

# The Use of Historic Ecclesiastical Nomenclature

<http://reformationchurch.org/Informative%20Pages/Historical%20Nomenclature.pdf>

## First Given at the General Pastoral Conference of The Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches

October 18-19, 2007

† In Jesus' Name †

### Introduction

The theological revival that Dr. Robert Preus started in the last generation has evolved into a liturgical and sacramental revival in the current generation. Whether or not he anticipated it, or would approve of all its aspects, those of the ecclesiastical revival consider themselves heirs of Dr. Preus's confessional legacy. I quote just two of the main characters in the current revival as proof of that assertion. First, Dr. Burnell Eckardt writes in *Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*, 2003 issue of "Gottesdienst":

I am fairly certain that he [Robert Preus] never wore a chasuble, and for that matter I never even saw him in a clerical collar. But what he and his generation uncovered for us was a profound and abiding respect for the truth that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ comes only through means – he was accustomed to reminding us that the Word and the Sacraments are not only rightly termed *means of grace*, but *means of salvation* – and that the Sacraments are exactly what Christ said they were, and nothing less. Thus we learned of an unmistakable bond between Word and Sacrament, that Word leads to Sacrament, and even that Word without Sacrament is indeed incomplete, for Word itself is sacramental: it gives what it promises.

Therefore one might say it was only a matter of time before we came to the conclusion that the Church's historic ways of adorning her worship and Sacraments are really much more fitting than the ways of the seventeenth-century Pietists, which we American Lutheran inherited. We learned from our confessional teachers to believe Jesus' words, "This is My Body which is given for you." We soon learned from antiquity to act accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

Second, the Rev. Peter Bender, is at the forefront of the current catechetical renewal in confessional Lutheranism. He acknowledges Dr. Preus as one of those who shaped his understanding and practice:

The sainted Robert D. Preus was president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana when I was a student there. Above all else Dr. Preus was a pastor. His teaching on "the chief article" – the justification of the sinner before God, by grace, through faith – was the center of his life and ministry and has become the center of my

---

<sup>1</sup> Burnell F. Eckardt. *Gottesdienst: A Quarterly Journal of the Evangelical-Lutheran Liturgy*, vol. 11, Number 4 (2003:4), p. 10

own. He lived the conviction that Christian doctrine was not irrelevant, but spoke to every need of the Christian and the church. He was no pietist. He taught justification as a pastor who understood how to apply Christ's righteousness to his flock for their salvation and comfort. His classes on the Lutheran Confessions were classes in pastoral theology, hymnology, and catechesis. Though he never used the word "catechesis" in class, he taught us *how* to catechize and the *goal* of all learning in the church: faith in Christ. He taught us to think clearly for the sake of the Gospel, and to preach the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake.<sup>2</sup>

The confessional movement is maturing into adulthood. Where it will lead is hard to say. What is clear, however, is this: confessionalists are generally fed up with a synodical status quo that continues to sink further and further into the abyss of protestantizing apathy and even down right hostility toward the Lutheran Confession. Discontent in the synods of the old Synodical Conference appears to be at an all time high, at least since the 1960s and 70s. Discontent is, of course, expressed in different ways and on different levels. Many are apparently content to keep "fighting the good fight" within the current political machinations. Some talk about a final separation from synod, but in such nebulous terms that one gets the impression that such a break is years away in coming, if ever. Others, still "in" synod are forming confessional pastoral guilds and fraternities like the Augustana Ministerium to counteract synodical hostility toward confessional pastors and congregations. A few have left their synod (or have been thrown out) and have formed new church bodies.

The discontent is most visible in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, but is by no means confined there. The Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches (ACLC) has formed from the seven pastors and nine congregations which were either thrown out of the ELS or left voluntarily and there are a few more ELS congregations teetering on the edge. The Orthodox Lutheran Confessional Conference of Independent Churches (OLCCIC) was forged out of a battle within the already tiny Lutheran Churches of the Reformation (LCR). Even within the Wisconsin Synod, by far the most monolithic of the synods, there have been loud voices in the past several years calling for confessional renewal (c.f. "The Motley Magpie"). By all appearances those voices have largely gone unheard, but one never knows.

The most thriving confessional movement exists within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and among those now on the outside who were reared LCMS. Decades of doctrinal chaos and confessional indifference have had a deteriorating effect on that body. It is precisely the chaos, however, that has forced confessionalists back into the Book of Concord. Old norms and "traditions" are being examined and reformed, not merely in light of the Synodical Conference "golden age," but in light of the doctrine and practice of the Lutheran Confessions themselves and of the old Lutheran Church. This is true not just in terms of liturgical and sacramental practices, but in terms of the sum total of ecclesiology. Not just old practices, but old ways of thinking and speaking are being revived. The move is toward thinking, acting, and speaking in a more churchly and confessional way. Just one example is the use of the word "catechesis." The word was unheard of two generations ago. Now that word, and the method of instruction that it denotes, have moved into the mainstream of confessional Lutheranism.

---

<sup>2</sup> Peter Bender. Lutheran Catechesis: A Guide to Catechesis for the Lutheran Catechumen and Family (Concordia Catechetical Academy, Sussex, WI, 1999), preface p. v

## Speaking and Debating Theologically: Setting the Ground Rules

The purpose of this paper is very narrow in focus. I want to examine one particular facet of this ecclesiastical revival that has received what I believe to be more than its fair share of criticism: namely, the use of historic churchly nomenclature. Something that has produced a fair amount of *angst* in the ACLC, for example, is the apparent penchant of some (specifically those in ELDoNA) toward the use of such historic terms as “mass,” “father,” and “bishop” (there are more terms, but these are the three I will deal with specifically). Some merely question the wisdom of Lutherans using such terms, particularly as we attempt to establish a general confessional consensus that will hopefully bear fruit in a new churchly alliance. Others wonder (not always silently) whether there is a deeper doctrinal concern.

