaining and celebrating the Mass of Western Christianity? I think not. At the very least, not that long ago, even if a full Eucharistic Prayer was not prayed regularly by all as part of the Great Thanksgiving, the Proper Preface, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* were regular parts of the Lutheran Mass, as were the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, and either the Apostles or Nicene Creeds. Even this, however, cannot obviously be counted on anymore and I wonder if our churches are no longer “*falsely* accused of abolishing the Mass,” since *abolishing* the Mass is precisely what we seem to have done, in spite of what our worship books and official statements say to the contrary!

Again, what we do or don’t do, say or do not say in our liturgies forms us as communities. Our liturgical words and our actions matter! Hence, a community which celebrates and receives Christ’s Body and Blood in the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, attends to the rubrical options and varieties already present in our liturgical book(s), faithfully proclaims the lectionary readings, and tenaciously keeps the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year week after week, year after year, will be a different sort of community than one which is continually experimenting with “worship alternatives” and searching for something “better” to meet the so-called “needs” of worshippers and potential seekers alike. And I dare say that the first type of community will, undoubtedly, be more “orthodox,” more “Lutheran,” in its doctrinal-theological outlook. Why? Because the issue is not about liturgical “style,” which is what some think we

⁹Ibid, 56.

liturgists are talking about. The liturgy is not, primarily, about expressing our prayer and praise to God or even our hearing the Word of God. Rather, as the very corporate expression of the self-identity and world-view of the worshipping community, the Body of Christ in this time and place, expressed concretely in its liturgical texts and liturgical actions, the purpose of liturgy is not to permeate our lives with ritual but to permeate them with Christ for the very building up of His Body, the Church, and for the salvation and life of the world.¹⁰ Perhaps we still do not get it and I sometimes think that LBW gave us an opportunity that we failed to embrace, embody, and grasp, but given the commonality in texts, rites, and rubrics in the worship books of Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics today, though now somewhat challenged by the unfortunate 2011 translation of the *Roman Missal*, Lutheran worship should look very much like post-Vatican II Roman Catholic worship is also supposed to look: i.e., where the Word of God is proclaimed clearly, audibly, intelligibly, and with dignity by carefully prepared readers (being able to read does not always mean being able to read publically); where ministers, presiding and otherwise, know their particular roles in the assembly and carry them out in a manner befitting the worship of the Trinitarian God; where bread that looks, smells, feels, and tastes like (and, of course, *is*) real bread is broken and shared and where wine, rich and good wine (Mogen David, still?), is shared in common; where the other sacraments or "sacramental rites" are seen as corporate and communal events with the rich and abundant use of the sacramental signs of water and oil and the healing and benedictory gestures of hand laying and touch; where the Liturgy of the Hours is the Church being itself in its constant, prayerful, eschatological, intercessory, and expectant vigil; where the Paschal Triduum, especially the Great Vigil of Easter, prepared for by a renewing, baptismal in orientation, forty-day Lent and an ensuing fifty-day period of Paschal

¹⁰See Robert Taft, "What Does Liturgy Do? Toward a Soteriology of Liturgical Celebration: Some Theses," *Worship* 66, 3 (1992): 194-211.

joy, are seen as the pulsating center and heart beat not only of the liturgical year but of life in Christ; and where the community itself, both in assembling to do *leitourgia* and in scattering for its missions of *martyria* and *diakonia* knows itself -- "fully, actively, and consciously" -- as that Body of Christ it receives and celebrates so that it may itself be broken for the life of the world. So much so was this the hope and vision of a renewed Lutheran worship that Eugene Brand could express his optimistic hope that the next "Lutheran" worship book would be a single volume produced together with Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Or, as United Methodist scholar James White liked to say, the greatest difference between liturgical practice at his wife's Roman Catholic parish and his United Methodist one was that his wife's church used real wine, while his church used real bread.

