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## THE SYMBOLISM OF THE LUTHERAN CULTUS.\*

Divine worship in the Christian Church is not an *adiaphoron*. The Lord expressly commands that His Word be heard, John 8, 47. He has only severe censure for those who forsake the Christian assemblies, Heb. 10, 25. He expressly enjoins public prayer, 1 Tim. 2, 1. 2. 8. He graciously promises His divine presence at such assemblies, Matt. 18, 20. He records with approval the public services of the early Christians, Acts 2, 42—47.

But though He has prescribed the *general* content of public worship, though He is present in the sacramental acts of divine service, declaring and appropriating to the believers the means of grace, and though He graciously receives the sacrificial acts of the assembled congregation, in confession and prayer and offerings, He has not commanded a definite form or order of divine service. It is a matter of Christian liberty whether a congregation wishes one or many prayers, one or several

\* In addition to the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, the following books were consulted: Alt, H., *Christlicher Kultus*. Berlin, 1851. Cooper, F. E.; Keever, E. F.; Seegers, J. C.; Stump, J., *An Explanation of the Common Service*. Philadelphia, 1912. Daniel, H., *Codex liturgicus ecclesiae universae*. Lipsiae, 1847—1853. Fuerbringer, L., *Leitfaden fuer Vorlesungen, Liturgik*. St. Louis, 1915. Gueranger, L. P., *The Liturgical Year*. Vol. I. Worcester-London, 1895. Horn, E. T., *Outlines of Liturgics*. Second Edition. Philadelphia, 1912. Kliefoth, Th., *Liturgische Abhandlungen I*. Schwerin und Rostock, 1854. Kliefoth, Th., *Die urspruengliche Gottesdienstordnung*. Bd. 5. Schwerin, 1861. Lochner, F., *Der Hauptgottesdienst der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. St. Louis, 1895. Synodalbericht, Nebraska, 1898, 1903. THEOL. QUART., I, VII.

hymns, one or two sermons or homilies, whether the chief assembly be held in the morning or in the evening, whether the service be held on Sunday or on a ferial day.

To argue from these facts, however, that it is a matter of complete indifference as to how the form of Christian worship is constituted would be bringing liberty dangerously near to license. The Lord says: "Let all things be done decently and in order," 1 Cor. 14, 40; and again: "Let all things be done unto edifying," v. 26. It cannot really be a matter of indifference to a Christian congregation when the order of service used in her midst shows so much similarity to a heterodox order as to confuse visitors. One may hardly argue that such *adiaphora* do not matter one way or the other, when it has happened that a weak brother has been offended. And a Lutheran congregation cannot justly divorce herself, not only not from the doctrinal, but also not from the historical side of its Church. It is a matter of expediency, as well as of charity and edification, that every Lutheran pastor and every Lutheran congregation have outward significant symbols of the inner union, of the one mind and the one spirit.

In addition to these facts, there is the further consideration that the outward acts of the Church, commonly known by the appellation "the liturgy," have a very definite significance, which, in many cases, renders the acts of public service true acts of confession of faith. And the symbolism of many of the Lutheran sacred acts, if correctly performed, is such that the beauty of these treasures of our Church may be brought to the joyful attention of our congregations.

This is true especially of the morning worship in the Lutheran Church, commonly known as The Service or The Communion. For this is not, as some people have supposed, a haphazard combination or a fortuitous conglomeration of heterogeneous material, but an artistic unit with definite and logical parts, a "spirituo-psychological, well-ordered, and articulated whole," as Lochner says (*Der Hauptgottesdienst*, 41). The order of service is a beautiful work of art, presenting

a gradual climax of such wonderful dignity and impressiveness that the mere presence in such a service should result in the edification of the faithful.

The service opens most appropriately with the Confession of sins. There is no better explanation of this preparatory step than that given by Augustine *In enarratione ad Psalm. CXIX*, when he writes: "Intrate in portas eius in confessione. In portis initium est; a confessione incipite. Unde in alio psalmo dicitur: Incipite Domino in confessione. Et quia? Quum iam intraverimus non confitebimur? Semper confitere; semper habes quod confitearis." (Daniel, *Codex liturgicus*, 1, 23.) Having made his confession and having been given the first assurance of the forgiveness of God, the believer enters into the Lord's presence.