The Roman Church of course, is always a threat. A new twist, however, has been added since the overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe – the appeal of Eastern Orthodoxy for certain traditionalist, sacramentally-minded Lutherans. It is not unusual these days for confessional seminarians and pastors to pour over the works of renowned Orthodox theologians such as Alexander Schmemmann and Kalistos Ware, or to occasionally wander into an Eastern Church to behold the splendrous beauty of the Divine Liturgy; and they are taking notes. I would be remiss, therefore, if I did not at least mention what appears to be a rather disconcerting trend. I say “appears to be” because it is not entirely clear if it actually is a trend, or if it is just a few unstable people who never had their feet firmly planted in the fertile soil of the Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran fathers). Some Lutheran pastors in recent years have abandoned the Lutheran Church and hence, the pure Lutheran doctrine of justification – the article on which the church stands or falls – for the glitzy, yet murky waters of the Eastern Church. There appear to be only a handful, relatively speaking, who have actually made the jump. The Rev. John Fenton is the latest defector of any notoriety. The real problem may be that Orthodox sympathizers in the Lutheran Church, whose enthusiasm for Eastern doctrine and practice is not tempered by a thorough grounding in Lutheran theology, infect Lutheranism from within with foreign elements.

Given the current situation, it is only natural that concern be expressed when those who claim the badge of “confessional Lutheran” begin to act and talk in ways and words that many associate with the Roman and Eastern communions. I would suggest, however, that as we have this discussion, three things be kept in mind. First, *how* we address the issue is important. All issues in the church should be addressed theologically. *Ad hominem* labels and attacks, such as, “Hyper-Euro Lutheran” or “Pastor so and so likes to hear himself called ‘father,’” are out of bounds. Such rhetoric is completely unnecessary, unhelpful, and is a sin against the Eighth Commandment.

Second, the accusation of “Romanizing” or “Easternizing” is a serious one and brother pastors should be given the benefit of the doubt. They should not be labeled “Romanizers” or “Easternizers” unless there is actual proof that they are such. If there is proof that they are, in fact, **not** attempting to cozy up to Rome or the East, then such rhetoric is at best, nothing but demagoguery, at worst it is slander. I will use ELDoNA as an example. Their 2006 Malone Theses (as close to an extra-confessional statement as they have) specifically rejects any Easternizing tendencies in the following citation:

We recognize that Lutherans in other countries observe different elements in the rite of the divine service. Lutherans in traditionally Eastern Orthodox lands may have different liturgical traditions from Lutherans in the West. *However, we reject any effort to institute Eastern elements which would violate Formula of Concord article 10, that is, which give the appearance of doctrinal unity where no such unity exists*<sup>3</sup> (emphasis mine).

---

<sup>3</sup> Malone Theses, *Liturgy*, point 2, p. 1. Consider also these citations: Under *Infant Communion* ELDoNA publicly confesses: “8) We reject the practice of infant communion. We reject the practice of the Eastern

Clearly, ELDoNA rejects any unionistic attempt to blur the distinction between Lutheranism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Though they have no specific statement rejecting Romanizing tendencies, they do make such statements as this, under *Infant Communion*:

As pastors, we take seriously our responsibility to serve as “stewards of the mysteries of God.” No matter how ‘interesting’ and ‘clever’ new theories may be, we reject and avoid practices that are completely unknown to the history and practice of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. ...<sup>4</sup>

Third, we do well to remember that, unlike the sectarian protestant churches, the Lutheran Church does not represent a radical departure from the Roman Church nor an overthrow of everything Catholic. On the contrary, the identity of the Lutheran Church, according to her Confessions, is that of a reforming movement within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. As C. P. Krauth writes in The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology:

He [Luther] distinguished between Popery in the Church of Rome, and the Church of Rome herself, and between false living representatives of the Roman Church, and her ancient, true representatives. From the true ancient Roman Church as known in the writings of the earliest Fathers, neither Luther nor the Lutheran Church ever separated. It was the true old Roman Church which in the Reformation revived, over against the modern corrupted Church of Rome. Not destruction, not revolution, but reformation, was that at which Luther aimed, and reformation is not revolution, but the great preventive of it.<sup>5</sup>

The Lutheran Church has a different standard than the sects. She does not reject ceremonies or terminology *because* they are Roman Catholic. She rejects that which contradicts the Gospel and does not conform to the Holy Scriptures. Perhaps this last point deserves further attention.

### **“That’s Roman Catholic!” The American Lutheran Mindset**

Ecclesiastical terminology (terms such as “father”, “mass”, “bishop”, etc.) falls within the realm of *adiaphora* – things “which are in and of themselves indifferent, neither commanded nor forbidden by God.”<sup>6</sup> Indifferent things are often thought to be things that don’t matter. This, however, is a serious mistake that often leads to all manner of mischief such as the use of trendy worship forms, sectarian music, or even “creative” *ad hoc* liturgies that have the feel of traditional worship but are not at all

---

churches which commune infants at the time of baptism. We also reject the practice of communing small children who have not been examined and absolved.” Under *Images* they confess: “It has become sadly evident that there is a need to make a clear distinction between the doctrine and practices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the churches of Eastern Orthodoxy. Our fellowship eschews any appearance of ‘Easternizing.’ Therefore, we all agree that: ...” The Malone Theses then goes on to reject the false use of icons in the Eastern Orthodox Church, stating in point 14: “We recognize the recent use of Eastern style icons in the worship life of the Lutheran Church as an alien element in Western Lutheran churches ...”

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p. 2

<sup>5</sup> Krauth, Charles Porterfield. The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1871 & 1899), p. 141

<sup>6</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. and ed. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, trans. The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Minneapolis, 2000) FC X, par. 2. All confessional citations will be from the Kolb/Wengert edition of The Book of Concord unless otherwise noted.

traditional. A careful reading of Article X of the Formula of Concord on “Ecclesiastical Practices” reveals that “indifferent things” are not, in fact, things that do not matter. In fact, the opposite is true. They do matter, immensely. *Adiaphora* are those things where Scripture has not spoken decisively, and so we must tread very carefully lest the church’s preaching and confession of the pure doctrine be spoiled.