There is a great deal of work left to do. As you well know, for example, in spite of frequent attempts and some notable examples to the contrary, the Eucharist itself remains in far too many places but an "occasional service," either still monthly, bi-monthly, or, even in those places having at least one Eucharist each Sunday, only "after" others have been dismissed from the principal Sunday assembly. Further, in spite of a clear preference for the use of full sacramental signs in the celebration of Liturgy,¹¹ minimalistic use of water in baptism, mass produced communion wafers instead of real bread, as the great Godfrey Diekmann put it once, "it takes more faith to believe that wafers are bread than it does to believe they are the Body of Christ," and what I refer to as (often even pre-filled), individualized, "shot glasses" for the reception of the Eucharistic Wine, has continued in far too many places. But the concern of the Lutheran Reformers for communion under both Elements was also the sacramental significance of sharing the *Cup*, not merely the reception of Wine. And, further still, in spite of several Lutheran Eucharistic Prayers currently available for use (not all of them good I admit), a bare-

¹¹See *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 25 and 26, pp. 31-32; and 44A, 48.

bones *Verba* (Institution Narrative) alone often does constitute the normative pattern of Eucharistic "consecration" -- occasionally without even dialogue, Preface and Sanctus -- in still far too many places on "Communion" Sundays. Here *Ecclesia semper reformanda* certainly includes continued reform of Eucharistic liturgy and practice.

As noted in passing, closely related here is the importance of using and, more importantly, *praying* the full Eucharistic Prayer as part of the Great Thanksgiving as the central prayer of the Liturgy. The best advice I ever received about being a faithful pastor was given to me by a Lutheran pastor in Decorah, Iowa, where I was doing my seminary internship in 1976. He said to me: "Always study the Sunday New Testament readings in Greek, always say something nice about the deceased at their funeral, and always, always, pray the full Eucharistic Prayer." Although I may not have always studied the lectionary readings in Greek when I was in full-time parish ministry (though I often did and still do), I have always managed to say something nice about the deceased at their funerals (sometimes more easily than at others), and since my ordination in 1978, I have never presided at the Lord's Supper without using either the Strodach-Reed prayer provided in the 1958 *Service Book and Hymnal*, or one of the several provided in LBW and/or ELW, or others in other contexts, including those of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* when I have presided in Episcopal contexts, which I often do on a regular basis today. But why is this important? As I argue in my recent book, *Praying and Believing in Early Christianity*, long before there was an Apostles' or Nicene Creed, or an explicit "doctrine" of the Trinity...it was through a Prayer of Thanksgiving over the baptismal waters, through the candidate's three-fold profession of faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the context of Baptism itself, and through the Great *Eucharistia* over the bread and cup of the Lord's Supper, consisting of *praise* to God for the work of creation and redemption, *thanksgiving* for the life,

death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and *invocation* of the Holy Spirit, that the Church professed its faith in the Trinity by means of *doxology* and *praise*... What is done, sung, or said liturgically and what is held, thought, or confessed doctrinally are inseparable. How and what the Church *prays* shapes and *is*, in a real sense, how and what the Church *believes*. This is hardly *adiaphora*. What we say and do liturgically matters! We pray the Eucharistic Prayer, then, for the very simple reason that this central prayer of the Mass bears and professes the classic Trinitarian faith of the Church in the very context of the proclamation and/or consecration of Christ's Real Presence. Our Trinitarian faith is prayed, not only professed! In fact, I would be so bold as to say that the renewal and vision of Christian worship expressed in our worship books will never come to fruition until Lutheran clergy begin to see as part of their public pastoral role that they are called to be prayers of the Great *Eucharistia* and that this prayer is to shape their identity, spirituality, and pastoral ministry in the Church. Indeed, such Eucharistic Prayers should be memorized that they might shape even how pastors regularly pray! But here there is a problem with even the texts of some of the current Eucharistic prayers, especially those appearing in ELW. There are only three out of the eleven Eucharistic Prayers that I can in good conscience use: (1) a new version of the classic Strodach-Zeller prayer that also appeared in some LCMS resources in the past; (2) the sixth, a somewhat changed version of the first prayer in LBW, which Frank Senn had his hand in composing; and (3) the eleventh, a significantly changed version of the Eucharistic Prayer in the so-called *Apostolic Tradition*. The others I cannot use for a variety of reasons, not least because I am not always sure to whom they are addressed (often a nameless God) and I heard someone actually speak positively about the fact that these prayers in ELW have broken the mold of Eucharistic Prayers being addressed always to the Father. Not sure that's something I would be proud of doing. Of the three prayers I can in

good conscience use, I cannot use two of them without changing or adapting them. For example, why is it that EP IV in LBW, could translate “*offerimus tibi panem et calicem*,” as “we lift this bread and cup before you, giving you thanks...” but ELW EP XI has changed the whole direction of the prayer saying “we *take* this bread and cup, giving you thanks...” If we have to change this so drastically and refuse to use even an offering verb here, which is a Lutheran issue I grant, then maybe we should not be using such a classic early Christian Eucharistic prayer text at all. I use the LBW version of this prayer but occasionally I do say “we offer you this bread and cup giving you thanks;’ the Latin text neither says nor implies that we offer Christ’s body and blood but the bread and cup as embodying our thanksgiving. But the prayer I want to focus on is the first EP in ELW and the third in LBW. It is the text from LBW EP 3, with adaptations from elsewhere on the screen. **MAKE POWERPOINT SLIDE OF THIS**

