WORSHIP AND MINISTRY:
WHAT OF GOD AND WHAT OF MEN?
A Study of the Augustana, Articles XII-XV, in Light of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians
Part II

Peter M. Prange

II. What of Men?

As important as it is to consider the question "What of God in worship and ministry?", it is equally important to ask, "What of men in worship and ministry?" In the history of the Christian church, rarely have battles truly been about the institution of God, the gospel. Finally, the gospel is what it is, and concerning it there can be little argument. Instead the battles have tended to be over the institutions of men: Christians trying to impose "their way of doing things" upon other Christians, even though these human institutions are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. We call them adiaphora.

> Church Usages (AC XV): With regard to church usages that have been established by men, it is taught among us that those usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church, among them being certain holy days, festivals, and the like. Yet we accompany these observances with instruction so that consciences may not be burdened by the notion that such things are necessary for salvation. Moreover it is taught that all ordinances and traditions instituted by men for the purpose of propitiating God and earning grace are contrary to the Gospel and the teaching about faith in Christ. Accordingly monastic vows and other traditions concerning distinctions of food, days, etc., by which it is intended to earn grace and make satisfaction for sin, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.[56]

There are two extreme approaches to the issue of adiaphora, both of which have reared their ugly heads from the days of Corinth to our present day. Paul categorizes them as the "strong" and "weak" positions. Both approaches have led to turmoil, persecution, and even death.

The "strong" in Corinth understood that eating food sacrificed to idols was neither here nor there, neither commanded nor forbidden

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[56]An example of this is seen in the Galatian Judiazers' insistence on circumcision.

by God in the New Testament era. They knew that they had Christian freedom to either eat or not eat. Yet Paul still encouraged the "strong" to refrain from such eating out of love for the "weak," who struggled with such eating. He writes: "If what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall" (1 Co 8:13). But instead of displaying such a self-sacrificing attitude of love, the "strong" in Corinth apparently asserted their Christian liberty with the cry, "Everything is permissible," to which Paul answered, "But not everything is beneficial . . . not everything is constructive" (1 Co 10:23).

The "weak," on the other hand, were no less guilty of a faulty approach in regard to adiaphora. They failed to understand the distinction between those things instituted by God and those things instituted by men. Furthermore, they went on to burden the consciences of others by demanding that these human institutions and regulations be slavishly followed, sometimes even suggesting that they were necessary for salvation.[57] Concerning the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols, Paul encouraged the "weak" Corinthians not to burden themselves or others with their erring consciences. While Paul conceded that "everything is permissible," he also reminded these people that they should "not be mastered by anything" (1 Co 6:12). Instead, he wrote, "Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience. . . . So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Co 10:25,31).

Today many, many instances of adiaphora arise in the areas of worship and ministry. In fact, nowhere else do matters of adiaphora seem to surface more frequently. Unlike the Old Testament days when God spelled out how the worship and ministry of the tabernacle and temple were to take place, in the New Testament era he has left the forms of worship and ministry up to human discretion, giving us freedom in the forms we choose. Yet, as we'll see, with freedom comes also responsibility.

This truth cannot be stressed enough: New Testament forms of worship and ministry are adiaphora, things freely instituted by men.

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[57]Though it could also rightly be said that *every* form in the life of Christians is divinely instituted, insofar as those forms proceed from faith, since they are "fruit of the Spirit" (Ga 5:22,25) and "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Php 2:13). In other words, the Christian is freely led by the Holy Spirit through the gospel even in his establishment and use of adiaphora. As a result, every adiaphoron can be used or dismissed freely by Christians (1 Co 9:19-23) as they are led by the Spirit through the gospel to do so. The object of all these free forms is to "serve one another in love" (Ga 5:13). Of course, the difficulty comes in when the sinful flesh exerts its pressure to make these forms a matter of conscience, robbing Christian freedom (Ga 5:1).