FC X, (par. 5-7) states that certain things are not *adiaphora*, namely, those things that might appear outwardly to be *adiaphora*, but in reality contradict the Scriptures. Other things that are normally *adiaphora* cease to be such when they are done with unionistic intent. Nor are those things true *adiaphora* that create useless, foolish spectacles in the church and do not benefit good order, Christian discipline, or evangelical decorum.<sup>7</sup>

According to the Formula there are things that are true *adiaphora*. The church:

in every time and place has the right, power, and authority to change, reduce, or expand such practices according to circumstances in an orderly and appropriate manner, without frivolity or offense, as seems most useful, beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church.<sup>8</sup>

The next paragraph in FC X defines the parameters for the use of such indifferent things in terms of what best contributes to a right confession of the faith:

We also believe, teach, and confess that in a time when confession is necessary, as when the enemies of God’s Word want to suppress the pure teaching of the holy gospel, the entire community of God, indeed, every Christian, especially the servants of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated according to God’s Word to confess true teaching and everything that pertains to the whole of religion freely and publicly. They are to do so not only with words but also in actions and deeds. In such a time they shall not yield to the opponents even in indifferent matters, nor shall they permit the imposition of such *adiaphora* by opponents who use violence or chicanery in such a way that undermines true worship of God or that introduces or confirms idolatry.<sup>9</sup>

This last paragraph is particularly important for our purpose. The Lutheran Church is always in a state of confession on two fronts – against Rome and Constantinople on her right and against the Protestant sects on her left. Determining which is the more serious threat at the time, however, is key. When the Formula was written, Rome actually presented as serious a challenge to the Lutheran Church as the Reformed. The Augsburg and Leipzig Interims, which would have forcibly brought the Lutheran Church back under the papal banner by means liturgical compromise, were very recent history. The 30 Years War, during which Catholic armies fought to stamp out the Lutheran Church, was a mere forty years away and would wreak havoc on European territories. We must not forget, however, that articles VII & VIII of the Formula, on the Lord’s Supper and the Person of Christ, were written specifically against the influence of the Crypto-Calvinists within the Lutheran Church.

Referring to the Divine Service as “the Mass”, referring to those in the Office of the Holy Ministry as “Father”, and titling ecclesiastical leaders “bishop”, is foreign to the American Lutheran tradition in a way that it is not to the traditions of other countries. This is only natural. America is a

---

<sup>7</sup> FC X, par. 5-7

<sup>8</sup> FC X, par. 9

<sup>9</sup> FC X, par. 10

Protestant nation and for much of her history has been decidedly anti-Roman Catholic. Just consider how long it took Americans to elect a Roman Catholic President. John F. Kennedy was the first in 1960! The platform of the Whig party in the mid-1800s was not only anti-immigrant, but anti-Catholic. The Irish were severely persecuted for several decades not just for being Irish, but for being Roman Catholic.

For Americans historically, then, the Roman Church, with its centuries-old liturgical traditions, church hierarchy, and dogmas has represented the very worst of the old world tyranny that Americans sought to escape by emigrating to and building in the new world.<sup>10</sup> The doctrinal fluidity, emotionalism, *ad hoc* worship forms, and “rugged individualism” of the Protestant churches, especially those of the frontier revivalists, have always suited Americans much better and still do. Though the Roman Church has long since found its way into the mainstream of American society, American Civil Religion is definitely and decidedly Protestant, not Roman Catholic.

Within such a context the Lutheran Church has had an identity crisis from the beginning. Is she more Roman or is she more Protestant? Methodism appeals to American Lutherans in a way that Romanism does not. One rarely hears the phrase “That’s Methodist!” or “That’s Baptist!” from the lips of a parishioner disgruntled with the pastor’s liturgical reforms. So it was for our forefathers. Disputes with Grabau and Loehe aside, Revivalism, not Romanism, was the main threat to our confessional Lutheran forefathers as they fought against attempts to “fit in” to the Americanized Lutheranism influenced by S. S. Schmucker’s “New Measures.” Dr. C. F. W. Walther worked tirelessly in combating the appeal of Methodism in the Lutheran Church. Consider these words from Walther:

We refuse to be guided by those who are offended by our church customs. We adhere to them all the more firmly when someone wants to cause us to have a guilty conscience on account of them. The Roman antichristendom enslaves poor consciences by imposing human ordinances on them with the command: ‘You must keep such and such a thing!’; the sects enslave consciences by forbidding and branding as sin what God has left free. Unfortunately, also many of our Lutheran Churches are still without a true understanding of their liberty. This is demonstrated by their aversion to ceremonies.

It is truly distressing that many of our fellow Christians find the difference between Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism in outward things. It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when a person sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the deluded American denominations just so they won’t accuse us of being Roman Catholic! Indeed! Am I to be afraid of a Methodist, who perverts the saving Word, or be ashamed in the matter of my good cause, and not rather rejoice that they can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them?<sup>11</sup>

The negative feedback and cries of “Romanism,” which Walther received from his attempts to restore the use of the common historic liturgy to the church, when so many parishes were following their own devices, prompted him to write in *Der Lutheraner*:

---

<sup>10</sup> This was especially true for the protestant emigrants from England who had suffered far more direct persecution at the hands of Romanist Kings and Queens than had protestants on continental Europe.

<sup>11</sup> C. F. W. Walther, Explanation of Thesis XVIII, D, Adiaphora, of the book The True Visible Church, delivered at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, beginning August 9, 1871, at the 16<sup>th</sup> Central District Convention. Translated by Fred Kramer, printed in Essays for the Church [CPH:1992], I:193-194

Whenever the divine service once again follows the old Evangelical-Lutheran agendas (or church books), it seems that many raise a great cry that it is “Roman Catholic”: “Roman Catholic” when the pastor chants “The Lord be with you” and the congregation responds by chanting “and with thy spirit”; “Roman Catholic” when the pastor chants the collect and the blessing and the people respond with a chanted “Amen.” Even the simplest Christian can respond to this outcry: “Prove to me that this chanting is contrary to the Word of God, then I too will call it ‘Roman Catholic’ and have nothing more to do with it. However, you cannot prove this to me.” If you insist upon calling every element in the divine service “Romish” that has been used by the Roman Catholic Church, it must follow that the reading of the Epistle and Gospel is also “Romish.” Indeed, it is mischief to sing or preach in church, for the Roman Church has done this also ... Those who cry out should remember that the Roman Catholic Church possesses every beautiful song of the old orthodox church. The chants and antiphons and responses were brought into the church long before the false teachings of Rome crept in. This Christian Church since the beginning, even in the Old Testament, has derived great joy from chanting ... For more than 1700 years orthodox Christians have participated joyfully in the divine service. Should we, today, carry on by saying that such joyful participation is “Roman Catholic”? God forbid! Therefore, as we continue to hold and to restore our wonderful divine services in places where they have been forgotten, let us boldly confess that our worship forms do not tie us with the modern sects or with the church of Rome; rather, they join us to the one, holy Christian Church that is as old as the world and is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.<sup>12</sup>

Where does the Lutheran Church find herself presently? That is the question that deserves our attention. In other words, what presents the most serious threat to the confessional Lutheran Church in America today, Rome or Geneva? We cannot deny that the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Communions are indeed attractive to some liturgically minded pastors. Certain Romanizing elements of the old liturgical movement have had some effect. Foreign elements to Lutheran Worship and the orthodox Lutheran doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, like the Eucharistic Prayer and the offertory procession, have made some inroads.<sup>13</sup> I would suggest, however, that for the rank and file of conservative Lutheranism, the sects, especially those of popular American Evangelicalism, are by far the more serious threat and always have been.

