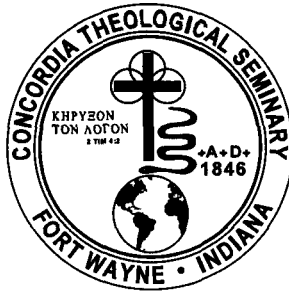


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Adiaphora: Marriage and Funeral Liturgies

Bryan D. Spinks

Introduction

In his lectures on the theology of John Calvin, Karl Barth noted that at the beginning of December 1537 the Bern Council turned its attention towards a number of differences in practice between the Churches of Bern and Geneva, which Bern regarded as disruptive and in need of resolving. There were four main issues. The first three were Bern's retention of certain feasts, fonts, and communion wafers. The fourth was that at Church weddings Bern allowed brides to wear hair adornment, but at Geneva the practice was forbidden on the basis of 1 Peter 3:3, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting hair, and of wearing of gold, and of putting on of apparel, but let it be the hidden man of the heart." Barth observed that while the bridal question was *tout egal* (a totally indifferent matter) for pastors Jacques Bernard and Henry de la Mare, for Farel and Calvin this was a question of the authority of Scripture.¹ He went on to note that in 1537 Bern was very much guided by one Peter Kunz, "a decided Lutheran," for whom such matters would be adiaphora.² Indeed, one can hardly imagine Luther wasting much time over hairstyles at a wedding. Compare the freedom expressed in the introduction to his *Traubuchlein* (1529): "Many lands, many customs, says the proverb. Since marriage and the married estate are worldly matters, it behooves us pastors or ministers of the Church not to attempt to order or govern anything connected with it, but to permit every city and land to continue its own use and custom in this connection."³

¹Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 346.

²Barth, *Theology of Calvin*, 347.

³"The Order of Marriage for Common Pastors, 1529," *Luther's Works*, volume 53, Liturgy and Hymns (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 111. References to volumes in this series will hereafter be abbreviated *LW*.

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On the matter of hairstyles, the classification of this as adiaphora has won the day, and brides at Geneva are as adorned as any elsewhere. Yet Luther's apparent latitude has its dangers. At what point does custom give way to convention and innovation, and at what point may these become indecent and without taste? Novelty in attire, geographical place, or symbol can distract or obscure what the Christian liturgy attempts to profess. Near see-through wedding dresses, a bikini at a beach setting, an outrageous hairstyle, or secular music may make Calvin's objection not quite such a mere trifle after all. And what of funerals? Apart from cutting out what he regarded as superstitious, Luther made few positive suggestions for funerals. What would he have made of wreaths in the shape of whisky bottles and packets of cigarettes, which have adorned some coffins in England? To borrow the words of Wayne E. Schmidt, services for marriage and funeral liturgies should neither be cheap nor gaudy. They are not secular but churchly rites. They should, therefore, be services of worship, conducted with reverence and dignity, lest inappropriate outward ceremony contradict the spiritual message that the Church seeks to proclaim.⁴

What, however, is the real core of a Christian marriage and funeral liturgy? If the core can be identified, then the rest can be classed as adiaphora. But when does adiaphora cross the line and become an offense or superstitious? While not claiming to be exhaustive, these issues are ones that this paper begins to explore.

On the substance of marriage and funeral rites, Scripture remains singularly unhelpful. The Song of Songs celebrates human love as God given. Lack of decent burial is regarded as an indignity in the Old Testament. It assumes custom, however, and neither describes nor prescribes it. That is true also for the New Testament. Jesus attended a wedding, and much to the horror of prohibitionists, multiplied the volume of wine

⁴Wayne E. Schmidt, "The Lutheran Wedding Service," *Concordia Journal* 6 (1980): 55.

available to celebrate the nuptials, but gave no advice on ceremonies. And given that every funeral he attended he ruined—including his own—he is every funeral director's nightmare. Yet the New Testament clearly sees marriage as a gift of God, which reflects in certain ways the covenant between God and his people. Further, 1 Corinthians 15, which may have been provoked by a clash over funeral etiquette, reminds us that in the face of death, the Church has a powerful message of good news and defiance to proclaim. Both have eschatological significance. Neither Jesus nor the Church invented marriages and funerals, but because of Jesus, the Church does have something significant to contribute to both, in respect of its own members, and others willing to hear.

