

## **A Response to Resolution 2-05, “To Commend *Theses on Worship* and Model Theological Conference on the Theology of Worship,” Adopted by the 64<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Houston, Texas, July 10<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

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In the waning moments of 64<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Houston this past summer, delegates by an overwhelming margin (802-243) passed Resolution 2-05, “To Commend *Theses on Worship* and Model Theological Conference on Theology of Worship.”<sup>1</sup> Couched as it was, between the hardly controversial Resolutions 2-04 “To Encourage Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families” and 2-06, “To Encourage Study of the Lutheran Confessions During Reformation Celebration,” the wearied delegates can’t be faulted if the passage of 2-05 was not given more than a passing thought.<sup>2</sup> Who is, after all, against “commending” the study of worship? The passage of 2-05, however, continued the alarming—and mostly unnoticed—trend at synodical conventions, begun already in 1998 with Resolution 2-10 “To Build Consensus on Worship,” continued in 2001 with Resolution 2-05A “To Continue to Foster Discussion on Worship,” and if anything, gained momentum in 2004 with Resolution 2-04, “To Affirm Responsible Use of Freedom in Worship.” That alarming trend, confirmed by a closer study of these resolutions,<sup>3</sup> is the abandonment by the LC-MS of promoting and urging uniform worship practices across the synod in favor of fostering unique worship formats within individual congregations.

That many if not most delegates just this last summer in Houston didn’t even have an idea as to what they were approving, however, can be gathered from the question posed by a highly conscientious and informed lay-delegate from my circuit, who upon his return to Minnesota, asked me point blank: “What were we voting on there anyway?” For him to have known, he would have had to find the *Theses on Worship* and its supporting material, read through them, then find and listen to or read the papers and responses presented at the Model Theological Conference on Worship, and then look up and study the resolutions on worship from previous conventions noted above. With all of the pre-convention activity addressing the restructuring of the synod, and the election of the president and other officers, that would have been a daunting task.

In order to respond effectively to Resolution 2-05 of 2010, the origin and content of the *Theses on Worship*<sup>4</sup> must first be explained. The eight theses of the *Theses on Worship* and their supporting materials were unanimously adopted by the 35 district presidents of the LC-MS at their meeting in St. Louis in September (19-22) of 2009.<sup>5</sup> Pastors of the synod were alerted to the *Theses*, their approval by the Council of Presidents, and location on the internet, via an e-mail

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<sup>1</sup> “LCMS delegates adopt worship, reformation study and compensation resolutions,” posted July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at [www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=17382](http://www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=17382).

<sup>2</sup> Somewhat of misrepresentation. According to eyewitness accounts, a number of delegates had cued up to speak to the resolution, the discussion of which having been carried over from a previous session, but the question was moved by the chair.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Holger Sonntag, “Luther on Freedom and Love in Liturgical Matters as a Challenge for Today,” at [http://lutheranwiki.org/Luther\\_on\\_Freedom\\_and\\_Love\\_in\\_Liturgical\\_Matters\\_as\\_a\\_Challenge\\_for\\_Today#Some\\_Applications](http://lutheranwiki.org/Luther_on_Freedom_and_Love_in_Liturgical_Matters_as_a_Challenge_for_Today#Some_Applications).

<sup>4</sup> Available at <http://worship.lcms.org/theses>.

<sup>5</sup> “COP adopts worship ‘theses’”, posted Oct. 6, 2009 at [www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=15851](http://www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=15851).

sent out from then synodical president Gerald Kieschnick.<sup>6</sup> According to Dr. Larry Stoterau, President of Pacific Southwest District, and Chairman of the Council of Presidents, the *Theses* were a result of a series of two-hour discussions, held at each meeting of the Council of Presidents, beginning already in 2007.<sup>7</sup> Those discussions stemmed from the observations by all of the district presidents, that in their interaction with the congregations of their respective districts, both “traditional” and “non-traditional” (Dr. Stoterau’s terminology) worship services were plagued by inconsistency in quality, a lack of creeds, prayers and the reading of Scripture, a lack of careful planning and the abdication of that planning by the clergy to those with no theological training, and an abandonment of the use of the church year.<sup>8</sup> That being said, the *Theses* do not suggest then that all will be well within the synod if both “traditional” and “non-traditional” churches simply: a) Improve the general quality of their services; b) Use creeds, prayers and Scriptures; c) Carefully plan their services under the leadership of their pastors; and d) Follow the church year.