Of course, Rome’s official false doctrine concerning justification and the corresponding works-righteous system of penance, together with the “holy sacrifice of the mass” form the frontal assault on Lutheranism. Nevertheless, can anyone seriously argue that the doctrine and practice of the Roman Church has had a greater effect on the average Lutheran layman (and pastor for that matter) than the revivalist Evangelicals? Can anyone seriously argue that John Paul II, as beloved as he was, has influenced the average Lutheran more than Billy Graham or Chuck Swindol? Would anyone seriously suggest that Benedict XVI will have a greater influence than Joel Osteen and Rick Warren?

---

<sup>12</sup> C. F. W. Walther. Translated from the *Der Lutheraner*, July 19, 1853 issue, volume 9, number 24, p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> Note the option of a truncated Eucharistic Prayer in the LCMS’ new Lutheran Service Book. In settings one and two of the Divine Service the Eucharistic Prayer is an option and in setting four it is the only option. Only in settings three and five is the option not given.)

Evangelicals appear to talk the same language as Lutherans do. They insist that they believe in justification by grace alone through faith. Appearances, however, are deceiving. Evangelicals believe in decision theology; they deny regenerational baptism (premised on their denial of original sin); they deny the real presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Supper (premised on a denial of the communication of attributes in the person of the Son of God). Evangelicals deny the means of grace as true salvific instruments of the Holy Spirit. Thus their actual preaching and teaching and practice proves otherwise.

No, modern Evangelicalism is the real threat. How many Lutherans go to church on Sunday morning and then spend the week listening to preachers on Christian Radio and frequenting Christian bookstores? In many Lutheran parishes the worship is literally infested with influence from Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith and the rest of the Contemporary Christian Music ilk. Favorite old revivalist Gospel songs like "Amazing Grace," "How Great Thou Art," and "The Old Rugged Cross" not only refuse to die, but are included in the newer Lutheran hymnbooks. Such things are of a different spirit and make it nearly impossible for many confessional pastors to successfully promote a truly Lutheran identity in their parishes.

Lutherans are bombarded by contemporary Christian culture and gravitate toward it, especially those who have been poorly catechized. On the other hand, there is little need to catechize against Rome. Ole and Lena Lutheran seem to have an instinctual aversion to anything that might smack of "Romanism." Is it any wonder then, that people react so harshly against what should be true *adiaphora* like whether the Divine Service is referred to as "the Mass" or whether ecclesiastical leaders are called "bishop"?

### **A Case for the Historic Terminology**

In this final section I propose that using such terms as "father," "mass," and "bishop" is a perfectly Lutheran practice, and conforms both to Holy Scripture and to the Lutheran Confessions. My purpose is not to show preference for such terms, or to encourage their use instead of the terminology common among American Lutherans. I have never referred to any ecclesiastical supervisor that I've ever had as "Bishop," nor do any of my parishioners address me as "Father." I don't expect they ever will, but if they do that will be their choice. Likewise, our church sign advertises the Holy Communion as "The Divine Service" not "Holy Mass" I do, however, casually refer to the Communion Service as "the Mass" from time to time and have taught my parishioners not to be put off by that term. All of this is to say, that I have no dog in this hunt other than to defend those who, in Christian freedom, utilize such terms in conformity with FC X. My purpose here is simply to demonstrate that, while such terms are not a common part of our current churchly vocabulary, these are all perfectly confessional terms that ought to be fully acceptable and ought not raise such suspicion and hostility in our circles.

**First: the term "Father."** American Lutherans are uncomfortable referring to their clergymen as "Father" because of its strong association with Rome. Matthew 23:9: "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven," is always used as the *sedes doctrinae* that the term "Father" is off limits for the clergy. A contextual reading of the verse, however, does not prove the conclusion.

The context of Matthew 23:9 (i.e., Mt 23:1-36) is a series of "woes" directed against the Scribes and Pharisees who do all their works "to be seen by men" (v. 5), who "love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces," and who love to be called "Rabbi, Rabbi" by men (vv. 6-7). Jesus' condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees is directed against their spiritual pride and haughtiness. They are Servants of the Word because they sit in Moses' seat (v. 2) as

incumbents of the teaching office that he held, but they do not act as true Servants of the Word. The Scribes and Pharisees have a prideful desire for honors and titles, so much so, in fact, that they end up arrogating to themselves honor that belongs to God alone. Thus, in verses 8 and 10, Jesus warns His disciples, who will be sent out by Him as ministers of the new covenant, not to be like the Scribes and Pharisees: “But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi,’ for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.” (v. 8) “And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.” Obviously, then, the issue is not the use of the term “teacher” in and of itself. Lenski rightly notes:

The use of the name ‘Rabbi,’ ‘my teacher’ is not forbidden by Jesus; for it is evident that he himself gives his church teachers and leaders who have various offices which also have their distinctive titles, Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28. The subordination of one brother to another which is expressed by the term ‘Rabbi’ is not contrary to the Lord’s will, for he himself speaks of ‘the greater of you,’ v. 11.<sup>14</sup>

The disciples will be teachers, but their authority will not be their own. Rather, they will be ambassadors, representatives of Him Who is the true Teacher. To claim anything more than that is to usurp authority that belongs properly to Christ.

In the same way, the prohibition against calling any man “Father” in verse 9 is not directed against use of the term as such, but should be understood in the context of what Jesus is really condemning. Again, the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Jesus acknowledges this, and thus He instructs the disciples in v. 3: “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do ...,” that is, whatever of their teaching conforms to the Word of God, do that. The problem with the Scribes and Pharisees that sets them at continuous odds with Jesus, is that they do not faithfully teach the Word of God. They are hypocrites who “teach as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mt 15:9). They teach that true righteousness is the active righteousness of the Law. In fact, they teach such a strict observance of laws as the means of obtaining eternal life that they themselves are not able to do it. “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (v. 4). Thus they condemn Jesus, Who claims to be the promised Messiah, God’s Son Who comes “to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15); Who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets in order to be that righteousness by which men enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:17). The Scribes and Pharisees violently reject faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, as the only true righteousness of God and the only way into the heavenly kingdom. They demand obedience to their own system of works-righteousness. They reject the Heavenly Father’s way of eternal life and replace it with their own. Thus, the Scribes and Pharisees actually seek to usurp the Fatherhood of God for themselves. They seek to have men call them “Father” in place of God, for they demand that men follow their doctrine instead of Christ’s, Who shows men the Father.