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER III (LBW), EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER I (ELW)

You are indeed holy, almighty and merciful God; you are most holy, and great is the majesty of your glory. [*Liturgy of St. James and Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*]

You so loved the world that you gave your only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. [*John 3:16 and Liturgies of Twelve Apostles (Syriac) and St. John Chrysostom*]

[SBH – Who] **Having come into the world, he fulfilled for us your holy will and accomplished our salvation.** [*Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*] – ELW: “*We give you thanks for his coming into the world to fulfill for us your holy will and to accomplish all things for our salvation*”

[Institution Narrative: In the night in which he was betrayed....Do this for the remembrance of me]

Remembering, therefore, his salutary command, his life-giving Passion and death, his glorious resurrection and ascension, and his promise to come again, [Liturgy of

St. James as amplified by the Scottish Presbyterian Book of Common Order, 1940]

we give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, not as we ought, but as we are able;

[Apostolic Constitutions VIII; the heart of the ancient Antiochene anamnesis]

and we implore you mercifully to accept our praise and thanksgiving, and, with your Word and Holy Spirit, to bless us, your servants, and these your own gifts of bread and wine; [Book of Common Prayer, 1549]

that we and all who share in the body and blood of your Son may be filled with heavenly peace and joy, [Roman Canon missae]

and, receiving the forgiveness of sin, may be sanctified in soul and body, [Liturgy of St. James] - changed in ELW to read, “*may be formed to live as your holy people*”]

And have our portion with all your saints. [Liturgy of St. Basil] - changed in ELW to read, “*and be given our inheritance with all your saints.*”

All honor and glory are yours, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, now and forever. Amen.” [so-called Apostolic Tradition]

I suppose that “may be formed to live as your holy people and be given our inheritance with all your saints” is dynamically equivalent to “may be sanctified in soul and body and have our portion with all your saints.” But in such changes not only are the sources of this prayer, namely the great anaphoras of St James of Jerusalem and St Basil, less clear but one wonders whether the decision not to use “be sanctified in soul and body,” represents a kind of dumbing down of liturgical language at this point. Perhaps the point being made is that no one understands

“sanctified,” which would come as a great surprise to several Pentecostal Christians and even to the late Soul Singer Marvin Gaye, who in his hit song, “Let’s Get It On,” can say at one point, “I’ve been sanctified,” though, trust me, it is not the Eucharist he is talking about. Further, what was 19 syllables in LBW has become 24 in ELW and there is no question but that the LBW version, which by the way is the only version I will use, simply rolls off the tongue more easily. Now, of this prayer, which was the *only* full Eucharistic Prayer in the 1958 *Service Book and Hymnal*, an optional *third* prayer in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978), and now again holds first place among several options in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006), Roman Catholic liturgical scholar Louis Bouyer once wrote of the 1958 text:

It would be hard to be more ecumenical! But all of these elements, chosen with great discernment, have been molded into a composition that is as moderate as it is natural. In its brief simplicity this prayer has a concise fullness that we are not accustomed to seeing except in Christian antiquity. Here...its eschatological orientation gives it a very primitive sound.... [T]his liturgy must be judged Catholic and orthodox to the extent that the traditional formulas it uses, with hardly an echo of the polemics of the Reformation, are in fact taken in their full and primary sense by the Church that uses them.¹²

As Paul Hasvold said to me so many years ago, “always, always, pray the full Eucharistic Prayer.” And let me suggest that at the very least you make this classic Lutheran prayer your own, memorizing and interiorizing it, according to the LBW translation.