So what was really behind the creation of *Theses*? Perhaps ultimately the frustration expressed by president Kieschnick with the pastors of the synod, stated publically both at the Minnesota State Pastors Conference in Brainerd, Minnesota in May of 2010, and again in his final letter to the pastors of the synod, as the first of the seven “Aspects of the Present Disharmony in Synod”:

“An “inability to deal with diversity” in such issues as admission to Holy Communion, worship substance and style, the Office of the Public Ministry and the role of laity, and the service of women in the church.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Kieschnick then, the variety of worship forms encouraged by the resolution of the 2004 convention has resulted in a diversity of worship throughout the synod, both in substance and style, that some pastors simply can’t stomach.

To their credit, in spite of Stoterau’s explanation, and Kieschnick’s comments, the Council of Presidents apparently recognized that the source of disharmony is more than poorly done worship services, or even hard-headed pastors: It is a serious theological issue. So the *Theses* of the Council of Presidents actually turn out to be an attempt, in view of the Scriptures and the Confessions, to outline a general theology of worship around which some sort of consensus among the pastors of the synod can be achieved. The *Theses on Worship* in their entirety are as follows:

- I. Worship is not an adiaphoron.
- II. The Scriptures and Confessions give the people of God considerable freedom in choosing those forms, rites, and ceremonies that aid the worship of God.
- III. The liturgy of the Church builds a framework for the worshiper to live the life of faith.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Larry Stoterau, “Theses on Worship: Dr. Larry Stoterau”, digitally recorded remarks made January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in St. Louis at “A Model Theological Conference: Toward a Theology of Worship That is...”, available at <http://media.lcms.org/Worship/model/disc1/4c.mp3>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> “A Pastoral Letter to Pastors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod From President Jerry Kieschnick August 11, 2010,” at <http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/Office%20of%20the%20President/August%202010%20Letter%20to%20Pastors.pdf>.

- IV. Imposing a certain form, rite, or ceremony on the Church burdens men's consciences, thereby militating against the Gospel.
- V. Great care is necessary in choosing forms, rites, and ceremonies because they either support or hinder true worship. There are no "neutral" forms.
- VI. Uniformity in forms, rites, and ceremonies, while desirable, is not essential to the unity of the Church.
- VII. The polarization that is affecting the Church concerning the issue of forms, rites, and ceremonies is sinful and hinders the proclamation of the Gospel.
- VIII. The people of God are commanded by God to keep talking with each other, under His Word, so that divisions are healed and the Church is united in doctrine and practice.<sup>10</sup>

Now at this point it must be noted that Council of Presidents, via Dr. Stoterau publically stated months before the approval of 2-05 by the Convention that these *Theses* are not the position of the synod, nor of all groups within the synod, but merely a "resource" and a "tool" provided by the Council of Presidents<sup>11</sup> to congregations, circuits and districts.<sup>12</sup> The presentation of such a "resource" and "tool" to a church body, however, is not some sort of innocuous action, made simply to foster some sort of general discussion among the clergy and laity, but has become a common method, as Reinhard Slenczka recently noted, used chiefly within the churches of the ecumenical movement, to avoid clear decisions or statements, "by preparing something for 'field testing' that later cannot be repealed anymore."<sup>13</sup> Such an approach to a theological issue within a church body "serves the purpose of circumventing a decision in order to avoid foreseeable confrontations and splits."<sup>14</sup> So the question that immediately should be asked upon learning of the *Theses* and their stated purpose is this: What kind of "tool" and "resource" actually is a document approved by the Council of Presidents unanimously, but yet freely admitted to be, not the official position of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod?