This then, is what Jesus condemns: calling anyone “Father” in the absolute sense, that is, in such a way that the supreme fatherhood of God is supplanted. He does not prohibit any and every use of that term as a title for those who hold the Office which Christ instituted in the church. Again, Lenski is correct:

Now spiritual fathers are rightly called ‘father’; in 1 Cor. 4:15 Paul calls himself the father of the Corinthians, and in 1 Tim. 1:1, Timothy’s father, compare Gal. 4:19 and John’s Epistles. Here again the explanatory *gar* helps us by pointing to our one and only Father, the heavenly one. We are to obey no man, however great he may be or may have

---

<sup>14</sup> Lenski, R. C. H. The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel, pp. 898-899

been in the church, so as to set aside the one and only real authority in force for us, that of our heavenly Father whose children alone we are in the proper sense of the word. Paul may call Timothy his son and may, like a mother, travail again till Christ be formed in the Galatians; we may call the great old teachers ‘Church Fathers’, the Reformer, ‘Father Luther’, the old and revered men in the church ‘fathers’ – and all such loving terms bestowed on the basis of our common childhood through faith only. The moment one of these old teachers errs from our Father’s Word, we would not accept such an error. No man in the church today has authority to make us do anything that is out of harmony with the Word of our heavenly Father. In the last analysis there is only *one* Father over us all.<sup>15</sup>

I would actually go a step further than Lenski. Lenski approves use of the term merely as one of endearment between brothers in the priesthood of the baptized and as an affectionate term for revered teachers who have gone before. It seems to me, however, that he does not adequately address the relationship that exists between Christians and the Office of the Holy Ministry as vital components of the “the household of God” (Gal. 6:10). The entire familial mosaic that Scripture paints of the church, is a theme (and a prominent one at that!) that should be explored further. For the time being, let me simply pose the question: If the church is a family, then are Pastors “fathers” in any substantial sense of the term? It would appear so. St. Paul says that pastors are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1). They are “ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). In that context Paul could declare that in Christ Jesus he had actually begotten the Corinthians through the gospel and that Timothy was his beloved and faithful son in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:15-17; 1 Timothy 1:2). Luther, in fact, takes exactly this position in the Large Catechism under the Fourth Commandment:

So we have introduced three kinds of fathers in this commandment: fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of a nation. In addition, there are also spiritual fathers – not like those in the papacy who have had themselves called “father” but have not performed a fatherly function. For the name of spiritual father belongs only to those who govern and guide us by the Word of God. St. Paul boasts that he is such a father in 1 Corinthians 4 [15], where he says, “In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” Because they are fathers, they are entitled to honor, even above all others. But they very seldom receive it, for the world’s way of honoring them is to chase them out of the country and to begrudge them even a piece of bread. In short, as St. Paul says [1 Cor. 4:13], they must be “the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things.”<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, then, the term “Father”, understood correctly, is a perfectly acceptable term for Lutheran clergymen. Whether it is a better term than “Pastor” is debatable. I would think that there is room for both terms in the vocabulary of the church today.

**Second: the term “bishop”:** Making the case for the term “bishop” is in some ways easier and in other ways harder than making the case for the term “father.” In the context of the ACLC’s concern over ELDoNA’s use of this particular term, the concern is not so much with the term itself as with the

---

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, p. 899-900

<sup>16</sup> LC, par. 158-160

ecclesiastical structure that ELDoNA has adopted – that of an Episcopal structure – and with their corresponding attempt to restore the three ranks within the one holy office – bishop, pastor, deacon.

Church governance does not fall within the scope of this paper, and therefore, I will not attempt to dissect the arguments for or against an Episcopal ecclesiastical structure, or for or against a more congregationalist structure. There are several papers on the ELDoNA website, particularly one written by the Rev. John Rutowicz, that defend the institution of a genuinely Lutheran episcopal structure of church governance. Those papers are an admirable beginning to the discussion. I will simply say that I agree with what Hermann Sasse wrote, July, 1949, in his eighth letter to Lutheran Pastors entitled Ministry and Congregation:

Christ is not the legislator of a human religious fellowship, and the Gospel has in it no law which prescribes the only right way of organization and polity for the church.

One must be clear as to what this means. Other churches have “an order by which the Lord wills the church to be governed,” as Calvin puts it [*Institutes*, 4, 3, 1; LCC 41, 1053]. This is true of all Catholic churches, both of the East and of the West, and of all Reformed churches. Their differences have to do only with what that order must be – the universal monarchy of the pope, the episcopal-synodical government of the church as in the Eastern churches and Anglicanism, a ruling senate of presbyters among whom there must be no differences of rank, or the autonomy of the individual congregations as in Congregationalism and among the Baptists. These are just a few notable options, all of which claim to represent what the New Testament requires for the polity of the church.

Luther’s entire greatness and the boldness of his basic theological principle of strict separation of Law and Gospel become evident when one sees how beyond all these possibilities he goes his lonesome way: Christ gave His church no such law prescribing one right organization, government, and polity (*de constituenda ecclesia*). Any way or organizing things may do, so long as the means of grace are going on and are not frustrated.

One thing the Lord gave His church, however, belongs not only to its well-being *bene esse* but to its very being *esse*: “In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted,” says Article V of the Augsburg Confession. In order that we may obtain the justifying faith of which the previous article has spoken, the Gospel must be preached, the sacraments must be administered. Therefore God has instituted the ministry, the service through which this happens. Wherever the means of grace are rightly administered, there God fulfills His promise that the Word will not return empty, there faith is created, there is the church, the congregation of saints, of justified sinners.

How the congregation organizes itself, for this no prescriptions are given, just as there are none for how the church’s ministry is to be organized.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Sasse, Hermann, We Confess the Church: We Confess Series, Volume 3, pp. 70-71

My task in this paper, then, is an easy one in that I am only defending the use of the term “bishop,” a term which has an abundance of Scriptural and Confessional testimony. I am not attempting to defend any *particular* use of the term within the context of this or that ecclesiastical structure.