Closely related to whether or not the Eucharist is central in the life of Lutheranism, or whether we are any longer “*falsely* accused of abandoning the Mass,” is the question of the Lectionary employed in worship. There is, of course, no standard or common Lectionary used in Lutheranism world wide, but the “official” lectionaries used by, at least, ELCA and Missouri Synod Lutherans in the United States, either the one provided in LBW, LW, LSB, or more regularly now since ELW, the *Revised Common Lectionary* (RCL), are derived and adapted from

¹² Louis Bouyer, *Eucharist: The Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 441-2. See also Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 627-8.

the Roman Catholic *Ordo Lectionum Missae* (OLM) of 1969, and are shared with much of English-speaking Protestantism in the United States and elsewhere. Like the Roman Catholic OLM itself, the hermeneutical principle governing both the LBW lectionary and RCL, as adapted by Lutherans and Episcopalians, is what Fritz West has called a “Catholic liturgical paradigm,” that is, a “Eucharistic hermeneutic,” which assumes that the Eucharist is regularly celebrated as the culmination of the Liturgy of the Word, including the homily. Others using this lectionary or a version thereof, following what West calls a “Protestant Hermeneutic,” may or may not chose a single reading from the list for a given Sunday as a sermon text. Gordon Lathrop underscored the Catholic or eucharistic hermeneutical approach over thirty years ago, writing:

We read a text from the gospel, not in order to recapture the time when independent tradition units circulated in the Christian communities, but in order to set the pericope we read next to the passion and resurrection of Christ held forth now in the Supper. Hence reading the individual pericopes and then celebrating the Supper presents us with a skein of images reinterpreting images which is the very pattern of the gospel books themselves. The Sunday texts are not then understood aright unless they are understood as leading to that Supper. The heirarchy of readings in the Sunday eucharist may then be thought of as a primary example of a skein of images reborn.¹³

In light of recent lectionary proposals for Lutheran use, the challenge, again, is whether Lutherans are decidedly Eucharistic in their Sunday worship or not. If not, then the more recent development of lectionary cycles designed to teach the biblical narrative, e.g., the *Narrative Lectionary*, which is but one way to provide adult education and/or Bible Study at worship may well be preferred to the RCL or other adaptations. But if we are Eucharistic in our approach to reading and preaching the Scriptures at Sunday worship then we cannot take lightly – nor so easily abandon - the ecumenical gift that the Roman Catholic Church has given to us all in the three-year lectionary. Presbyterian liturgist, the late Horace Allen said it this way: The RCL

¹³Gordon Lathrop, "A Rebirth of Images: On the use of the Bible in Liturgy", *Worship* 58, 4, (1984), 296.

“marks the first time since the Reformation that Catholics and Protestants find themselves reading the scriptures together Sunday by Sunday.... Who would have thought that 450 years after the Reformation, Catholics would be teaching Protestants how to read scripture in worship?”¹⁴

Fourth, and finally, although I have spoken strongly against the unbaptized being welcomed to Communion participation, I want to affirm, as part of our ongoing reform, just as strongly the communion of *all* the baptized. What makes us Christian? And if it is nothing other than the inseparable unity of water and the Holy Spirit that makes Christians, that incorporates people into the Body of Christ, the Church, then it should be clear that the very means by which the Church sacramentally and liturgically expresses its self-identity *as* Church, that is, the Eucharist, must be for *all* who are initiated into the Christian community, which, at heart, is nothing other than the continuation of the table companionship of Jesus Himself. The recovery of such a foundational understanding of initiation as entry to the eucharistic companionship of the Church then calls us rightly to an advocacy for and practice of the communion participation of all the baptized, along the lines of the pristine tradition of the Orthodox East from as far back as we can go and along the lines of the tradition of Rome and the West for at least the first Christian millenium. Remember, as Aidan Kavanagh says: "although no person has a right to baptism, the baptized *do* possess rights to confirmation and the Eucharist."¹⁵ Or, in the words of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, "Holy communion is the birthright of the baptized."¹⁶ Or, still, to say that in yet another way:

¹⁴Horace Allen, as quoted by John Allen, Jr., "Liturgist Says Ecumenical Dialogue is 'Dead,'" *National Catholic Reporter* (May 24, 2002), <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-87210384.html>

¹⁵A Kavanagh, "Initiation: Baptism and Confirmation," in M. Taylor (ed.), *The Sacraments: Readings in Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (New York: Alba House, 1981), p. 93.