Both marriage and funeral rites fall into what Arnold Van Gennep called "rites of passage." In these human rites, Van Gennep identified three stages or phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation. In marriage rites these correspond to betrothal—the separation of the couple as a couple and future husband and wife; the time of the betrothal, when the parties are no longer free for other attachments, but do not yet enjoy the obligations and privileges of marriage; and finally the marriage rite by which the pair of individuals is established in the community as a couple. In funerals there is a dual passage—of the deceased and the bereaved. Impending death was marked by preparation and farewell, and dressing the body for its last journey; the liminality was between death and disposal of the body; and finally, the burial or disposal of the body—that is, incorporation into the land of the departed. But the mourners too were changed by the death, and underwent a period of mourning and adjustment, which was often extended by rites and ceremonies for a period after burial of the body.

It is around these stages of passage that the Christian insights and interpretation are set. When Luther quoted the proverb, "Many lands, many customs," it was applicable to both marriages and funerals. But the questions remain: what constitutes the core of these rites, and what is adiaphora in these rites? And at what point do the customs cease to be adiaphora, and become instead a direct contradiction to the Gospel?

It would be rash to claim that one lecture could cover all that can and needs to be said on this. Rather, this paper begins by looking at what Luther advised in the matter of the two liturgies, illustrating his latitude by reference also to the Swedish Lutheran rites of Olavus Petri. Second, it reviews what modern research has taught us about the origin and development of these two rites in early epochs. It considers these rites in two recent Lutheran liturgies. Finally it briefly outlines what this author considers to be the core elements of these rites, and what may and may not count as useful or unhelpful *adiaphora*.

Luther and Olavus Petri on Marriage and Funeral Rites

Luther's reforms of the marriage rite were set forth in 1529. He was well aware of the different customs found in different parts of Germany. Noteworthy also is the brevity of provisions for the marriage rite found in German Manuals and Agendas, of which the Magdeburg rite is a prime example. In other words, Luther was not accustomed to lengthy provisions as found, for example, in the Spanish or English medieval rites.⁵ In his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), Luther had already disqualified marriage from being classed as a sacrament, and he was also critical of the regulations for marriage found in canon law.⁶ Essentially, Luther believed that marriage was a covenant of fidelity based upon free consent. He defended the ancient custom of betrothal of vows in the future tense that canon lawyers had tried unsuccessfully to outlaw. But Luther also rightly discerned that the espousals and customs of marriage were essentially secular and private in origin, and certainly not the core of the Christian marriage rite. In the *Traubuchlein*, the marriage contract, which fulfills the requirements of civil and canon law, took place at the entrance of the church building, as was the custom. Only then did the bride and groom enter the church. Luther made no provision for

⁵Bryan D. Spinks, "Luther's Other Major Liturgical Reforms: 3. The *Traubuchlein*," *Liturgical Review* 10 (1980): 33-38; K. W. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing* (London: Alcuin Club/SPCK, 1982).