And since they are adiaphora, the danger forever exists that Christians will take either a "strong" or "weak" approach toward them. As leaders in the church, we must be especially vigilant in upholding and defending Christian liberty. Sadly, however, we can often be the greatest offenders of conscience-binding in these matters! We of all Christians must have an evangelically balanced approach toward every issue of adiaphora in worship and ministry.

But doing that is more difficult than it first sounds. In fact, it's nearly impossible. Why? St. Paul points out the difficulty in his first letter to the Corinthians. He writes: "I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Co 10:33). Luther phrased that near-impossible balance this way: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[58] Simply stated, if we're dealing with adiaphora *correctly,* the strong possibility exists that we will be forced to "talk out of both sides of our mouth," trying to please everybody in every way.[59] If we're dealing with adiaphora *correctly,* charges of unfairness and favoritism will most certainly abound. How much easier it would be to simply make up rules, to bind consciences, and to handle every situation and person exactly the same way! Being legalistic is always easier than being truly evangelical. The results of legalism, however, are disastrous.

We must be evangelical. That's Lutheran! With guidance from the Holy Spirit through the gospel, we must make prudent decisions concerning the forms of ministry and worship that we employ in service to the gospel and the people we serve. We must not make adiaphora a matter of conscience or law. Instead, in every given situation, we need to repeatedly ask ourselves as individual Christians, as congregations, and as a synod: "What forms of worship and ministry *best* proclaim the rich message of the gospel to the people we are serving?" That is our primary and ultimate goal: proclaiming the gospel as best and as richly as we can. Nothing more; nothing less.

Believe it or not, though, different people may come to different conclusions when they ask and answer that question! Such disagreement in matters of adiaphora, we must agree, is entirely permissible and even to be expected. There simply may not be complete uniformity in practice concerning adiaphora, even among those who completely agree in doctrine and practice. After all, these matters are free, and we

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[58]Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *Luther's Works,* Vol. 31, 344.

[59]For instance, Paul's seemingly divergent actions when it came to the circumcision of Timothy (Ac 16:3) versus the non-circumcision of Titus (Ga 2:3) are irreconcilable unless you understand what it means to have a truly evangelical approach toward adiaphora.

rejoice in the variety of gifts and talents and ideas that God gives to his Church. We must also remember that situations vary from congregation to congregation, person to person. The best form of gospel proclamation in one congregation may bring confusion and unrest in another.

That said, we must also be careful that our forms of worship and our methods of ministry do not in any way undermine the truths of the gospel. We must ask ourselves: do our forms proclaim the gospel, or do people just like them because they're different and entertaining or, for that matter, because they are traditional and sentimental? Too often we are the unsuspecting victims (and perpetrators!) of diminishing the truths of the gospel with our forms. For instance, we might insist so much on a certain form of worship to help rectify a "spiritual downturn" among our people that its use overshadows the *content* of worship, the gospel itself. Or we might stumble into thinking that a certain method or "philosophy" of ministry will bring desired success rather than realizing that only the gospel brings true success. The gospel is the only legitimate remedy to spiritual malaise. We can't take it for granted, something that we *say* we'd never do, yet something that we are forever in danger of doing when we're trapped in the pitfall of trusting forms and abusing liberty! Let us recommit ourselves to the "foolish" gospel, which alone works and strengthens faith. Trust the Holy Spirit, not human forms. That's Lutheran!

Historically, no one since the time of the apostles has dealt more evangelically with matters of adiaphora than Martin Luther. No one has dealt more legalistically than Rome and the Protestants. Let us take Luther as our model. We all know that Luther railed against the man-made laws of Rome. He railed against the idea that the worship forms of Rome were necessary for salvation, as Rome insisted they were. He railed against the idea that the forms of ministry within the Roman church—especially the papal hierarchy—were necessary for salvation, as Rome insisted they were. Our Confession clearly states along with Luther: "It is taught among us that all ordinances and traditions instituted by men for the purpose of propitiating God and earning grace are contrary to the Gospel and the teaching about faith in Christ." Rome had long fallen into legalistic formalism, a disease that continues to this very day. The gospel is no longer at the center of their worship and ministry. The law is. The forms of worship and ministry are the all-consuming thing to many Catholics. The institutions of men have long since trumped the institution of God.