The answer to that question came in January of 2010. From January 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>, a model theological conference was held at Concordia Lutheran Church in Kirkwood, Missouri, with the theme "Toward a Theology of Worship That is..."<sup>15</sup> Sponsored by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) and the Commission on Worship, with funding provided by Thrivent Financial, the conference brought together members of those two commissions, invited presenters and responders, the Council of Presidents, and members of their respective districts whom the presidents had personally selected. That it was hoped that the *Theses* would play a significant role in the conference was apparent by the time allotted Dr. Stoterau at the beginning

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<sup>10</sup> <http://worship.lcms.org/theses>.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that the *Theses*, although approved unanimously by the Council of Presidents, was actually authored solely by the president of the Montana district, Terry Forke, who received a standing ovation from them for his efforts ("COP adopts worship 'theses'."). To his credit, Rev. Forke has corresponded graciously and frequently on various blogs concerning objections and concerns raised by the *Theses*. (Cf. Terry Forke//November 11, 2009 at 2:33 pm at <http://worshipconcord.wordpress.com/2009/11/01/239> and "Montana District President Terry Forke Replies to Pastor Preus BJS Article on Worship Theses" at <http://steadfastlutherans.org/?p=8125>).

<sup>12</sup> Stoterau.

<sup>13</sup> Reinhard Slenczka, "Magnus Consensus: The Unity of the Church in the Truth and Society's Pluralism," *Logia* XIII, 3 (Holy Trinity 2004), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. "Worship conference planners seek 'collegial' input," posted on Nov. 11, 2009 at [www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=16038](http://www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=16038), and Joe Isenhower Jr., "Response to model theological conference on worship 'positive'," posted on Jan 27, 2010 at [www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=16486](http://www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=16486).

of the event solely for the purpose of describing their genesis.<sup>16</sup> Their ultimate purpose could then be gleaned by who followed soon after Dr. Stoterau, and that is, Ted Kober, of Ambassadors of Reconciliation. His topic: “Learning to Talk About the State of Worship.”<sup>17</sup> Granted, in his remarks Kober admits that tensions within the synod may in fact be a result of real theological differences held by its various members, and no true peace can result from simply “agreeing to disagree.” Overwhelmingly, however, the issue for Kober seems to have been the *way* in which the conversation was conducted and certainly his advice was, for the most part sound. As any participant in a meeting where *Robert’s Rules of Order* are adopted to facilitate cordial and fair discussion, however, agreeing to talk about a problem in a certain way is not the actual solving of the problem.

So what is the ultimate goal of the *Theses*? Is the hope of the Council of Presidents that via the novel theology of worship presented in the *Theses*, the individual congregations and pastors have been given a tool and resource which will allow them to coexist peaceably because in reality, the variety of worship forms within the synod in no way indicates a variety of theologies within the synod? Put another way: Does the new theology of worship described by the *Theses*, present a scripturally and confessional sound basis by which all current worship practices can be accepted, encouraged, and promoted?

Before answering the latter question, a few comments must be made about the model theological conference on worship held last January. The conference itself was held to fulfill the mandate of Resolution 2-01 of the 2007 convention, also held in Houston, “To Foster Greater Understanding of Worship through Theological Conferences.”<sup>18</sup> The resolution itself was read by the assembly en masse led by the Executive Director of the CTCR, Dr. Joel Lehenbauer.<sup>19</sup> Yet in that resolution, there is no language of creating some sort of new theology of worship to resolve conflict within this synod, but of “[building] greater understanding of *our* [emphasis added] theology of worship and foster further discussion of *worship practices that are consistent with* [emphasis added] that theology.” In other words, the resolution dictating that the Model Theological Conference on Worship last January should be held assumed that the Missouri Synod, even the Evangelical Lutheran Church, *already had* a theology of worship which simply needed *to be understood* through study and conversation. There no language was found of finding, or discovering, or creating something new.

That the planners of the conference overlooked this aspect of the resolution, going along somewhat with the efforts of the Council of Presidents with the *Theses*, can be gathered by its title, “Toward a Theology of Worship That Is...” This title then was carried over into each of the six presentations which were entitled respectively 1) “Toward a Theology of Worship That Is Scriptural and Confessional”; 2) “...Pastoral and Sacramental”; 3) “...Personal and Contextual”; 4) “...Missional and Vocational”; 5) “...Missional and Vocational (another approach)”; 6) “...Practical and Theological.” In what must have been a disappointment for the Council of Presidents however, in the six presentations given, the *Theses* were noted in passing only twice.

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<sup>16</sup> Stoterau.

<sup>17</sup> Digitally recorded remarks made January 11th, 2010 in St. Louis at “A Model Theological Conference: Toward a Theology of Worship That is...”, available at <http://media.lcms.org/Worship/model/disc1/6.mp3>.