⁶*LW*, 36:11-126.

a traditional nuptial blessing—but neither did the Magdeburg Agenda. Instead there is a blessing by Word and Prayer. A reading from Genesis 2 is followed by an exhortation, and Luther frequently preached at this point. Notice, however, Luther's rubric: the pastor "shall read God's Word over the bridegroom and bride"; blessed indeed, by the Word of God himself. And Luther concludes with his version of a nuptial blessing, with hands spread over the couple. Strodach thus commented: "This Office is wholly evangelical; it is built of Scriptures and prayer . . . the Benediction of the Word and Prayer which Luther in another writing says is the only right benediction"⁷

When we turn to Luther and funerals, we lack a proper funeral text. Instead we have Luther's recommendations in summary form, scattered in his writings—in his Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony (1528), and in his Preface to the Burial Hymns (1542).⁸ According to H. Richard Rutherford, "Luther, consistent with his rejection of adiaphora that he believed violated the absolute free gift of divine grace, removed funeral rites from the liturgical repertoire, while encouraging appropriate pastoral care of the bereaved and proper decorum (integrity) at burials as a sign of Christian hope."⁹

In fact, Luther had a little more to say than Rutherford suggests. Luther urged that the corpse be fittingly treated; a chaplain and sexton should accompany it; the people should be urged from the pulpit to follow and at the burial to sing the German hymn *Mitten wir in leben sind*.¹⁰ In his Preface to the Burial Hymns, Luther noted that St. Paul exhorts us not to sorrow, but to comfort and have hope. A funeral was an

⁷Paul Z. Strodach, *Works of Martin Luther*, six volumes (Philadelphia 1915-43), 6:223.

⁸*LW*40:263-320; *LW*53:325-331.

⁹H. Richard Rutherford, "Luther's 'Honest Funeral' Today: An Ecumenical Comparison," *Dialog* 32 (1993): 178-184.

¹⁰*LW*53:274-276.

opportunity to confess the resurrection, and therefore a time for singing. He wrote:

Accordingly, we have removed from our churches and completely abolished the popish abominations, such as vigils, masses for the dead, processions, purgatory, and all other hocus-pocus on behalf of the dead. And we do not want our churches to be houses of wailing and places of mourning any longer, but *koemeteria* as the old fathers were used to call them, i.e. dormitories and resting places.

Nor do we sing dirges or doleful songs over our dead and at the grave, but comforting hymns of the forgiveness of sins, of rest, sleep, life, and of the resurrection of departed Christians so that our faith may be strengthened and the people be moved to true devotion.¹¹

However, as it is well known, there is an ambiguity in Luther's writings over the state of the dead, and therefore of the desirability of praying for the dead. Philip Secker has observed that Luther's frequent reference to death as sleep is sometimes euphemistic or metaphorical, but in other places seems to have a literal meaning.¹² Secker concluded his survey with the words "Luther was less than wholly consistent in his treatment about the state of the dead between death and the Day of Resurrection."¹³ The inconsistency surely reflects that Luther, unlike a number of later Reformers, dared not pontificate on a subject of which Scripture itself never gives systematic treatment. Luther did concede that the saints in light pray for us, and the Lutheran Confessions also taught that it is not forbidden to pray for the dead, providing this is done without attempting to bargain with God and transfer merit.¹⁴ Both the Hannover and Württemberg Church Orders of 1536 acknowledge that

¹¹LW53:326.

¹²Philip Secker, "Martin Luther's Views on the State of the Dead," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38 (1967): 422-435.

¹³Secker, "Luther's Views," 434.

¹⁴Smalcald Articles, Part II.II.26 and 14. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV.

such prayers are in accordance with an acceptable ancient custom.¹⁵

The core for Luther, then, seems to have been as follows. For marriage, only after the civil requirements were met (outside the church building, at the door) did the Church's part come—blessing by Word and Prayer. For funerals, dignified disposal, a celebration of the resurrection, and, if worded appropriately, prayer about the dead person.