And yet what did Luther do with Catholic forms at the time of the Reformation? Did he throw them all out? Did he smash the altars and the organs and the stained glass windows? Did he innovate totally new worship forms? Did he obliterate the distinction between the public ministry and the laity? Did he get rid of all things "Catholic"? Hardly.

He left the church-smashing to the radical reformers—or the *Schwärmer* (enthusiasts), as Luther called them—men like Muenzer, Karlstadt, and Zwingli. Later on rationalist reformers like those led by John Calvin did the same thing. These reformers threw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. They purged their churches of anything that remotely smacked of Romanism, even when that meant denying the truths of the gospel and overthrowing God's institution.[60] And where have the churches of their spiritual descent landed? On the whole, they deny the power of the gospel just as Rome does. Their made-man, legalistic forms take precedence over the gospel. They bind consciences with their rules and laws. Their institutions of men trump the institution of God, and many Protestants give Rome a run for their money in the race to be most legalistic.

Luther and his followers have instead historically traveled the narrow, Lutheran—and truly evangelical—middle road. Our Confession states: "It is taught among us that those usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church, among them being certain holy days, festivals, and the like." In other words, Luther held onto many things "Catholic" as long as it was remembered that these forms were to be used in Christian freedom and as long as they contributed to peace and good order.

> To (Luther), both papists and Enthusiasts were enemies of Christian liberty. Both meant to replace faith with human rites. The pope had bound the conscience of men to certain works. . . . By their mere performance, these works were supposed to warrant the mercy of God. . . . Some of these rites were wrong in themselves and had to be swept away . . . Others might be retained or removed, according to the verdict of the individual conscience. But even this freedom the pope was unwilling to grant.

> The Enthusiasts, on the other hand, made a law of that evangelical freedom which Luther proclaimed. Whatever the pope had commanded for salvation, they meant to prohibit. They failed to see that man is justified neither by the performance nor by the neglect of certain rites. They tyrannized the conscience of men as much as the pope and were just as slow to grant freedom in the use of liturgical forms.[61]

Do you see the parallels in our own church body today? More and more we have two sides in our synod contending for their points of

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[60]For example, they denied the Real Presence in Holy Communion and the regenerating power of Holy Baptism. These ideas were deemed far too Catholic for acceptance, and Luther was accused of succumbing to Rome when he vigorously upheld these truths of the gospel.

[61]Vilmos Vatja, *Luther on Worship*, 173.

view concerning worship and ministry forms. You can label them anyway you want, but both sides to this issue must remember: we're dealing with adiaphora! All forms are free—whether they follow traditional usages or initiate new ones. Simply put, there is too much conscience-binding going on among us in matters of adiaphora. Why argue, for instance, about whether a pastor should wear a white alb or a black Geneva or no robe at all? These matters are free! If he has a good reason for it, if the gospel is being truly proclaimed, and if all things are being done in a fitting and orderly way, let it be! We could all learn something from Luther, who, on the one hand, was determined not to undermine Christian liberty, yet, on the other hand, was interested that peace and good order be maintained through the forms of worship and ministry. He made no rules as long as the gospel was being proclaimed and good order was being maintained.

Practically speaking, though, in the area of adiaphora Luther himself had a conservative nature. And why was that? Certainly not because of laziness or fear or "crypto-Catholicism," as some would then and later suggest.[62] No, the source of Luther's conservative reforms was ultimately his faith in the gospel. Luther had a deep appreciation for the gospel's power to do the saving work of God. He also believed that in time the Holy Spirit through the gospel would lead Christians to produce the very best forms for worship and ministry. "Why insist upon man-made forms?" Luther might have said. "It's the gospel that saves, and the gospel will produce its own best forms in time!" Luther didn't get hung up on forms.