He is now greeted by, and, in most cases, takes part in, the Introit of the day. It makes him acquainted with the special character and idea of the day, and he answers with the *Gloria Patri*, the confession of the coeternal Godhead of our Lord and the Holy Ghost with the Father.

Standing now within the portals of the temple, the congregation lifts up its voice in the *Kyrie*. This has been explained as follows: "The congregation, realizing its infirmity from indwelling sin, calls upon God for that grace which has been announced and offered in the Introit." (Explanation of the Common Service, 27. 28.) Since, however, such a confession at this point would interrupt the sequence of thought in the service, it is preferable to say with Horn (*Liturgics*, 61) that "the *Kyrie* is not specifically a confession of sin, but a cry of need," and with Lochner (l. c., 111), that the *Kyrie* is the common, humble confession of the entire misery and woe of the human race, on account of which God's only-begotten Son became man. For this wonderful deed Christ and the entire Godhead is then greeted and proclaimed in the *Gloria in excelsis*, the angels' hymn of glory, sung for the first time at Bethlehem and in use in the Church since the time of Hilarius Pictaviensis.

The words of humble entreaty and petition having now been spoken, and the sinner having been greeted with the assurance that his sins are fully and completely forgiven in and through Christ, to whom he has given joyful homage and adoration, he now joins with the entire congregation in the Collect. It will be well to quote Calvoer here, who writes of this prayer: "Praemittere solet sacerdos collectis: Oremus! Excitatur hoc ipso fidelis populus ad comprecandum devote, neque hoc solum, sed ut populus quoque sciat, quae sint sua et quae sint sacerdotis solius partes, ut quando simul orare, quando vero sacerdotis functionibus in sacro silentio attendere debeat. Legit enim minister ecclesiae, concionatur, consecrat eucharistiam, distribuit eam accedente verbo ad elementum, dimittit ecclesiam cum benedictione, in quibus coetus collectus non tam se habet active quam passive, non simul haec talia cum ministro peragens, sed recipiens haec sacra potius ab eodem, ipsa sacerdotalia mera relinquens. At in collectis, quum sint totius collectae aut coetus preces, jungit suam operam populus; quae cum omnia rite ac ordine peraguntur, acclamat sacerdos populo: Oremus!" (In Kliefoth, *Die urspruengliche Gottesdienstordnung*, 5, 29.) It is therefore entirely correct for an old Agenda to explain: "Collecta dicitur oratio, in qua sacerdos totius populi vel ecclesiae necessitates et pericula, seu vota et desideria, quasi collecta, Deo repraesentat; unde dicit: Oremus, quasi adstantes invitet ad hanc orationem adjunctis votis animisque faciendam." The Collect also serves to concentrate the thought of the Epistle and Gospel.

For now the Lord comes to the congregation in His Word. In the Epistle, which contains primarily doctrine and admonition, His apostles address the faithful, and in the Gospel the great signs and miracles of our Lord are proclaimed, or He speaks to us in His own words. Very properly, therefore, the congregation stands before Him in meek and humble devotion, responding to the Epistle with the Hallelujah or a hymn embodying the great Gospel-news of the day, and to the Gospel with the recital of the Creed in chorus.

Having thus publicly stated their acceptance of the truth of God's Word, the faithful are prepared for the next great part of the service, the Sermon, with its application of the doctrines contained in the lessons *de tempore* to their hearts and minds. It is the first part of the great climax of the service, the recital of the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of fallen mankind or the earnest admonition of the faithful to lead lives commensurate with the exalted state of the elect of Christ. The congregation answers with the Offertory or Offering, accepting the doctrines that have been proclaimed, and vowing faithfulness to the Lord with all their heart and soul.

It is a mistake to assume, with Kliefoth, that The Service is properly divided into the sacramental act of the Word and that of the Communion. The old Lutheran liturgists very properly called the whole service The Communion, and though the celebration of the Lord's Supper is, in a way, the culmination of the service, since only the actual adult members of the church are permitted to partake of the heavenly meal, yet the means of grace are on the same level. The Eucharist is the second part of the great climax. The audible Word is supplemented by the visible Word. The faithful having received the assurance of the grace of God in the sermon, they now become partakers of that meal in which assurance is made doubly sure, being supplemented by the body and blood of the Savior, sacramentally received.

