THE LUTHERAN LITURGY

The word LITURGY is misunderstood or misapplied many times, even by Lutherans. In this series of articles, we will attempt to define the word, then to explain the various facets of its meaning in the Lutheran Church.

Liturgy, liturgics, and related words all come from the Greek word λειτουργία [pronounced lie-tour-GEE-ah], which originally meant almost any dutiful public service. This could be sweeping the streets, military service, keeping up the roads running through or around one’s property, and the like.

It finally came to have the specialized meaning of a religious worship service. However, this does not mean only the order of the service used in church, but also embraces such things as the Church Year, the vestments for the clergy, the use of set colors in altar paraments and vestments, and the use of paraments and vestments themselves.

German Lutherans used the term GOTTESDIENST (literally "God-service" or "service of God." The possessive sense of the word isn't our service to Him, which is the popular conception of "worship" but rather His "service" to us in forgiving our sins and creating and sustaining faith. In American Lutheranism, we often anglicize Gottesdienst to the "Divine Service" when speaking of worship with Holy Communion.

Our first concern will be with the orders of worship. Of these, only three will be considered—the Order of the Holy Communion, Matins, and Vespers. Perhaps a question arises now: "Why not the Order of the Morning Service without Holy Communion?" To answer this, we say that originally, no such order was considered, for the Sacrament was always an integral part of the service. The present form came about as a concession to Pietism, which was a movement accenting God's Word and a holy life at the expense of receiving God's gifts in the Sacraments.

Second, this form is, in a general way, contained in the Order of the Holy Communion. The purpose of our study of liturgy is to first give it meaning, that every member may have his or her worship life enriched; and second, that in the face of the sectarian influence around us, we may more deeply appreciate our rich heritage.

The essence of a particular denomination or confessional body determines its liturgy. The Lutheran emphasis is on the ministry of Word and Sacrament, so the service order divides itself into three parts: 1) Preparation; 2) The Office of the Word; 3) The Office of the Sacrament. In every order of worship, we have the SACRIFICIAL element (we reach out to God) and the SACRAMENTAL element (God reaches out to us). This explains why, in many congregations, the pastor faces the altar for certain (Sacrificial) portions of the service, while in other parts (Sacramental) he faces the congregation.

The various segments of the service have Latin, Greek or Hebrew names which are carry-overs from the older liturgies.
HOLY COMMUNION

Some of the distinction between the Order of Holy Communion and morning worship without the Sacrament has been removed in the new Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod hymnal, Lutheran Worship. Here, the services follow the same pattern until after the sermon and Creed. Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal—the new hymnal of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church—contains "The Common Service," which is designed to be used with or without the Sacrament being celebrated. Additionally, Christian Worship has the "Service of Word and Sacrament" and the "Service of the Word." Because many congregations still use The Lutheran Hymnal, and most older Lutherans and pastors will remember it, references will be made to it and the newer hymnals. For purposes of saving space, Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal will be abbreviated CW, The Lutheran Hymnal will be abbreviated TLH, and Lutheran Worship will be abbreviated LW. Basically, LW's "Divine Service I" is the same order of worship as TLH's "Order of Holy Communion" on pages 15 and following.

With a few differences, "The Common Service" of CW follows the same pattern. The options in the service which are used on non-Communion Sundays in LW are, by-and-large, to be found in TLH's "Order of Morning Service," pages 5 and following. It would be helpful to have CW, LW, or TLH on hand as you look through this appendix. The variations in "Divine Service II" of LW will also be mentioned in this section.

THE INVOCATION—The word means "call upon," and is so termed because we call upon the Triune God. In effect, this is an announcement that this congregation worships the Triune God, that its members are baptized in His Name, and that everything in the service is to be done in the Name of the Triune God. It is also a call that brings God actively to the scene of worship. The sign of the Cross may be made to show that all which follows is possible only through the suffering and death of Christ upon the Cross of Calvary, the benefits of which are ours through Baptism. [TLH pp. 5 & 15; LW p. 136; CW p. 15]

THE CONFESSION OF SINS—The first part of confession is the call to repentance. Next come two VERSICLES (little verses) said by the pastor with RESPONSES by the congregation. These take note of the grace of God whereby we are assured of the forgiveness of sins. Then pastor and congregation together confess their sins in the General Confessions. All these segments are sacrificial, and the pastor faces the altar.