¹⁶*Lutheran Book of Worship*, Minister's Edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), p. 31

If the Eucharist is the weekly constitutive act of the church, and if participation in that Eucharist signifies both our membership in the body and as such our allegiance to Christ himself, what are we doing when we baptize infants and young children and then refuse to admit them to the very act that both signifies and effects that membership?¹⁷

Why among us is the first post-baptismal act for infants often that of an excommunication from the very table companionship into which they were just initiated? Nothing could be more contrary to the spirit of the Church's classic tradition. For, as Robert Taft has noted:

modern historical research and theological reflection have shown that the universal primitive tradition of both East and West viewed the liturgical completion of Christian Initiation as one integral rite comprising three moments of baptism, chrismation, and eucharist, and without all three the process is incomplete.¹⁸

The 1992 Roman Catholic Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Comissions developed a position statement clearly indicating this kind of recovery of the intimate connection between the full initiation of young children and Eucharistic participation, and, so rightly advocating for the communion of baptized and confirmed infants. In so doing, the members of the FDLC have joined a large ecumenical company of contemporary Christians, not only those from the Eastern traditions but Episcopalians and Lutherans throughout the world. In 1991, for example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) adopted its own *Statement on Sacramental Practices*, which reads in part:

In Baptism we are incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church. In Holy Communion the Church is nourished and strengthened. Therefore we speak of and practise Communion of the baptized....

¹⁷D. Holeyton, *Infant Communion - Then and Now*, Grove Liturgical Study, 27 (Bramcote/Nottingham: Grove Books, Ltd., 1981), p. 23.

¹⁸Robert Taft, "On the Question of Infant Communion in the Byzantine Catholic Churches of the U.S.A.," in *Diakonia* 17 (1982), as cited by Ruth A. Meyers, "Infant Communion: Reflections on the Case from Tradition," in idem. (ed.), *Children at the Table: The Communion of All the Baptized in Anglicanism Today* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation), p. 149.

...The Lord's supper is God's meal for the baptized. Admission to the Supper is by Christ's invitation, offered through the church to the baptized.¹⁹

Similarly, following the lead of its Lutheran neighbors to the north, a task force appointed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) produced and accepted in 1997 *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*. In this document the following statement appears:

Infants and children may be communed for the *first time* during the service in which they are baptized.... When infants and young children are communed, the parents and sponsors receive instruction and the children are taught throughout their development.²⁰

And, it is important to note that in the Episcopal Church in the USA, at least within a number of its dioceses, the practice of communing *all* the baptized from the moment of their baptism on is reaching the status of a norm.²¹

it must be emphasized here that these recent ecumenical calls for restoring both communion and "confirmation" to baptism at whatever age are not coming about because of a sacramental romanticism, or from any attempt at a liturgical repristination of a supposed, normative "Golden Age" of the Church of the first few centuries. Far from it. Rather, such a move is coming about, primarily, because of a new recovery of the fullness of the theology of baptism itself, because of the rootedness of all Christian initiation and life in the very graciousness of God, the God who through both Word and Sacrament always acts first, always acts in love prior to our action, leading us by the Holy Spirit to the response of faith, hope, and love within the community of grace. The great liturgical scholar Gerard Austin states in reference to restoring Eucharist to baptism:

¹⁹Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Statement on Sacramental Practices* (1991), 5.8, 6.9.

²⁰*The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997), 42. For a brief survey of changes in contemporary Lutheran practice elsewhere see my article, "The Shape of Christian Initiation in the Lutheran Churches: Liturgical Texts and Future Directions," *Studia Liturgica* 27, 1 (1997): 33-60.

²¹On this see the collection of essays edited by Ruth Meyers (ed.), *op. cit.*

Such a practice [i.e., the uniting of all three sacraments whenever Baptism takes place] would underscore the reality that God takes the initiative, that baptism-confirmation-eucharist form an essential unity, and that admission to eucharist is built on incorporation into Christ and not upon something extrinsic such as knowledge or age....Such an approach would not destroy programs of religious catechesis; rather it would base such programs on personal development and needs and would be ongoing, rather than coming to a halt after the reception of confirmation.²²

Closely parallel to this central theological orientation of the inseparable unity of Baptism and Eucharist are the insights of a number of contemporary educators and social scientists, who assert that it is precisely within what some have called the “first stage of faith,” that is, ages 2-6, where children possess the greatest and long lasting responsiveness to images, rituals, and symbols.²³ Given this, it should become increasingly clear as well that the denial of the Eucharist to the youngest of baptized children is nothing other than the denial of the *primary* way in which they actually *can* participate in the symbolic, ritual, and image-laden liturgical self-expression of the faith community. If we wait until age 7 or later to introduce them to Eucharistic participation, that is, until a time in which they can be catechized, prepared, and begin to “understand” the implications of the Eucharist cognitively and rationally, we have waited too long, I fear. Eucharistic faith is not equal to cognitive understanding. Faith is not only rational but pre-cognitive, pre-rational as well. In the Pauline New Testament sense, faith is not intellectual acceptance of or assent to propositional revelation, but trust. And such trust develops, it seems, only in relationship, only in an environment, in a community of trust such as the family or the church. James Fowler writes that:

We are endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith. How these capacities are activated and grow depends to a large extent on how we are welcomed into the world and what kinds of environments we grow in. Faith is interactive and

²²Austin, op. cit., p. 145.