<sup>18</sup> *Convention Proceedings 2007: 63<sup>rd</sup> Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Houston, TX, July 14-19, 2007* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, no date), Stock Number 09-2609, p. 115.

<sup>19</sup> “Opening Remarks,” digitally recorded remarks made January 11th, 2010 in St. Louis at “A Model Theological Conference: Toward a Theology of Worship That is...,” available at <http://media.lcms.org/Worship/model/disc1/1.mp3>.

That is not to say the presenters thereby had committed themselves to “[building a] greater understanding of *our* [emphasis added] theology of worship and [fostering] further discussion of worship practices that are consistent with that theology.” Instead, it was clear from the outset that each presenter was simply going to address the issue of worship from his perspective. The first presenter, Dr. Jeff Gibbs of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, set the tone for such an approach when he stated in the introduction to his paper:

“I am not, then, going to try to extract from the Scripture and the Confessions a set of truths or principles that direct and govern what should or should not go on in the corporate worship of the congregation. Nor will I rehearse commonly held theological truths that are general enough for all of us to agree upon, and yet do not challenge us to new ways of thinking...”<sup>20</sup>

Only the final speaker, Dr. Charles Arand, also of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, attempted to “build a greater understanding of our theology of worship,” on the basis of the Confessions, but did so by narrowly focusing on just one article of one document, offering “four principles from the[sic] Melancthon’s understanding of human traditions” on the basis of AAC XV.<sup>21</sup> The other four presentations featured a variety of extra-Confessional vocabularies, methodologies and authorities, all in the hopes of somehow effectively addressing the question of Lutheran worship.

And before moving on, a comment should also be made about the representation of the participants of the conference. As no pastor from a rural or small town setting gave a presentation, the vast majority of congregations and pastors within the synod remained unrepresented. The three pastors who did present all came from metropolitan areas (New York City, Tulsa and St. Louis). The two seminary professors who presented were both from the same seminary (Concordia, St. Louis). And while a member of the CTCR, also from St. Louis, presented (Larry Vogel), not one member of the Commission on Worship, which oversees worship matters within the synod, presented. Granted, members of the Commission on Worship, as well as Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne were given the role of responders, but this is hardly the same as shaping a given question and conversation with a major presentation. So to sum up simply: The synod-wide Model Theological Conference on Worship last January was dominated by the thoughts and ideas of just one metropolitan area: St. Louis.

And to recap: The LC-MS convention this last summer voted to commend a document entitled *Theses on Worship*—which the Council of Presidents freely admits does not represent the viewpoint of the synod—as well as the Model Theological Conference on Worship—which exceeded its mandate to promote a greater understanding of a theology of worship which already exists, by suggesting, even by its theme, that something new in the theology of worship is yet to be discovered. Also, the conference was dominated by presentations of just one metropolitan area, St. Louis.

Returning now to the question posed a few moments ago but I left unanswered: “Does the new theology of worship described by the *Theses*, actually present a scripturally and confessionally sound basis by which all current worship practices can be accepted, encouraged, and promoted?” (Understand, here I am simply posing the question which flows naturally from convention resolution 2-01, approved at the 2007 convention in Houston, in hopes of coming to “an understanding of *our* theology of worship.”) In order to receive some sort of answer, I posed this

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<sup>20</sup> “Laying the First Shingle: Foundational Perspectives for a Scriptural and Confessional Theology of Worship,” p. 1f at: <http://media.lcms.org/Worship/model/disc2/1.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> “All Adiaphora are Not Created Equally,” p. 10 at: <http://media.lcms.org/Worship/model/disc7/1.pdf>.

question after the *Theses* were first published to Dr. Holger Sonntag, in hopes that his comments would serve as a good introduction to a book yet to be published on Lutheran worship. Weeks of daily conversations ensued. Sonntag's comments become so extensive, and precise, that they themselves eventually were published by Lutheran Press of Minneapolis as *The Unchanging Forms of the Gospel: A Response to Eight Theses on Worship*. In that work, Sonntag noted no less than twelve major shortcomings of the *Theses* which would indicate that they in no way fully nor completely represent the theology of worship found in the Lutheran Confessions:

1. The *Eight Theses* imply that the means of grace, the Word of God and the Sacraments, do not have specific unchangeable forms, rites, or ceremonies instituted by Christ himself, but simply ought to be present in worship in changeable humanly established form, rites, and ceremonies.
2. Without specific, recognizable, and invariable divinely established forms, rites or ceremonies, the gospel in word and sacraments can neither function as the public mark of identification of the church nor can it shape the humanly instituted rites of the worship service.
3. Without such specific forms of Word and Sacrament, there also can be no distinction between necessary, essential, mandated ceremonies that are already given with the institution of the means of grace (and thus instituted by God), and unnecessary, non-essential, free ceremonies (instituted by men and, accordingly, called "traditions of men" etc.) that can nonetheless be useful for a number of reasons if they are designed in conformity with the essential ceremonies.
4. So without the distinction of necessary and unnecessary forms, rites and ceremonies, all forms, rites and ceremonies, whether they be necessary, essential and mandated or unnecessary, non-essential, and free are therefore, according to the *Eight Theses*, subject to "considerable freedom", which can only foster the already existing misunderstandings in these matters.
5. While the *Eight Theses* attribute two main purposes to ceremonies, the additional positive purpose of uniform ceremonies among pastors and congregations attributed to them by the Lutheran Confessions, namely, the preservation of the essential unity of faith in the church, is not recognized.
6. Therefore, the positive temporal and spiritual benefits of humble love restraining the Christian congregation's freedom when it comes to non-essential ceremonies are not carefully considered.
7. The *Eight Theses*, unlike the Lutheran Confessions, fail to give a general definition of the essence of worship. They also fail to give a distinction between true worship and false worship, that is, idolatry.
8. The *Eight Theses* also fail to locate the Christian worship service at this point in time in the historical continuum of genuine Christian worship that has been

ongoing ever since the enunciation of the promise of the proto-evangel in Gen. 3:15.

9. The *Eight Theses* lack even a hint at the full extent of the Christian's worship in this world, giving the impression that his worship is limited to the corporate worship service and other religious activities of the First Table of the Ten Commandments, while the Lutheran Confessions, faithful to Scripture, include the entire vocational life of the justified believer according to both tables.
10. While the *Eight Theses* rightly speak of the teaching function of godly ceremonies in the corporate service of the church, they fail to mention the insistence of the Lutheran Confessions on thorough instruction in the chief articles of the faith also outside of corporate worship for the service to become meaningful to the worshipers and for their proper participation in the service.
11. The concluding analysis of the problem offered by the *Eight Theses* addresses the symptom, but not the real underlying cause of strife, division, and polarization in the church, which is an increasing disunity in doctrine that – according to the prediction of the Lutheran Confessions and the reformers – has resulted from a decreasing uniformity in the external rites of the corporate worship service, both in those essential ceremonies established by Christ himself and in those non-essential ceremonies established by the church.
12. If the problem is not rightly diagnosed, the solution offered cannot be satisfying: If there truly is theological division in our church body, if there are thus several warring confessions of the faith in one body, then this should be duly considered in the church's worship, e.g., when it comes to holding joint communion services at synodical, district, or circuit events. Constant talking will remain fruitless if there is no cost for a failure to reach an agreement within a realistic timeframe.

To say the scope of these twelve shortcomings is startling would be an understatement. Any one of them could in and of itself be the center of a study or conference. Apart from raising a multitude of questions about the *Theses* of the Council of Presidents, and consequently, the purpose of the Model Theological Conference on Worship, the twelve shortcomings reveal the true depth of the theology of worship to be found in the Lutheran Confessions, but which remains, relatively unknown. This being so, the mandate of resolution 2-01 from the 2007 synodical convention still stands before us, and that is: To come to a greater understanding of the theology of Lutheran Worship as contained in the Lutheran Confessions.