This miracle requires adequate preparation, and so, after the conclusion of the Church Prayer, which is made from the altar as the place of prayer, the faithful lift up their hearts in a prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharistic Prayer, for God's unspeakable mercies. The prayer is followed by one of the most impressive hymns of praise, the Holy, Holy, Holy. The Consecration having been introduced with the Lord's Prayer and consummated with the Words of the Institution, the administration of the Holy Supper takes place, while the congregation devoutly sings the *Agnus Dei*.

And now the believer, having received the final assurance

of pardon, joins with the congregation in the joyful hymn of Simeon: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." He prays with a thankful heart for strength to live as it becometh a disciple of Christ, and, having received the blessing of the Lord, goes back to his home rejoicing in the fruits of his salvation.

Just as the Service, however, is thus a beautiful and harmonious unit, with a symbolism whose full significance is unknown to, or not appreciated by, the majority of the church-goers, because they have never been made acquainted with it, so also other acts of worship performed in the church have a meaning, which should be brought out by the ministrant. Properly interpreted and correctly understood, they become a source of pleasure to the congregation present, instead of wearying by the monotony of frequent repetition.

When Luther wrote his "Taufbuechlein verdeutscht," in the year 1523, he very properly retained the form in general use in the church, since the ceremonies prescribed in the various agendas were not in themselves wrong. The outward ceremonies, including the exorcism, the administration of salt, the Ephphatha-ceremony, and others, have since been omitted, but the text has been retained almost in its entirety. Thus also the symbolism of the form may well be preserved. Since ancient times the ceremony of baptism was divided into two parts. The renunciation and the profession of faith took place in the vestibule, "ad januas ecclesiae." Most of the English parish churches had north and south porches, which were used for this part of the ceremony. When the words had been spoken, "The Lord preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even forevermore," the celebrant, preceding the sponsors with the child, came into the church, where the rite of baptism was administered at the font, which stood near the entrance.

We still have the division of the act of baptism into two parts, and might well indicate the symbolism of the rite. The pastor may meet the sponsors with the child at the foot of the

chancel-steps, where the first part of the sacred act takes place. When the blessing of entrance has been spoken, the pastor should lead the sponsors with the child to the font, where the Sacrament is administered. Thus the symbolism is preserved. The child, having been born under the curse of inherited sin, and therefore subject to eternal death and damnation, is brought to the place where the mercy of God is dispensed in the means of grace. It is welcomed at the entrance of the chancel, and then taken into the place where the Lord of mercy gives the blessings of the Gospel through baptism, thus signifying its admission into the communion of the congregation.

The form of the marriage ceremony is similarly indicative of the doctrinal position of the Lutheran Church. According to Luther's "Traubuechlein fuer die einfaeltigen Pfarrherren" of 1534, the marriage ceremony was divided into two parts. The rite proper, the giving into wedlock, took place in the vestibule, "vor der Kirchen." Then the procession moved to the altar, where the reading of the lessons and the benediction were rendered. The symbolism of this original form, if applied to-day, is immediately apparent. Marriage is a thing of this world and is primarily under the jurisdiction of the State, "ein weltlich, irdisch Ding," as Luther so often points out. This fact is brought out by the rubric, according to which the rite of joining in wedlock was performed in the vestibule, in the porch, or before the doors. The solemnization and blessing of the marriage is, however, a matter of the church, and therefore takes place at the altar.

There is another circumstance to which attention should be called. According to the understanding of Scriptures, a valid betrothal is tantamount to a marriage *in foro ecclesiae*. It is far better, therefore, and liturgically the one correct thing, to have the bride and groom come to the altar together, to emphasize this fact. The form according to which the groom awaits the bride-to-be at the altar cannot be defended in a Lutheran church.

The original symbolism of the sacred act may also be retained, even in our days. If there be an address by the pastor,

he should meet the young people at the lowest step of the chancel and perform the joining in wedlock there. After that he should proceed to the altar, read the lessons, and pronounce the blessing over the bride and groom at the step of the altar. In case there be no address, the lessons ought to precede the act of marriage, which takes place at the entrance to the sanctuary, while the benediction is pronounced in the chancel, at the step of the altar.

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