Then the pastor faces the congregation to pronounce the Absolution, which fully exercises the Office of the Keys. Sacramental in character, it is the fulfillment of Christ's promise, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." It is not a pious wish, but a statement of fact. Many say that it is at the end of the Absolution that the service proper starts. [TLH pp. 15-16; LW pp. 136-137, left-hand column; CW pp. 15-16]

An optional Announcement of Grace included, wherein the minister speaks the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins to the congregation. He does not, however, pronounce the Absolution. This is often used when there is no celebration of the Sacrament and also if individual Confession and Absolution is practiced in the congregation. [TLH pp. 5-6; LW pp. 136-137, right-hand column]
THE INTROIT (pronounced IN-trō-it) or Psalmody or Psalm of the Day—The word Introit means "going in." Originally, it was at this time that the priest or pastor went in through the gate at the altar rail into the chancel. All the preparatory service was said from outside the rail to this point. Many Lutheran congregations have returned to this ritual in present day. It has its historical beginning in the Old Testament, when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies only after he had made the offering for his sins and the sins of the people. The Introit is composed of verses of one or more Psalms. The verse which begins and ends the Introit is called the Antiphon. [TLH pp. 6 & 16; LW p. 137; CW moves the Psalm between the first and second Scripture readings on p. 17]

THE GLORIA PATRI was originally chanted by the choir in response to the Introit. The name comes from the first two words in Latin, meaning, "Glory be to the Father." In LW, the Gloria Patri is printed as an integral part of the Introit and both CW and LW include it with each Psalm; in TLH, it is printed separately in the hymnal. [TLH pp. 6 & 16]

THE KYRIE (pronounced KEAR-ee-ay) is not, as many believe, another confession of sins, but is a recognition of our total dependence upon God in our constant struggle against sin. The full title is, "Kyrie Eleison," or, "Lord, have mercy." [TLH pp. 7 & 17; LW p. 137; CW moves it between the Confession of Sins and the Absolution on p. 15]

THE GLORIA IN EXCELSIS (ex-CELL-sis)—This song paraphrases the song of the angels at Jesus' birth, "Glory to God in the Highest," and continues in that same exultant note with a hymn of praise. It is the heart's response to the Kyrie. During Lent, the Gloria in Excelsis is omitted from the liturgy, as are all Alleluias. [TLH pp. 7-9 & 17-19; LW pp. 138-139; CW pp. 16-17]

THE SALUTATION—This loving blessing spoken to the congregation by the pastor and responded to by the congregation is, in effect, saying, "Dear members, may you receive the benefit of the Word which is about to be spoken to you." The Response says, "Dear Pastor, may the blessings of God be upon you as you bring this Word to us." [TLH pp. 9 & 19; LW p. 139; CW p. 17]

THE COLLECT (or Prayer) OF THE DAY is the final segment of the preparation for the Office of the Word. It is a short prayer in which are collected the thoughts of the entire congregation as they apply to theme of the day [see the remarks on the Gospel and on the Ordinaries and Propers which follow this section]. It is almost always a one sentence prayer, and always closes with the Trinitarian address. [TLH pp. 9 & 19; LW pp. 139-140; CW p. 16]

THE OLD TESTAMENT READING (or First Lesson)—In LW and CW, this is the first of the Scripture readings in the Office of the Word. In TLH, a regular spot for it was not reserved in the liturgy. However, there were times in the Church Year when an Old Testament reading was used instead of the Epistle, and some pastors regularly included Old Testament readings as part of Sunday worship. Normally, an Old Testament reading is selected which is in close harmony with the Gospel as the "theme for the day" is developed. In the Three-Year Lectionary Cycle [see Ordinaries and Propers], almost every book of the Old Testament is represented in the readings at some time during the cycle. Occasionally, the First Reading is from the Book of Acts. [LW p. 140; CW p. 17]
THE GRADUAL—Gradual comes from the Latin word meaning "step." It was at this time that the minister moved across the altar steps from one end to the other to read the Gospel after the Old Testament and/or Epistle readings. The reason for the move is symbolic. In Church architecture, "east" is always the direction facing the altar. The preliminary readings were read in the "south," since this is the side of light, where the sun travels across the sky in the northern hemisphere. The Gospel moved the "light" of Christ into the "north," where darkness ruled, symbolic of the Good News going out into a sin-darkened world. Just as the Introit moved the pastor to the altar, so the Gradual moves him across its front. Many congregations have dropped its usage, or have retained only the "Hallelujah/Alleluia." The lyrics of the Gradual change, but not weekly. Instead, they change with the seasons of the Church Year, providing a continuity within each season. [TLH pp. 10 & 20; LW p. 140]