The term “bishop” appears as a title for Christ Himself in 1 Peter 2:25: “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer [“bishop,” *episkopon*] of your souls.” Christ is the chief Shepherd and Bishop of the church. The term “bishop”, then, appears as a title for Christ’s undershepherds, those in the office of the holy ministry, first in Acts 20:28: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopous*], to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” It appears again in Philippians 1 where St. Paul addresses “the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops [*episkopois*] and deacons,” and again in 1 Timothy 3:1-7: “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop [*episkopeis*], he desires a good work. A bishop [*episkopon*] must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; ...” once again in Titus 1:7: “For a bishop [*episkopon*] must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,” and finally in 1 Peter 5:2 where Peter exhorts the Elders to “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers [*episkopew*], not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.”

Again, analyzing the way in which the offices of bishop, presbyter and deacon formed historically into ecclesiastical ranks is beyond the scope of this paper. It is enough simply to assert, in conformity with the Confessions, that any difference among the various ranks of clergy is merely *de iure humano*. There is only one divinely instituted office (called by a variety of names throughout history). By divine right all the clergy are equal in office and have the same authority and the same duties, namely, to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sin, to administer the sacraments, to judge doctrine and reject doctrine that is contrary to the gospel, and to exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose ungodly life is manifest.<sup>18</sup> We read in the Treatise:

The bishop of Rome claims to be superior by divine right to all bishops and pastors. In addition, he claims to possess by divine right the power of both swords, that is, the authority to confer and transfer royal authority. Third, he states that it is necessary for salvation to believe these things. For these reasons the Roman bishop calls himself the vicar of Christ on earth. We hold and publicly declare that these three articles of faith are false, impious, tyrannical, and ruinous to the church.<sup>19</sup>

First of all, therefore, let us show from the gospel that the Roman bishop is not superior by divine right to other bishops and pastors. In Luke 22 [:24-27] Christ expressly forbids lordship among the apostles, ...<sup>20</sup>

According to John 20 [:21], Christ commissions the apostles as equals, without distinction, when he says: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” He sends forth each one individually in the same way as he himself was sent, he says, and therefore he bestows upon no one any privilege or lordship over the rest.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> AC XXVIII, par. 5-6, 21

<sup>19</sup> Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, par. 1-4

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, par. 7-8

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, par. 9

In 1 Corinthians 3 [:4-8, 21-22] Paul regards all ministers as equals and teaches that the church is superior to its ministers. Thus he grants neither preeminence nor lordship over the church or the other ministers to Peter.<sup>22</sup>

Dr. Robert Preus writes in his treatise, The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy:

To Luther, pastor, preacher, and minister denote the same person or office (SA II.iii.1; cf. his practice in the SC and LC, and also the usage in FC). Pastors and ministers are often classified with bishops and always bear that title (AC XXVII.13; XXVIII.38). By divine right the pope, like any minister, is no more than the pastor and bishop of the churches at Rome: other churches may attach themselves to him politically, but only by human right, for the other churches did not choose him as overlord (SA II.iv.1).

The title *elder* is also used interchangeably with pastor, bishop, and minister (Tr.64). In the ancient church those who presided over the churches were called elders and bishops, and those called elders, or presbyters, would by human right choose one man over the rest to avoid schism and for decency and order (Tr. 62-67). But any distinction between bishop, elder, and pastor is only by human right, and when bishops become tyrannical or enemies of the Gospel, the church – the term is used in the singular and the plural – has the right to call, elect, and ordain ministers, and the ordination by another pastor is valid “by divine right.”<sup>23</sup>

Parish pastors are all *de iure divino* bishops in their own parishes. For the sake of good order, to promote harmony, to provide a check and balance, etc., pastors may (perhaps even should) elect one of their own to the position of supervisor. But no ecclesiastical supervisor, whether he be titled president, circuit visitor, superintendent, or bishop, can claim any divinely given authority over another pastor.

To what extent the term “bishop” has been retained as the title for ecclesiastical supervisors over the centuries has, in large part, been determined by how closely ecclesiastical governance follows the historic episcopal form. The Scandinavian countries simply retained the historic order. The German territories tended to form consistories made up of clergy and educated lay people under the oversight of the “Superintendent” whose duties were laid down in the 1528 Visitation Articles.<sup>24</sup> The ecclesiastical structures of the American Lutheran Churches have tended to be much more congregationalist. Several ministeriums were established early on, but Lutheran church bodies forming in the last 150 years have overwhelmingly favored a more corporate structure presided over by executive officers. Naturally, and in good American fashion, corporate terms are used for such offices (president, vice-President, secretary, etc.) rather than more traditional titles like “bishop” or “superintendent.” There have been exceptions, however. The English District of the LCMS titles its District President, “Bishop”. The synods that now make up the ELCA (ALC, LCA, AELC) began using the term bishop as early as 1970. Thus, the term is not unheard of amongst Lutherans, even in America, and, in and of itself, it really doesn’t say anything about a church’s political structure.

---

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, par. 11

<sup>23</sup> Preus, Robert. The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy as found in Church and Ministry Today: Three Confessional Essays, p. 11

<sup>24</sup> For a description of the duties of the Superintendent see chapter 6 in The Second Martin: The Life and Theology of Martin Chemnitz, by J. A. O. Preus.

The question is, what is the aversion to that term and why are we suspicious when we hear a church official called bishop? Why do we prefer to label our ecclesiastical leaders with terms from the secular corporate world. Why do we want to copy their business model? I would suggest, again, that this is the old American “Romophobia” rearing its ugly head. To our ears the word “bishop” is synonymous with Roman Catholic tyranny. With that mindset we assume that if we call our supervisors bishops they will begin to tyrannize. But synodical officials already tyrannize. In our day they tyrannize in ways that are completely in line with what they are: officers of corporate businesses (you know the old joke about the word Synod). Unfortunately, however, synodical tyranny is no laughing matter. The old synodical structures are formed on a business model and we label our synodical officials with corporate terms. Plus we give them nothing to do but sit in an office all day and think of ways to spend money. Is it any wonder, then, that they act like businessmen instead of churchmen?

We can have the debate about which ecclesiastical structure best suits the ACLC. Is it right, however, for us to gainsay the calling of ecclesiastical leaders “bishop?” What is wrong with getting back to a more churchly way of speaking? Of course, no title is a safeguard against tyranny. On the other hand, perhaps if we begin to speak more like the church we will begin to act more like the church.

**Third: the term “Mass”:** The term “Mass” conjures up, in Lutheran minds, images of Roman priests standing at the altar secretly reciting the incantations that transubstantiate the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, for the purpose of sacrificing Christ in an unbloody manner to make atonement for the sins of the living and the dead. This, in fact, plays right into the hands of the Romanists, who would have us believe that inherent in the very term “Mass” is the notion of a propitiatory sacrifice.