So there, in essence, is the response to Resolution 2-05. It should be rescinded, or vacated, the *Theses* abandoned, and with them the idea, that the key to solving the current dilemma of worship within the LC-MS is somehow to create peace on the basis of a new theology of worship which can be justified somehow by the Scriptures and the Confessions. The peace, after all, which is concordia, a walking together, which a Lutheran synod of congregations and pastors is to be, is not simply a mutual coexistence of parties who share common goods and services of the synod. Such a peace, established on the basis of a new theology of worship, would be no better than an auditory peace, the quiet hush, which is found in a public library. There, the contents of

the facility are shared by anyone who steps through the door, whatever they may individually believe, teach or confess. The only requirement for such a library-peace is an agreement that a quiet be maintained, so that all can continue to go about doing whatever their doing, whatever it is they ultimately believe, teach or confess. In contrast, the peace which is a synod, is a peace which is based upon a common understanding and use of the shared treasures of the Word of God and the Sacraments. Such a common understanding can only come about through careful study of an agreement upon the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

But how is that done? That really is the question, isn't it? As noted above, the presentations at the model theological conference featured a variety—one could even say a “dizzying amount”—of extra-Confessional vocabularies, methodologies and authorities. So here I must confine my remarks to the question of some sort of Confessional standard for the discussion of worship within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Afoot among us today would seem to be a hermeneutic for interpreting the confessions when it comes to worship matters that goes something like this: “If when it comes to worship I can find some sort of justification for what I am doing within the Lutheran Confessions, or cannot find a precise objection to what I am doing there, then I have met the standard of worship which reflects the theology of the Lutheran Confessions.” Of course such a hermeneutic would justify about 99.9% of worship practices currently found throughout all of Christianity. And the result of such a hermeneutic would be worship which eventually possesses no Lutheran distinctive whatsoever.

But that is not the only common hermeneutic among us today. Another hermeneutic is like it: “Our congregation has “Lutheran” in its name, and subscribes to the Lutheran Confessions in its constitution, so whatever it does, reflects the theology of the Confessions.” Still a third hermeneutic cannot be ignored: “I consider myself to be a Lutheran, so however I worship, is a reflection of the theology of the Lutheran Confessions.” None of these three hermeneutics are going to cause us to discover what the theology of worship found within the Lutheran Confessions actually is. We don't look to popular Christian worship practices, the practices of Lutheran congregations, or Lutheran individuals to establish that, but to the Confessions themselves.<sup>22</sup>

And here we must be extremely careful. Since the time of the Reformation, there have been all sorts of theologies, liturgical movements, pious societies and mission endeavors which have interpreted the Lutheran Confessions on the basis of the specific needs and desires of individual situations. That means that past studies created by intellectuals and the zealous, although treating the Confessions, do not always reflect their content. A nice example of that fact when it comes to Luther studies can be found in Bernhard Lohse's (1928-) *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His*

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Peter Brunner, *Zur Lehre vom Gottesdienst der im Namen Jesus versammelten Gemeinde in Leiturgia* [Concerning the Doctrine of the Worship of the Congregation Assembled in the Name of Jesus in Service] translated by M. H. Bertram, and published as *Worship in the Name of Jesus* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968): “Only in this dependence on the words of revelation, which disclose God's institution to us, is a doctrine on worship possible. Thus this doctrine does not find its norm in what happens in the present-day worship services of Christendom; its orientation is not empirical-descriptive. Nor does this doctrine rest on any experiences the congregation or individual members of the congregation may have in such assemblies; in this sense it is oriented neither psychologically nor anthropologically. Nor does this doctrine derive from the synthetic sum total of all of Christendom's teachings on worship in the course of the centuries. As surely as it is meet for us to give ear to the voice of the fathers and the brethren in the evolution of the doctrine on worship, so surely dare this doctrine never be a historicizing eclecticism. Inasmuch as we surrender our doctrine of worship unconditionally to past revelation, it will have to be oriented, along the entire line, to the living Word of God.” P. 26.

*Life and Work*.<sup>23</sup> There is not the question of what Luther taught, but what scholars have said Luther taught. The same situation holds true for the Lutheran Confessions. The distinction between what the Confessions teach, and what some have said they teach, must always be kept in mind.

The solution? Instead of studying the Confessions via later studies, the Confessions should be approached via the writings of the Reformer himself. The Confessions, after all, are not the iceberg which is Lutheran theology, but the tip of the iceberg, summarizing in essence, the theology of Martin Luther. To understand the theology of worship as found in the Lutheran Confessions, the writings of the Reformer himself must therefore be revisited, and studied, to once again bring to light, the foundation for the comments which would eventually be made in the Confessions. This is, after all, a hermeneutic deployed by the Confessions themselves:

"Since Dr. Luther is rightly to be regarded as the most eminent teacher of the churches which adhere to the Augsburg confession and as the person whose entire doctrine in sum and content was comprehended in the articles of the aforementioned Augsburg Confession and delivered to Emperor Charles V, therefore the true meaning and intention of the Augsburg Confession cannot be derived more correctly or better from any other source than from Dr. Luther's doctrinal and polemical writings..." Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. VII, Lord's Supper, Tappert, p. 576, par. 41.