The Manual of Olavus Petri (1529) provides an excellent paradigm of how Luther's approach to adiaphora was applied to these two rites.¹⁶ The provisions for marriage begin with an instruction, based around Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3, 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 Corinthians 9. Marriage as a covenant is highlighted. Provision is made for the reading of banns three times. Then, at the church door, free consent is affirmed three times, followed by a prayer during which the bride and groom incline their heads together. Yelverton notes that the triple consent and the inclining of heads preserves a peculiarity of the Swedish custom. There is a prayer that relates to the ring, and though it is really more a prayer for the bride rather than the ring, the sign of the cross was made over the ring. The groom's vow and giving of the ring and the bride's vow and receiving of the ring follow, and the witnesses are called upon to remember this giving and receiving. The quotation from Matthew, "Those whom God has joined together," follows, along with versicles and responses, and traditional prayers from the medieval manuals, including a nuptial mass. Two things are of significance. The Swedish tradition of blessing the couple under a canopy was retained, as was the blessing of the home.¹⁷

When we turn to burial, the first thing to note is that Petri retained the custom of "Hallowing of the Dead," with

¹⁵For further discussion one may see Eric E. Dyck, "A New *Lex Orandi*; A New *Lex Credendi*: The Burial of the Dead, 1978, from an Historical Perspective," *Consensus* 18 (1992): 63-73.

¹⁶E. E. Yelverton, *The Manual of Olavus Petri 1529* (London: SPCK, 1953).

¹⁷Yelverton, *Manual*, 74-75.

exhortations, a Gospel reading, and a prayer, which included these words: "that, if this our departed brother, whom thou through death hast called from this miserable life, be in such an estate that our prayers can avail for his good, thou wilt be gentle and merciful to him."¹⁸ For the actual burial, provision was made for the committal, with throwing earth on the corpse, prayer (again, with petition for the deceased), an anthem (either a hymn, the *Media Vita*, or a psalm), a lesson, and a homily.

Thus, provision was made for the retention of Swedish customs that differed from the German customs, but also for a theology that emphasized certain continuities with the received tradition, but modified them in such a way as to make them scriptural.

Lessons from Liturgical History

Though there is nothing infallible about the ancient liturgical rites, our knowledge of them and their evolution is such that we are in a better position than our Reformation forebears to distinguish between what was early and authentic in the tradition, and what are later developments or even distortions.

With regard to marriage rites, the first thing of note is the difference in emphasis between Eastern custom and Western custom. In the former, the crowning with garlands remains an important ingredient, as does the exotic imagery of the blessing of the ring. In the West, thanks to the insistence of canon lawyers who wished to pinpoint what was a valid marriage, the emphasis came to be placed upon the public exchange of vows. Historically speaking, however, these are late comers to Christian liturgy.

In the history of Western marriage rituals, two types can be discerned.

1. Rituals reflecting Roman and Italian usage, where a nuptial blessing with a canopy or veil placed over the bride formed part

¹⁸Yelverton, *Manual*, 92-94.

of a special mass. The ceremony took place in the church building within a celebration of the mass.

2. Rituals reflecting Celtic, Gallican and Spanish usage, where there is a blessing of the rings and tokens of betrothal (betrothal here as something quite separate from the marriage), and the blessing of the bed or bridal chamber. These were domestic rites, taking place in the home.

At some stage these two rituals came to be amalgamated, providing for the blessing of rings and tokens of espousal, a nuptial mass with blessing, and a blessing of the bed. Only in the eleventh century do we find vows of betrothal, with a promise to marry within a certain period of time, appearing as part of the liturgical provisions. The vows of betrothal in the future tense were repeated again in the present tense before the older liturgical ceremonies commenced. In fact, despite the protestations of churchmen and busybodies, right down to the eighteenth century in England marriage was still frequently a private domestic affair among certain social classes – hence the term “common law” marriages. Liturgically, only with medieval concern for legitimacy and inheritance did it become necessary for the private betrothal to become public, and repeated later in public using the present tense of the verb. The first textual evidence of the vows as part of the liturgy comes from the coastal areas of Northern France. Thus, the vows were the last addition to the rite, put there by the demands of canon lawyers. At the heart of the early rites were blessings of the ring, bride and groom, and the home. The Church blessed a marriage; it did not contract it. In making blessing secondary, the Church has provided liturgies expressing canon law. It is surely significant that Luther’s rite gave minimum attention to vows, leaving them outside the church building, and concentrated on the theme of blessing inside the building.