In the introduction to his *Deutsche Messe* (1526)—a German order of worship that Luther was proposing for use in Lutheran congregations—Luther makes it exceedingly clear that upholding Christian liberty was of prime importance to him in this endeavor. "In the first place, I would kindly and for God's sake request all those who see this order of service or desire to follow it: Do not make it a rigid law to bind

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[62]This was a common charge made by the later Lutheran Pietists against Luther, beginning with Jakob Spener's *Pia Desideria* (1675). The Pietists suggested that Luther had not gone "far enough" in his reforms of the Lutheran church. According to the Pietists, Luther was the champion of justification but hadn't taught enough about sanctification. The Pietists thought it their calling to take the next step in teaching sanctification. Pietism, however, sought to "improve matters by outward and therefore legalistic means. . . . That the term "pietism" was coined by [orthodox] Lutherans may be accounted for by their greater alertness to the truth that only the Means of Grace can create spiritual life and build the church, and that sanctification must remain unalloyed with any kind of legalism and not be made a matter of program, since it is not our doing but rather the gift of the Spirit" (Koehler, *History*, 15). Pietism continues to have a destructive influence among Lutherans today, even within the WELS, as we all face the ever-present temptation to rely on methods rather than the power of the means of grace.

or entangle anyone's conscience, but use it in Christian liberty as long, when, where, and how you find it to be practical and useful."[63]

However, Luther, like Paul, was not willing to grant Christian liberty absolute "carte blanche" in matters of adiaphora. Instead he wanted all Christians to remember what the real goal of Christian liberty is, since some were abusing that liberty by the introduction of all kinds of novel worship forms.

> Some have the best intentions [in producing new forms of worship], but others have no more than an itch to produce something novel so that they might shine before men as leading lights, rather than being ordinary teachers—as is always the case with Christian liberty: very few use it for the glory of God and the good of the neighbor; most of it for their own advantage and pleasure. But while the exercise of this freedom is up to everyone's conscience and must not be cramped or forbidden, nevertheless, we must make sure that freedom shall be and remain a servant of love and of our fellow-man.[64]

That said, Luther also states that uniformity in the use of forms is beneficial and something that we should strive for, even if that means voluntarily surrendering some of our Christian liberty.

> Where the people are perplexed and offended by these differences in liturgical usage, however, we are certainly bound to forego our freedom and seek, if possible, to better rather than to offend them by what we do or leave undone. Seeing then that this external order, while it cannot affect the conscience before God, may yet serve the neighbor, we should seek to be of one mind in Christian love. . . . As far as possible we should observe the same rites and ceremonies.[65]

Luther understood well the paradox that in matters of adiaphora he was subject to none and slave to all. Such understanding was a direct result of his faith in the gospel to work salvation. Professor Joh. Ph. Koehler comments on Luther's evangelical approach to adiaphora:

> In Luther's life we may behold what a great thing in life faith is. . . . There is no pretense, no pose about him, but the spontaneous, unhampered bubbling of a spirit whose fountain-head is faith and in this faith knows himself to be lord of all things and subject to none. For that reason Luther had a much keener appreciation of true progress in the life of mankind . . . and Luther gave proof of this understanding when he purified but conserved the order of common worship.[66]

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[63]Martin Luther, "The German Mass and Order of Service," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, 61.

[64]Ibid., 61.

[65]Ibid., 61.

[66]Koehler, *History,* 6-7.

Again some may ask: why *purify* and *conserve* the traditional forms of worship rather than starting fresh as the radical reformers did? Our Confession gives us the answer: because the traditional forms of worship in the Christian church "contribute to peace and good order in the church." In addition, the Apology states that celebrating the church year and following a regular liturgical form is also educational. Traditional liturgical forms teach and re-teach the truths of Scripture and salvation week after week, year after year. Most importantly, they keep the Means of Grace squarely in the center of worship.[67] In other words, Luther recognized that there was much benefit to good, liturgical worship. In fact, later on our Confession even boasts that these forms of worship were "observed among us with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents."[68]

Were those worship forms perfect? No forms are this side of heaven. Luther recognized that. "But it wasn't his way to try to restore, for instance like the Calvinists, the forms and conditions of the Apostolic age. He left things as they were excepting that he removed errors that had become attached to them."[69]