THE EPISTLE (or Second Lesson) is a reading from one of the Epistles of the New Testament. During certain seasons, the Epistle is replaced by a reading from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. During the special Holy Seasons, the Epistle readings selected have direct bearing on the Gospel. In other times, such as the many weeks following the Pentecost Festival, the readings are done lectio continua, or "continuous reading." Here, we simply read through a letter from one end to the other in the order in which the selections occur. Sometimes there is a close relationship with the Gospel and Old Testament readings—usually, there is not. The congregation is usually seated during the reading of the Old Testament and the Epistle, since this is viewed as a time of instruction, The standing of the pastor and the seating of the people reminds us of the relationship of a teacher with his pupils. [TLH pp. 10 & 20; LW p. 140; CW p. 17]

THE HALLELUJAH (Sentences for the Season, Alleluia, or Verse of the Day) is a remnant of the ancient Graduals. Sung between the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel, Hallelujah is a Hebrew word meaning "Praise the Lord." [TLH pp. 10 & 20; LW p. 140; CW p. 18]

THE GOSPEL—The divinely inspired accounts of the four Evangelists of the birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ make up the Gospel reading. The pastor announces it, and the congregation responds, "Glory to You, O Lord." This is an appropriate response, for it is in and through the Gospel that Jesus comes to us. The congregation rises in honor of Christ, ready to listen to and follow His words. The Gospel reading concludes with another ascription of praise to Christ, the Anointed Savior. [TLH pp. 11 & 21; LW pp. 140-141; CW p. 18]

THE CREED—Whether the Apostles' or the Nicene Creed, it is our confession of faith in answer to the promises we have heard in the Scripture readings. The Creed is normally one place in the Order of the Holy Communion when we use "I" rather than "we." This is because each person must believe for himself or herself. In CW, the ancient tradition of saying, "We believe," has been retained in the Nicene Creed. The Apostles' Creed is part of the traditional Baptismal liturgy of the Church, and should always be used under normal circumstances when anyone is baptized. [TLH pp. 12 & 22; LW pp. 141-143; CW pp. 18-19]

THE SERMON is the high point of the Service of the Word, and—with the Sacrament of Holy Communion—the one of the two peaks of the entire morning's worship. Usually we unite in the
"Sermon Hymn" or "The Hymn of the Day" prior to the preaching. It is chosen with care by the pastor to prepare his hearers for the message of the sermon. In LW, a list is provided, which attempts to relate this hymn to the thematic idea of the Gospel. During the last stanza, the pastor will often pray before the altar or in the pulpit. He asks for guidance and help as he breaks the Bread of Life for Christ's holy people.

Texts are not simply plucked out of thin air, but are carefully chosen from one or another series of Gospel, Epistle or Old Testament readings, from the Introit or Gradual, or from the Psalm of the Day. Occasionally, the pastor may select a "free text." This is a text not of the readings for the day. Hopefully, it still closely fits the day's theme.

Sermons in the Lutheran Church are not a few choice proverbs and anecdotes, nor are they a number of "off the cuff" remarks. Rather, Lutheran sermons are carefully and prayerfully prepared explanations of God's Word [see Ordinaries and Propers]. Here, the responsibility is not only on the pastor for good preaching. The congregation is also responsible for being good hearers. [TLH pp. 12 & 22; LW p. 143; CW p. 19]

THE OFFERING and THE OFFERTORY—In our giving of gifts to the Lord, we act in grateful response to all our many blessings which come from Him. In the early Church, the gifts of the people (mainly food) were brought before the altar and presented as offerings. Enough of the presented bread and wine was set aside as was needed for the Holy Communion, and the remainder was later distributed among the poor. The Offertory, "Create in Me . . . ," is our cry that we might stand before God with pure hearts, and that we might receive full forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ. [TLH pp. 12-13 & 22-23; LW pp. 143-144; CW p. 20]

THE GENERAL PRAYER or PRAYER OF THE CHURCH—Here is our answer to St. Paul's exhortation that "supplications, intercessions and prayers be made for all men." The General Prayer is modeled after prayers in use six centuries ago. Provision is also made for special intercessions, such as a prayer for the communicants. We do not always use the General Prayer, but often a seasonal prayer. This latter is also a General Prayer, but has special seasonal emphasis. [The texts most commonly used are TLH pp. 13 & 23-24 or LW pp. 132-133.]