Because the Eastern rites reflect Eastern culture, many of their features would seem strange to those accustomed to Western marriage rites. However, perhaps the blessings of the ring in those rites helps to focus on a neglected feature in Western rites; namely, the ring comes to symbolize the unilateral covenant of

God's grace, typified in the union between Christ and his bride the Church. The ring is a symbol of this, and not simply of a vague "unending love." These themes are usually only hinted at in exhortations and collects in the Western marriage rites. In the Eastern rites, they are built into the symbolism and gestures of the rites themselves. In this sense the Eastern rites reflect the biblical vision far more adequately than the Western rites.

The history of Christian funeral rites also yields some interesting observations.¹⁹ In the old Roman *Ordo* much of what later became prayer for the deceased was recited at the moment of death, with washing and preparing the body for its final procession for burial. The prayers celebrate God as the giver of life, the recreator, and the resurrector. The dying person identifies with Christ through the reading of the Passion, is fortified by the Sacrament of the Altar, and dies within the assurance of eternity in the community of saints. Words such as "May the choir of angels welcome you and lead you to the bosom of Abraham; and where Lazarus is poor no longer may you find eternal rest" expressed a confident mood expressed in vivid biblical images. If the moment of death was not precisely pinpointed, it did not matter greatly, since many early Christians inherited the Jewish belief that the soul lingered close to the body for three days. The funeral was a triumphal procession into perpetual light.

From the sixth century, however, a change began to take place. The mass for a death developed from a commemoration to a purification of the dead. From Spain came the idea of anointing the sick for inner wholeness rather than a return to health, and from the Irish Celtic tradition the concept of anointing for purification of souls. The need for purification and absolution began to be stressed over the confident expectation of salvation. The Roman chants were moved from the process of dying to a place after the mass, and were linked with a petition for deliverance from the bitter pains of death. The process can

¹⁹See Geoffrey Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* (London: SPCK, 1977); Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

be traced through Benedict of Aniane's Supplement of the Hadrianum, the Sacramentary of St. Denis, and the Lorsch Manual, which became the foundation documents of the overly penitential and petitionary rites of the later Church. From this brief outline it emerges that the earlier Christian rite was a rite of passage for the deceased Christian, and only indirectly through its joyful and triumphant tone, did it serve as a rite for mourners. Prayers for the deceased were a commendation of the Christian person, framed within an anthropology that did not sharply distinguish the disruption of body and soul at the exact moment of death. When Reformation Churches devised rites solely addressed to the mourners, we may detect an over reaction to medieval superstition; rites as bare as that of the Church of England (1552), or the even more extreme Westminster Directory, represent an abdication of eschatology and show a hesitancy about the salvation of the baptized and justified.

Luther did not have the benefit of the wider knowledge we now have. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that, working within his own terms, he came close to agreeing with the substance, if not the precise forms, of the core of the ancient marriage and funeral rites. The key ecclesiastical duty at marriages was blessing; at funerals, to proclaim the resurrection, and thereby to comfort the mourners, and to maintain the ancient duty of prayer about the departed, providing such prayer did not bargain with God and present itself as an *ex opere operato* passport to the divine throne room.

Some Modern Lutheran Rites

Let us now consider the provision made for marriage and funerals in two recent Lutheran compositions from the United States: the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, and the *Christian Worship* of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. As a foil we will also consider those rites as found in the *Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).²⁰

²⁰ *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978); *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern

The marriage rite in *LBW* is brief, and if it reflects Lutheran antecedents rather than American frontier brevity, they are those of the short German orders. The grace and opening prayer place the liturgy within the presence of Christ and in the context of joy, and the liturgy of the Word is celebrated. But after that it would seem that the vows of medieval canon law are the central part of the rite. Rings are given, but no blessing of the rings, or, what we might expect, a blessing of God in the context of the salvific symbolism of the rings. God is blessed in the later prayers, but there is no profusion of nuptial imagery and nuptial blessing; any eschatological significance of Christian marriage is passed over. It all seems a very human work, with little need of the grace of God. The rite does provide for the Eucharist, but the proper preface is weak, and there is no special nuptial blessing. Luther's special blessing by the Word and Prayer seems to have slipped out, and nothing of comparable significance is put in its place. Finally, those American Lutherans of Swedish descent will look in vain for the canopy and blessing of the nuptial home.