Such was also his attitude when it came to the traditional forms of ministry. Again Luther was conservative in his approach. When, for instance, Karlstadt and the Zwickau prophets disturbed the Wittenbergers in 1521 by blurring the distinction between the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers, Luther took action. At the time he was hidden away in the Wartburg, but when these enthusiasts began to officiate without liturgical vestments and to encourage the laity to help themselves to the bread and wine directly from the altar,[70] Luther hurried to Wittenberg. He preached a series of eight sermons emphasizing that the gospel alone must accomplish needed reforms. "I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. . . . I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing . . . the Word did everything. . . . When we spread the Word alone and let it alone do the work, that distresses [the devil]. For it is almighty and takes captive the hearts, and when the hearts are captured the work will fall of itself."[71]

As for Karlstadt's practice at Holy Communion, "while granting that it was not wrong to give the bread and wine into the hands of the

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[67]Tappert, op. cit., 218, 220, 222, 249.

[68]Ibid., 56.

[69]Koehler, *History*, 82.

[70]Ernest Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, 538.

[71]Martin Luther, "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg, 1522," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, 77-78. Hereafter referred to as "Eight Sermons."

laity, [Luther] urged moderation and restraint."[72] As we know, Luther was the champion of the priesthood of all believers, yet he also recognized the necessity of peace and good order in public ministry forms and church polity. This led Luther and his followers to confess in the Apology that it was their "*deep desire* [emphasis added] to maintain the church polity and various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, although they were created by human authority."[73]

To summarize: it was because of Luther's conservative nature that the Lutheran church continued to use worship and ministry forms that outwardly seemed quite Catholic, although inwardly they were imbued with an evangelical spirit. Historically, Lutheran forms of worship have been traditional and liturgical, while Lutheran forms of ministry have tended to be hierarchical. In both instances, the desired result was maintenance of Christian liberty alongside peace and good order to promote and further the proclamation of the gospel. That history cannot be denied or argued.

However, neither can that history be used in a legalistic manner, as when someone might say, for instance, "We should do worship or ministry this way, because Luther did it this way." Luther would be appalled at his name being used in such a statement concerning adiaphora! While Luther's forms were certainly conservative and gospel-oriented—and, yes, even good—we must be careful not to make Luther into a "new law" or to use his name to infringe on someone else's Christian liberty. Remember: such an infringement was Luther's foremost concern!

However, that's exactly what many of the so-called Old (conservative) Lutherans did when they first arrived in America. They legalistically imposed the traditional Lutheran forms of the Old Country upon New World Christians. Koehler reports:

> When, for instance, outward forms were to be instituted and were urged as specifically Lutheran, the non-clerical Christians [i.e., the laity] were handicapped because of lack of training along these lines. Their intuitive feeling and rightful aversion, to which they might give voice, did not count, of course, when *Vater Luther* or some other church father was cited as sponsor, and it took a rare amount of Christian courage in those days to insist on one's Christian liberty over against the doctors of the doctrine.[74]

On the other hand, Luther would say, people shouldn't use their Christian liberty "trump card" to dismiss traditional forms of worship

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[72]Schwiebert, op. cit., 542. Cf. Martin Luther, "Eight Sermons," 89-91.

[73]Tappert, op. cit., 214.

[74]Koehler, *History*, 83.

and ministry simply because they're itching to have something new and exciting. Sadly, that has often been the approach taken to combat traditionalism, as Koehler states: "Needless to say, those who appealed to Christian liberty, too, were inhibited by the current intellectualism of the age and thus quite often in the same bondage of legalism that militated against the true conception of the freedom of the Gospel."[75] When it comes right down to it, both traditionalism and faddism in worship and ministry forms tend to be two sides of the same coin. Both are often the result of intellectual, even spiritual, slothfulness. Rather than giving God our best, we give him the easiest, the "most comfortable," and too often the most mundane.