The Roman Confutation, responding to AC XXIV, sought to buttress its case by means of philology. First, they tried to make the case that the Mass is a sacrifice since the Greek church called the Mass *leitourgia* which, they said, means sacrifice. Melancthon responded in Apology XXIV by arguing from Greek and Roman civil law (from whence the term comes) that the term “liturgy” does not mean “sacrifice,” but simply, “public service.” *Leitourgia* was the public service, or monetary tax, that all citizens owed as part of their responsibility for the upkeep of public property. This is the word St. Paul used in 2 Corinthians 9:12 for the collection taken for the needs of the saints. Furthermore, a *Leitourgos*, a “minister to my need,” is what Paul calls Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25. From there Melancthon demonstrates that the verb form *leitourgeo*, derived from *leita* (“public goods”), means, “I attend to or I administer public goods.” Far from supporting the Roman notions of the liturgy as sacrifice, the etymology actually supports the Lutheran position that the minister is a public servant and God’s steward who preaches the gospel to the people and who consecrates and administers to the people the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

The next etymological argument of the Confutation is pure foolishness, and Melancthon treats it as such in the Apology. The Confutation states:

The sense of the word “mass” itself shows that the reference is to sacrifice since “mass” means “sacrifice” and received its name from the Hebrew word *misbeach* (“altar,” or in Greek, *thysiastrion*) on account of the sacrifice received there.

Melancthon demonstrates from the Old Testament that such a rendering is a “far-fetched etymology” especially since *misbeach* is also found in places like Deuteronomy 16:10 referring to the collections or

---

<sup>25</sup> Ap XXIV, par. 78-83

gifts of the people rather than the offerings of the priest. After a few words of explanation he simply dismisses this point of the papists as a trifle and a ridiculous, silly conjecture.<sup>26</sup>

Chemnitz takes up the issue again in volume two of the *Examen*, section I “Concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass,” article VII, “Concerning the Term ‘Mass’.” John Eck tried to prove the antiquity of the papal Mass by finding the term “Mass” in several writings of the patristic fathers. Every time he found the term he would declare that the current papal Mass is so old that it was celebrated even at the time of Ignatius and Dionysius. Chemnitz responded by proving, first of all, that the term “Mass” is actually not found in the original language of any of the Greek fathers. Rather, that is the term used in translation.<sup>27</sup> Second, Chemnitz says:

The term “Mass” is indeed found with Latin writers, like Ambrose, Bk. 5, Letter No. 33, and Leo in the Letter to Dioscurus of Alexandria – not, however, with the most ancient ones. But these men call that Masses, which Hilary, on Psalm 65, calls “the ceremonies of the divine sacraments,” namely, when in gatherings of the church either the sacraments were administered, dispensed, and partaken of, as is clear from the epistles of Leo, or when they came together for prayer. Thus we read in Cassian, Bk. 2, *De modo psalmorum*, ch. 13, that after the nightly Mass they were not to sleep. Ch. 15: “After the prayer-Mass let everyone return to his cell.” Bk. 2, ch. 8: “After the Mass of the nightly vigil let sleep be permitted until daylight.” Cassander shows from the rule of Benedict and from Honorius that the prayers which are commonly called collects are called the customary Masses.<sup>28</sup>

The fact is, nobody really knows how or when the term “Mass” came to be the title for the Western Rite of the Holy Communion. The best guess is that it is simply derived from the Latin of the final dismissal in the historic Roman liturgy: *Ita, missa est* (“Go, it is the dismissal”). All Romanist attempts to fix the meaning of the term are, therefore, nothing more than foolish speculation. The term “Mass” is simply a colorless term for the historic Western Rite of Word and Sacrament. This is the way it was received by the Lutheran Reformers. Attempting to prove that the term itself was rejected by the Lutherans based on how it is used in the Lutheran Confessions is a useless exercise. To assemble all the citations just from the Book of Concord that use the term “Mass”, and divide them into positive uses and negative uses, would take pages and, in the end, would prove nothing. Sometimes the term is used negatively, for example in Smalcald Articles II:

That the Mass under the papacy has to be the greatest and most terrible abomination, as it directly and violently opposes this chief article [i.e., the first and chief article on the Person and work of Jesus Christ]. In spite of this, it has been the supreme and most precious of all the various papal idolatries. For it is held that this sacrifice or work of the Mass (even when performed by a rotten scoundrel) delivers people from sin both here in this life and beyond in purgatory, even though the Lamb of God alone should and must do this, as mentioned above.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, par. 84-87

<sup>27</sup> Martin Chemnitz. Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 4, pp. 481-482

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, pp. 482-483

<sup>29</sup> SA II, par. 1

The problem is not the term itself. The problem is the false doctrine and practice in the Roman Mass. Luther makes this clear in the following paragraphs where he rails against the propitiatory notions of the Canon of the Mass, the buying and selling of masses, private masses, pilgrimages, purgatory, etc. It is the *Sacrifice of the Mass* which is “The dragon’s tail [that] has produced many noxious maggots and the excrement of various idolatries.”<sup>30</sup>

The term is used positively in such places as AC XXIV, simply as a reference to the Church’s historic liturgy:

Our people have been unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass. But it is obvious, without boasting, that the Mass is celebrated among us with greater devotion and earnestness than among our opponents.<sup>31</sup>

And again in AC XXIV:

On holy days and at other times when communicants are present, Mass is celebrated, and those who desire it receive the sacrament. Thus, the Mass remains among us in its proper use, as it was observed formerly in the church.<sup>32</sup>

And in Apology XXIV:

At the outset it is again necessary, by way of preface, to point out that we do not abolish the Mass but religiously retain and defend it. Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord’s day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, after they have been examined and absolved.<sup>33</sup>

The focus again is on the Rite itself and not on the term. “Mass” was simply the common term of the day. Obviously, Luther did not discard the term. He titled his first revision of the liturgy in 1523 “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg” (*Formula Missae*) and his second in 1526, “The German Mass and Order of Service” (*Deutsche Messe*). Likewise, Luther’s colleague and pastor, John Bugenhagen, produced several Orders of Service for the new Lutheran territories both in Germany and as far north as Denmark. The term “Mass” was retained. I cite here several examples from Johannes Bergsma’s book, Johannes Bugenhagen and the Reformation of the Liturgy of the Mass:

The Order of the Mass from the Church Order of Braunschweig, 1528

The Order of the Mass from the Church order for Hamburg, 1529

The Mass Order from the Luebeck Church Order, 1531

The Order of Mass in Wittenberg, the Church Order of 1533

The Mass Order from the Pomeranian Church Order, 1535

The Order of the Mass from the Danish Order of 1537

The Mass Order from the Church Order for Hildesheim, 1542

---

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, par. 11

<sup>31</sup> AC XXIV, par. 1

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, par. 34-39

<sup>33</sup> Ap XXIV, par. 1

The Mass Order from the Wolfenbuettel Church Order, 1543<sup>34</sup>

No doubt the term went out of use quickly after the Reformation, especially in Germany, and was replaced by the more appropriately descriptive term *Gottesdienst* (“Divine Service”). It wasn’t abolished everywhere, however. Scandinavian countries such as Sweden continue to use it to this day.