At first sight the Wisconsin Synod's *Christian Worship* seems more promising. The initial "call to worship" celebrates and affirms God's goodness and grace. The liturgy of the Word follows, and an exhortation that does utilize Ephesians 5, though in rather a dull and uninspiring manner. Then come all the eggs in one basket—the marriage promises. An exchange of rings follows, a declaration of the marriage that would make medieval canonists purr with delight, and a meager blessing that could apply to any situation. A few prayers and the Aaronic blessing conclude the rite.²¹ Luther's Word blessing has gone, and blessing and celebration are muted in favor of a legal contract. In both rites, that which Luther identified as being of

Publishing House, 1993); *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). These works will hereafter be abbreviated *LBW*, *CW*, and *BCW* respectively.

²¹It must be noted that the marriage rite in the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* does no better ([St. Louis: CPH: 1984], 120-128).

the world—the vows—is made the center, and Luther's concept of blessing, or any substantial euchology, are omitted.

BCW, in its Rite II, does much better. Following the Anglican tradition in fundamentalistic fashion, it begins the rite with an exhortation. It then, in the declaration of intent, links the couple's union with Christ in the Church through Baptism. The vows come after the liturgy of the Word, and are certainly prominent. However, the rings are more prominent than in the two Lutheran rites, and even if not utilizing the rich imagery of the eastern prayers, the ring is linked in the prayer with the covenant between God and the Church. The prayers are more imaginative, though this might reflect modern liturgical prayer fifteen years on. However, it is in the eucharistic liturgy that the Presbyterian rite makes up for lost opportunity, with special nuptial blessings applicable to a married couple, and a special eucharistic prayer that picks up on many of the images of marriage found in Scripture. At least the making of the legal contract is set within a richer theology and euchology.

The Burial of the Dead in *LBW* begins by blessing God, and allows for a pall to be placed upon the coffin and a procession. Of the rite, Eric E. Dyck says: "The *lex orandi* has been converted from an Office to a eucharistic structure; from prayers to encourage the faith of the living to inclusion of the deceased as a symbol of the paschal experience."²² He suggests that no longer is the prayer of the rite only for oneself at the time of death—as in previous burial offices—but rather it seeks to integrate the deceased and thereby recognizes the unity of the Church. Joined to Christ in Baptism, this corpse in the assembly's midst symbolizes the completion of the sinful Adam's drowning and God's creation of a new Adam.²³ However, the actual prayers do not fulfill Dyck's expectations. True, provision is made for the Eucharist. The prayers that introduce the liturgy of the Word, however, hardly reflect the confidence of the resurrection for this particular person. God is

²²Dyck, "Lex Orandi," 63.

²³Dyck, "Lex Orandi," 69, 65.

thanked for the life of the person, but the consolation of the mourners remains the main concern. In the material that follows, the person is entrusted, commended, and committed, but all with a certain diffidence and uncertainty as to whether Baptism, justification, grace, the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ—those gifts that the Lord gives his children—are sufficient to assume the person is with the Church triumphant. The nearest such confidence is ever expressed in the rite is at the commendation, with its reference to “a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your redeeming.”²⁴ Now, undoubtedly Luther’s concern that belief in the resurrection must be proclaimed is here. But surely there is a difference in proclaiming belief in resurrection in a general objective manner, and proclaiming that we actually believe that it does happen to individual Christians, and to this person who is being buried! There is in this rite a loss of eschatological nerve.