Instead let us strive to give our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier the very best in all we do! That's Lutheran! To do that we must steer clear of the two false and extreme approaches to Christian liberty, both of which result in slothful legalism. We must strike an evangelically balanced approach to adiaphora as Luther did by remembering and putting into practice these seven scriptural truths:

1) All forms instituted by men are, in themselves, free to be used or left unused in Christian liberty (1 Co 6:12; 9:19; 10:23).

2) The goal of Christian liberty is unhindered love and service to God and our fellow Christian (Ga 5:13; 1 Co 9:19; 10:24), a love that is often best expressed by voluntarily surrendering our Christian liberty for the sake of the gospel (1 Co 9:19-23).

3) All beneficial forms instituted by men will promote peace and good order (1 Co 14:33,40).

4) The best forms are those forms that put the focus squarely on the means of grace, the gospel (1 Co 9:23).

5) The gospel itself produces the best forms among men (Jn 15:5; Ga 5:22,23; Php 2:13).

6) If at all possible, uniformity in adiaphora should be sought (1 Co 1:10; 11:16).

7) Everything should be done to the glory of God (1 Co 10:31).

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III. Corinth Yesterday and Today

As I have already alluded to in the body of this essay, many of the same devilish attitudes that were found in the Corinthian congregation of the first century can be found today within the Christian church, within the Wisconsin Synod, and, yes, even within our own hearts. That should come as no surprise. We are all sinners. Chris-

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[75]Ibid., 83.

tians have always been tempted to trust human institutions to work change in the hearts of unbelievers and Christians alike instead of relying on God's institution, the gospel of forgiveness and eternal salvation. The gospel seems so powerless and so foolish! It doesn't always produce the results we want, and it almost never produces those results as quickly as we want. And so we strike upon other ideas—legalistic ones—pushing, prodding, and coercing as the law does, rather than wooing, winning, and inviting as the gospel does. It would be naïve to suggest that we have never had those "bright ideas" ourselves, because we all have. We've all broken the First Commandment in our lives as Christian leaders, trusting ourselves, our methods, and our forms instead of trusting the Holy Spirit to work faith and good works discreetly through the gospel in his own good time.

Yet we continue to trust human institutions! In my opinion, one of the biggest mistakes we can make is to look at the way another church or congregation "does it"—particularly a church that is exhibiting a lot of numerical growth—and then say, "We're going to do worship and ministry their way, because their way works!" How naïve! Now, I'm not saying that we can't learn things about gospel ministry from other churches, even those outside our fellowship. We can. But before we jump headlong into "doing things their way"—using their humanly devised forms of worship and ministry—we need to ask ourselves some very fundamental questions: "Why is their way of doing things so 'successful'? Is their 'success' based on legalistic, human institutions, or is it a result of God's evangelical institution, the gospel? Has this church hit upon a form of preaching the gospel that is better and richer than the form my church is currently using? Or is their growth, at least in part, a result of incipient legalism?" The answer is often the latter.

We need to ask the question: What of God and what of men? Too often we don't.

> [Instead, we adopt spiritually barren, human forms] thoughtlessly, mechanically, without really thinking anything about it. In every instance, the gospel is not the great mainspring, which is in itself a great, glorious treasure and also ripens beautiful fruits, not only insofar as the result is great and beautiful, but also the manner in which it is obtained. These other methods are not only in themselves of a legalistic nature according to their derivation, but they also will bring along in their train [legalistic habits] . . . into the whole life of the church, and then at the end this produces results that are worthless, mechanical, superficial, external, artificial, as these attributes apply in each individual case.[76]

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[76]John Ph. Koehler, "Legalism Among Us," *The Wauwatosa Theology,* Vol. II, 278.

Notice: One may get "results" from using legalistic forms—big numbers!—but have you fulfilled our Savior's Great Commission to "preach the *gospel* to all creation" (Mk 16:15)? Hardly. Permit me several examples to illustrate my point.