Why are we hesitant to do such a thing? It is just speculation, but I think we are trapped in a post WW II popular assessment of Luther which would blame his understanding of the two kingdoms for the masses of Germany allowing Hitler to rise to power, the anti-Semitic writings of Luther's later years as justifying the mass extermination of the Jews of Europe, and even reticence of the Lutheran church at the time to do anything at all. Throw in his beer-drinking and salty language, often-mistranslated, and you have a figure easily disregarded. Such reasoning, of course, is highly flawed,<sup>24</sup> and of course, if one takes the time to open any of Luther's works, his brilliance is instantly recognized. At least it was by *Life Magazine*, which back in the year 2000, named Martin Luther the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the *Top 100 People of the Millennium*.<sup>25</sup> (In that the only two people ahead of Luther on that list were Gutenberg and Columbus, a strong case could be made that Luther should have been #1.) If the now defunct *Life Magazine* got it, you would think Lutherans would as well.

So what then about context? If the theology of worship of the Lutheran Confessions is to be studied on the basis of the writings of Luther, what is the modern context for such a study? The LC-MS? World-wide Lutheranism? Christianity in general? If Lutheran worship as it has been traditionally practiced is understood generally to be a hindrance to evangelism, I would suggest that such a study be done within the context of the worship practices of all world religions. After all, if we truly wish to reach out not just to lapsed Protestants, but to all people of all religions everywhere, the religious "baggage" with which they are laden must be understood. Praise bands might attract American twenty-somethings, but most probably are seen by pious Muslims or Hindus as having nothing whatsoever to do with religion.

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<sup>23</sup> *Martin Luther—Eine Einführung in sein Leben und sein Werk*, trans. By Robert C. Schultz (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Lowell Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler: The Untold Story* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. [http://www.amiannoying.com/\(S\(0ah4rf3saocxdg45tvh2ebr3\)\)/collection.aspx?collection=1804](http://www.amiannoying.com/(S(0ah4rf3saocxdg45tvh2ebr3))/collection.aspx?collection=1804).

In the Twin Cities of Minnesota, for example, where I live, we have a larger immigrant population per-capita than any other city in the United States. Minnesota is also 35% Lutheran, the largest concentration of Lutherans within the United States. This combination has occasioned the situation, that right next to a somewhat disheveled Missouri Synod congregation in my circuit, a pristine Buddhist temple has been erected with massive statuary, beautiful gardens, and fountains. Another Buddhist temple has been built next to the local Lutheran high school. My neighbor to the north is an American Indian. To the south, an ex-Jehovah's Witness. One of my son's best friends from the public school, an immigrant, is a Hindu named Krishna, who everyone calls Kris; and another son routinely brings home a Muslim from the Gaza strip by the name of Fwad, who everyone calls Frank; and more than once, one of my daughters has had over for supper a religionless girl from Bosnia named Emma, whom everyone calls, well, Emma. We do not allow our children to attend their worship services, but they do visit their homes, in which are found all sorts of religious objects, pictures, and symbols. What brings Lutherans, Muslim and Hindu children together even in casual friendship? Perhaps it is as simple as an agreement over the natural law: Both the Hindu and Muslim family feature a mom and a dad, brothers and sisters, and religion, just like our family. At our local high school, this is not the norm for the children raised in this culture. The modern context of Lutheran worship therefore is not the worship of other Lutherans, or even the worship of other Christians, but the worship of other religions.

So as I stated above, a proper response to Resolution 2-05 of the 2010 convention is that it should be rescinded, or vacated, the *Theses* of the Council of Presidents abandoned, and with them the idea, that the key to solving the current dilemma of worship within the LC-MS is somehow to create peace on the basis of a new theology of worship which can be justified somehow by the Scriptures and the Confessions. The mandate of Resolution 2-01 of the 2007 convention, "To Foster Greater Understanding of Worship through Theological Conferences" should be fulfilled with a synod-wide study of the theology of worship of the Lutheran confessions, with reference to the writings of Martin Luther.