CW’s burial rite is honest enough in its opening explanatory rubric to spell out its limited intentions. “With the Word of God, the Christian Church comforts the bereaved family and friends and confesses its lasting hope in the resurrection of the dead in Christ.”²⁵ The deceased is mentioned indirectly in a prayer for the mourners, and he/she is “remembered.” But on the subject of whether the person is now with the saints, the service is agnostic to a point of cynicism. Like the Church of England, this Synod is unsure about the fate of its own adherents, and so Luther’s permissible use of prayer for the departed is a talent buried fair and square in the ground.

By contrast again, the Presbyterian *BCW* seems to have grasped the implications to be gleaned from the history of the funeral rites, and the logic of the classical Reformed concept of the elect. The “Comforting of the Bereaved,” a counterpart to the Roman Catholic prayer or vigil by the body, witnesses to a bold recapture of a service that is about resurrection in three

²⁴*LBW*, 211.

²⁵*CW*, 144.

particular aspects: Christ's, those who mourn, and the deceased. It includes passages echoing the old *In Paradiso deductem*, and has confident expectation that those who believe do, by God's grace, receive the unfading crown of glory and are received into God's merciful arms. Indeed, the funeral rite itself is interesting in that it assumes that the deceased has been a member of the Church militant, and is now therefore a member of the Church triumphant. The initial part of the service takes place in the church building. For outsiders, it is recommended that the service take place elsewhere, and that certain parts of the service be omitted because they are inappropriate. Koinonia and participation in the sacramental life of the Church are not necessarily regarded as assurance of salvation, but as significant enough to allow for the expression of a confident eschatology. Dare an Anglican suggest that what one might have expected from Luther's teachings on justification by grace through faith and the Sacraments is expressed far more confidently in the Presbyterian rite than either of the two Lutheran rites.²⁶

Conclusion: Core and Adiaphora

To suggest that there is one all-purpose formula for arriving at the ideal marriage or funeral liturgy would be ludicrous, and would ignore Luther's observation about "many customs." But given our knowledge of liturgical development, it should be possible to identify both core material and adiaphora in these rites.

The history of the marriage rite confirms Luther's opinion that blessing is central to what the Church does. Luther either knew, or sensed that the vows were indeed a domestic, or at least a civil issue, and were not the substance of the Church's rite. Whether we take the Eastern rites, or the Roman, Spanish or Gallican usage, they are concerned with blessing and celebrating marriage, and not primarily with contracting it. That may not be

²⁶Again, I note that the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* provides an excellent commendation of the dying (*Agenda*, 162-168). Yet, why does not its counterpart to the *In Paradiso deductem* find a place also in the actual burial of the dead?

an adiaphora in civil terms, but may be as far as the Church is concerned. Of course, many countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, allow the Churches to continue to oversee that legal responsibility, and that privilege must be carried out properly. For example, in England the form of the vow is strictly controlled by law. This in no way suggests that the Church cease to take that responsibility where it is offered; neither does this argue that the vows should be exchanged outside the church building! But if this late comer to the marriage rite is allowed to take over and eclipse blessing and celebration with rich euchology, then something has gone wrong. Luther used reading of the Word over the couple as blessing, together with a special nuptial prayer with outstretched hands. The Swedish rite retained a traditional nuptial blessing under the canopy, and the blessing of the home. Other rites have made much of the ring and its symbolism as regards the covenant of grace between Christ and the Church. The Roman rite had its special nuptial blessing within the mass. The East has its crowning entwined with rich euchology. These are adiaphora in so far as they depend on custom. They are not adiaphora in terms of what is central about marriage; that is, while the form and symbol may vary and is adiaphora, their focus and purpose in terms of blessing and appropriate celebration with nuptial imagery is not.