I am convinced that I could get a whole lot more people to join my congregation if numerical growth for its own sake was really the goal. All I'd need to do is be more legalistic than I already tend to be by nature. All I'd need to do is be more like my Baptist friends down the street. All I'd need to do is emulate the "gospel preaching" that I hear resounding in those cauldrons of legalism and twist the sacraments of God's free forgiveness into something that the Christian offers to God. Or I could be more like my Roman Catholic friends downtown and tell people that unless they are a member of the *Lutheran* church, they are going to hell! That unless they contribute "such and such" to their salvation, they are in danger of eternal flames. Simply preach "sanctification" to the exclusion of justification, even though that's a theological non sequitur. But preaching "sanctification" gets results, they argue! Yes, legalism does produce outward results.

In addition, I am convinced that I could get a whole lot more people into worship and Bible study in my congregation if that in itself was *really* the goal. All I'd need to do is be more legalistic than I already tend to be by nature. I could get my congregational members to place a heavier envelope in the offering plate every Sunday if that was *really* the goal. All I'd need to do is be more legalistic. Yes, I could have a congregation of thousands in time, I could have my own TV network, I could have my name on bookshelves and marquees throughout the world if that was *really* the goal. All I'd need to do is be more legalistic.

Simply put, if you want *church* members, and if you want those church members to get things done—to "act like Christians"—well then my advice to you is this: adopt the forms of churches that seem to be "successful" without scrutinizing the reason for their "success." Or better yet: adopt their forms without scrutiny with the intention of simply "adding the gospel" later on. You'll probably be "successful," too. But in the end, you'll probably have to remove the word "evangelical" from your name because you will have ceased to be truly evangelical. History has proven that legalism shrewdly accompanies the forms it spawns, no matter how conscientiously we try to "inject" the gospel into those forms. To even attempt it is like trying to put "new wine into old wineskins." Jesus himself promised that it wouldn't work. In fact, it is destined to fail miserably. "Both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined" (Mk 2:22). But on the "upside," such legalism is "successful" in this world ruled by the *opinio legis.* It brings "results."

Yes, legalism makes *church* members. It also makes people do things that by nature they wouldn't normally do. But legalism does something else: It destroys Christian faith. It robs people of Christ and the complete freedom he has won for them. Yes, it nullifies the gospel, the institution of God.

We could have such "success" in the Wisconsin Synod if that was *really* our goal, if that was *really* the task that our Savior gave his Church. But our goal is *not* to make simple *church* members by cramming human institutions down people's throats or by deceiving people into thinking that we're something we're not. Sadly we all forget that over and over again! Our goal and privilege is to assist the Holy Spirit in making *Church* members, true disciples, that is, members of the one holy Christian and apostolic Church.

We too want growth—real growth in faith and love. But how is that goal achieved? How is that task accomplished? Just one way! "Preach the gospel to all creation" (Mk 16:15), "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:19,20). God's institution, the gospel, is our only hope, our only stay, our only salvation, and God's only means of grace. And so what kind of human institutions— forms of worship and ministry—are we going to want to have and use? Only those that originate in the gospel, are grounded in the gospel, and proclaim the gospel of God's free forgiveness and the eternal life won for us through our Savior's holy, precious blood and innocent sufferings and death. Only God's institution has the power to save people now and in eternity. Human inventions simply won't do it.

The Corinthians forgot that. We forget that. We need to ask the question: "What of God, and what of men?"

That's why Paul wrote what he did in his first letter to the Corinthians. That's also why Paul needed to write elsewhere: "I am not ashamed of the gospel," (Ro 1:16) because sometimes we act like we are; we act as if we don't really trust the gospel to do its saving work. Yes, Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians and us that our salvation—and that our work of proclaiming salvation—does not rest on the wisdom of Greeks or the miraculous signs of Jews, glorious and successful as they may appear. Nor does it rest on the slick forms and methods that other modern churches may employ, even though they may produce "results." Instead, our salvation and the true success of our work rely solely on one thing and one thing only: God's institution, the gospel.

> We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolish-
> ness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and

> Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. . . . It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Co 1:23-25,30,31).

We are thankful for the growth the Holy Spirit produces whether it comes in a trickle or in a flood. Let us continue to rely on his power alone.

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