The term appears to be making a comeback in our day. It is regularly used by confessional Lutherans in casual conversation and in conference papers and journal articles. Some are now even advertising their Communion Services as “Holy Mass” and “Solemn Mass.” There does not seem to be the kind of general fear attached to the term among Lutheran that there once was. This, it seems to me, is a positive thing. That term, like the terms “Father” and “Bishop”, are part of our confessional heritage and should not be merely dismissed as Romanizing baggage. Caution is in order for confessional Lutherans, however, since we do not want to give the impression that we approve of the unwholesome ecumenism of the “high church” crowd in the ELCA who are trying their level best to reunite with Rome. On the other hand, “worship” has always been the common term for the Sunday Morning Service in American Lutheran churches, which is the term all the protestant churches use for their Services. Why are we so afraid of being mistaken for Rome, but we give not a thought of being mistaken for protestants?

No term in and of itself is beyond misunderstanding and misuse. Nor do any of the common terms, in and of themselves, adequately describe what Lutherans believe is going on in our sanctuaries when the Gospel is preached and the Holy Communion is celebrated. Confessional pastors like to gainsay “worship service” because it is thought that worship speaks of something *we* do for God, and in the liturgy, Christ is the main actor. He is serving us. Our worship is only the response. Is that entirely true? Melancthon notes in Apology IV:

The highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness. About this worship Christ speaks in John 6:40, ‘This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.’ And the Father says (Matt. 17:5), “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”<sup>35</sup>

Even though the term “Divine Service” is the best of the bunch in my opinion, it isn’t air-tight. Who is doing the serving? Are we serving the Divine or is He serving us? “Both things are happening” we would say. But that needs to be explained.

One argument in favor of the term “Mass” might be, that in the context of our contemporary Christian culture, that term weeds out protestants who deny the real presence of Christ’s Body and Blood in the Supper and despise the historic liturgy. “Worship Service” and even “Divine Service” can be simply bland designations for what happens on Sunday morning that don’t really distinguish confessional Lutherans from the Reformed and the Evangelicals. On the other hand, there is no mistaking what the term “Mass” refers to. Most people know what the Mass is. The term “Holy Mass” on the church sign, therefore, tells any informed passerby that this church celebrates, on Sunday Morning, a ritual in which they believe that they actually consume the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. But I digress...

---

<sup>34</sup> Bergsma, Johannes. *Johannes Bugenhagen and the Reformation of the Liturgy of the Mass*, translated by Dennis Marzolf, pp. 25-62

<sup>35</sup> Ap IV, par. 310, Tappert

Let's not make mountains out of molehills. If our people react against calling the Divine Service "the Mass" and fear it as pastoral Romanizing, then careful, patient catechesis is the answer. We should not confirm Romeophobic prejudices by taking pot-shots at well-meaning confessional Lutherans who are simply exercising their Christian freedom. We don't have to adopt the term ourselves, but we should recognize that it is a perfectly legitimate title for the Lutheran Liturgy that has a long history of acceptance in the churches of our confession.

### **Conclusion and Final Thoughts**

In this paper I have attempted to prove that the historic ecclesiastical nomenclature of the Western Church that some within the confessional movement prefer, is well within the heritage of the Lutheran Church. Let me just reiterate something I said in a previous section. The Lutheran Church does not reject customary usages *because* they are Roman Catholic. Lutherans do indeed have a different standard than the sects. Our churches have never rejected the Western Church in the same way that the Reformed did. We reject only that which contradicts the Gospel. If our ceremonies and ecclesiastical terminology, then, reflect an affinity for the historic Western Church, that is because we have an affinity for the Western Church. In fact, the Church of the Augsburg Confession is the pure Western Church, not Rome. The confessional Lutheran Church is the true visible manifestation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, not Rome. The salutary customs of the Western Catholic Church are our rightful heritage, not Rome's. Rome is the usurper, not us.

As those of us gathered here for this free conference go about the business of fostering and developing a truly confessional consensus, there is no reason why terms like "mass," "father," and "bishop" (among others) should cause any undue anguish. There are other, more substantive matters that deserve our attention. The current confessional revival is an attempt to reform the church according to the axiom *ecclesia semper reformanda* – "The church is always reforming itself." When the church goes through the process of reform things change. Some changes may challenge our comfort zones. What we are "comfortable with" is hardly a theological or churchly way of judging reforms, however. Pastors and laymen alike would do well to remember this. We cannot claim that laymen ought to have an equal say with the clergy in the ecclesiastical councils, and then reject certain reforms out of hand because our laymen might be uncomfortable with them and because we think they are ill equipped to deal theologically with the matter.

Fifty years ago, black robes, quarterly communion, and austere ceremony was standard in American Lutheran Churches. Today chasubles, every Lord's Day communion, and a fuller expression of liturgical ceremony is so common that most level-headed people don't get worked up over it. Not many years ago "Worship Service" was the common designation for the Sunday Service. Today the good old Lutheran term "Divine Service" is just as common. Perhaps the same will be true of certain ecclesiastical terms in the years to come. We should welcome the prospect.

Legalism must be avoided, of course. Some pastors vest in a cassock and surplice, some in an alb and chasuble. Some pastors chant, some don't. Some churches have stained glass windows, others have no windows at all. Some churches have crucifixes and processions, some don't. A few confessional Lutheran churches call the Divine Service the Mass, their pastors Father and their ecclesiastical leadership Bishops. Most still don't. These are not things that should divide us, however. They won't divide us if we faithfully adhere to the standard of Augsburg Confession, article 7:

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are

administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere.<sup>36</sup>

Rev. Robert A. Lawson, Jr.  
St. Paul Lutheran Church  
Escondido, CA

† **Soli Deo Gloria** †

---

<sup>36</sup> AC VII, par. 2-3