Of course, enthusiasm for such symbolism should not lead to stupidity. In the *Manual on the Liturgy*, Pfatteicher and Messerli write: "Crowns of flowers (chaplets) may be placed on the heads of the bride and groom by each other, by their parents, or by attendants after the minister has announced the marriage."²⁷

The rite itself, however, gives no rubric, prayer, or formula to accompany this appropriation of an Eastern custom. Why not instead have everyone pick their noses, or spray red paint at the couple? Ceremonies without significance, such as this, are quite meaningless and give liturgy and liturgists a bad name. Of

²⁷Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 353.

course, items such as music and bridal attire, among others, are also adiaphora. But the yard stick is whether they are appropriate, or at least, do not contradict, the Christian vision of marriage that the rite proclaims.

With funerals two things seem central: commendation and comfort. The joyful commendation of a Christian person—created in the image of God, for whom Christ died, and who is justified by faith through grace—is pivotal. Death results in termination of membership of many things, but not of God's Church. The rite needs to express that. Precisely because of this, the rite should be a comfort to the mourners. And both of these things rest on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the good news of salvation. These also are proclaimed in the rite. The white pall, which *LBW* and *LW* allow, is a symbol of baptismal grace. The meeting of the coffin and placing of the pall are gestures of Christ's compassion. H. P. V. Renner has recently described it thus: "The scene is reminiscent of, in fact it is almost a replica of, the triumphant encounter between Christ and the death of a youth at Nain's gate. . . . The depressing cluster of mourners, bearers, and corpse are met here by the symbols and representatives of hope—the ministers of Christ—who bear Christ in their ministry."²⁸ Like all adiaphora, such things must be judged as to whether they express or contradict the central message of the Gospel in this particular ritual setting.

Dare I suggest that these core elements, which are not contradicted by Luther's insights, together with Luther's proverb, "many lands, many customs," are a sound basis for the compilation of evocative Christian marriage and funeral rites.

²⁸H. P. V. Renner, "A Christian Rite of Burial," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 26 (1992): 72.

Come Sing of Christ the Lamb

James P. Winsor

Come sing of Christ the Lamb
Who takes our sins away
Whose sacrifice beneath the bread
And the wine does lay.
O think on Him
Who thought of thee
And took on flesh in flesh to die.

Come sing of Christ our Groom
Who for His bride did die
To spare her from the wicked foe
And silence his lie.
O joy in Him Who joys to dine
At wedding feast and call thee "mine."

Come sing of Christ our Host
Forth to His Banquet Hall!
His Father welcomes prodigals
And pardons them all.
O feast with Him
And with His saints.
Death's veil is torn; sip heaven's joy.

To the Tune *Love Unknown* (*Lutheran Worship* 91)

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Church and to purge it of its Jewish elements, namely the Old Testament. The confessional Christians opposed such doctrinal compromises with their lives. Throughout the twentieth century, scholars from the high culture have attacked the reliability of the Bible, but orthodox Christians have stood on the truth of God's Word. Today the Church must resist the dictates of the pop culture.

The doctrine of the two kingdoms, when applied to worship and culture, might mean that a Christian might enjoy popular music – but not want it in divine service. A Christian might be a good businessman – but not want to turn the Church into a business. A Christian might love TV, movies, and computer games – but not look to the Church to be entertained. A worship style would be valued because it is not part of the dominant culture of the moment. Ways would be sought to keep the Church different from the world. The Church would seek to counter the ways of the world, not imitate them. The lost would see in the Church an alternative to the vanity, deceit, and futility of the world.

Our family has the custom of inviting people who have no relatives in the area to our house for Thanksgiving dinner. We do not change our time honored, invariable menu according to what our guests are accustomed. Not only would our children never allow it, but the sense of family established by our eating rituals is exactly what our homesick guests crave. Besides, it would be inhospitable to offer those who eat fast food every day a McDonald's hamburger instead of a Thanksgiving dinner. Our family's task is to invite the lonely and those with no place to go, bring them in, and make them welcome at our feast. This is also the task of the Church.