²³Cf. the work of J. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco 1981), and J. H. Westerhoff, III, *Building God's People in a Materialistic Society* (New York 1983), especially pp. 59-78.

social; it requires community, language, ritual, and nurture. Faith is also shaped by initiatives from beyond us and other people, initiatives of spirit and grace. How these latter initiatives are recognized and imaged, or unperceived and ignored, powerfully affects the shape of faith in our lives.²⁴

If children of any age can be baptized, and if confirmation is properly restored as nothing other than the concluding ritualization and sacramentalizing Spirit-gift and seal of baptism, then there is absolutely no reason, theological or otherwise, why these children should not be communed as well. As a Greek Orthodox woman once explained to a youth group I brought to her parish to experience Byzantine Liturgy: "We feed our small children regular food without expecting them to know yet about vitamins and nutrition. So also we Orthodox feed them the spiritual food of the Eucharist without expecting them to know yet the meaning of this Gift. Both foods are necessary for life." But perhaps it was Mark Searle, who best summed up the rationale for restoring both confirmation and communion to the baptism of young children, saying:

At a time when the Church is so intent on rescuing the humane values of Christianity and is concerned to do greater justice to the role of the family...and a time when the role of the nonrational and prerational dimensions of the life of faith is being recovered, perhaps infant initiation ought to be seen less as a problem to be grappled with than as an opportunity to be grasped. Far from barring children from the font, the chrism, and the altar, the Church should welcome their participation in these sacraments as a reminder both of the catholicity of the Church and of the fact that, no matter how informed or committed we might be as adults, when we take part in the sacramental liturgies of the Church we are taking part in more than we know.²⁵

CONCLUSION

²⁴J. Fowler, op. cit., p. xiii, as cited by Meyers, op. cit., p. 160.

²⁵M. Searle, "Infant Baptism Reconsidered," in Johnson (ed.), op. cit., pp. 408-409. See also the recent Notre Dame doctoral dissertation of Clare Vernoica Johnson, *Ex Ore Infantium: The Pre-Rational Child as Subject of Sacramental Action – Theological, Liturgical and Canonical Implications* (Notre Dame, 2004). Herein Johnson develops a "theology of childhood," based on a Rahnerian theological anthropology in support of full Christian initiation of infants. Johnson's compelling study needs to be published and to enjoy a wide readership.

Again, in the words of Aidan Kavanagh, "in baptism the Eucharist begins, and in the Eucharist baptism is sustained. From this premier sacramental union flows all the church's life."²⁶ There. That again is what this is all about. So, let Kavanagh's short phrase serve as an apt summary of both of my presentations to you, both with regard to the very centrality of baptism in our theology and with regard to the centrality of the Eucharist in the ongoing life of the Church. And especially in relationship to the Eucharist I have tried here to articulate several areas that our focus "*Ecclesia semper reformanda*" suggest to me as needing further attention today, namely: (1) our confessional theology of the Real Presence, that that in the Lord's supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and *substantially* present and are truly offered with those things that are seen," and further "that in the sacrament..., Jesus Christ, true God and true man, *is present wholly and entirely, in his body and blood*, under the signs of bread and wine,"²⁷ with all the implications for communion participation that this implies; (2) that this theology *cannot* be separated from what we actually do, say, and pray in our liturgical assemblies, including, I have argued, the full Eucharistic Prayer as it actually appears in our worship books; (3) attention to the "Eucharistic hermeneutic" of the three-year lectionary; and (4) renewed attention to the communion of all the baptized. I offer these simply as a way forward, as a way of setting the agenda for the ongoing reform of our liturgical life as Lutherans today, and perhaps as a way of recapturing our confessional statement that our churches have not abolished the Mass. "Actually, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained."²⁸ Thank you for your attention these past two days.

²⁶Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 122.

²⁷ *The Eucharist as Sacrifice*, in Paul Empie and T. Austin Murphy (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, III* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), 192.

²⁸*Ibid*, 56.