In LW's Divine Service I, an alternate form is the only one printed within the liturgy. It is in the form of a Kyrie, with each petition, intercession or supplication prayed by the pastor. The congregation then responds, "Lord, have mercy." [p. 144] CW provides Prayers of the Church [p. 20] for each liturgical season, the set beginning on page 123. The Lord's Prayer is then prayed in CW's "Common Service," but follows later in TLH and LW.

In services where there is no Holy Communion, the service concludes with The Lord's Prayer, the Collect for the Word or the Collect for the Church, and the Benediction. More on the Lord's Prayer and the Benediction will follow below. The Lord's Prayer is also discussed in Chapter 10, "What Do Lutherans Believe About Prayer?" The Collect for the Word is a prayer that God's Word would have full effect on our lives, leading us to everlasting life. The Collect for the Church is our prayer that the saving Word would be proclaimed throughout the Church, and that we might serve Him until the end of our days. [TLH p. 14; LW pp. 155-157; CW pp. 20, 25]
When the Sacrament of the Altar is celebrated, the worship continues with the Service of Holy Communion. TLH allows the option of including a hymn prior to the beginning of the Office of Holy Communion [p. 24].

**THE PREFACE and the SURSUM CORDA**—This is the beginning of the Office of Holy Communion, going before the actual celebration. Here again, the pastor and the congregation employ the Salutation [see above]. Sursum Corda is Latin for "Lift up your hearts!" So again, the pastor is saying, "The Lord be with you, my dear flock, as you receive the Holy Supper." In response, the congregation says, "And with you, dear pastor, as you offer it to us." The next Versicle and Response are a call by the pastor and a pledge by the congregation to dedicate a thankful heart and life to God. The "Common" Preface ends with that part of the preface which is said during the entire Church Year. [TLH pp. 24-25; LW pp. 144-145; CW p. 21]

**THE PROPER PREFACE**—Here the pastor says or chants that part of the preface specific to the day or season of the Church Year. This continues our pledge to devote ourselves wholly to God in all we think, say or do. [TLH p. 25; LW pp. 145-148; CW pp. 21-22]

**THE SANCTUS**—Combined with the Proper Preface, the Sanctus ("Holy") may best be described as "our table prayer before the Lord's Supper." The first part of the Sanctus, "Holy, holy, holy ...," comes from the prophet's heavenly vision in Isaiah 6. It concludes with the Benedictus, which was the song of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. [TLH p. 26; LW pp. 148-149; CW p. 22]

**THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER**—Found in LW, but not TLH or CW, this prayer gives thanks that Christ came to earth and won our salvation, In it, we ask that we would properly receive the Sacrament and be strengthened through it. It is not a necessary part of the liturgy. Some feel that it weakens the effect of the Communion Liturgy's pointing toward the Sacrament by placing too much emphasis on the communicant. Others use it joyfully, seeing it as our final opportunity to prepare our hearts and minds to receive the Blessed Sacrament. [LW p. 149]

**THE LORD'S PRAYER** (Our Father)—This is the distinctive property of the Christian Church, and joining in it before Communion reminds us that we are of the family of God, and that we are all one with our brothers and sisters of faith the world over. See also Chapter 10, "What Do Lutherans Believe About Prayer." [TLH p. 27; LW p. 149; CW p. 20]

**THE VERBA or Words of Institution**—These words are spoken to the congregation over the bread and wine; the elements are thus consecrated—dedicated to holy use. Use of the Words also reminds us that this is not a man-made custom, but was ordained by Christ Himself on the eve of His death. By using our Savior's own words, we are assured of the remission of sins in the Sacrament, and strength for life. [TLH p. 27; LW p. 150; CW p. 23]

**THE PAX DOMINI** is a final blessing spoken by the pastor prior to the Distribution. The words mean the "Peace of the Lord," and are spoken to assure the communicants of their peace with God which comes from the pardon of their sins in the Sacrament. It is not only a blessing for the moment, but "always." [TLH p. 27; LW p. 151; CW p. 23]
THE AGNUS DEI—Pronounced "AHN-yus DAY" or "AHG-nus DAY" these words have their origin in the words of John the Baptist, who said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." It simply means, "Lamb of God." [TLH p. 28; LW p. 151; CW p. 23]

THE DISTRIBUTION—We have reached the high point of the Sacrament, for it is now that, in bread and wine, we eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord. It is for this reason that the pastor speaks the words of distribution, "Take, eat, this is the true body of the Lord .... Take, drink, this is the true blood of the Lord ...." This should be a particular time of reverence, for it is a heavenly feast prepared by Christ for His children on earth. The customs of bowing and kneeling for the Sacrament as two-fold signs of humility and reverence are praiseworthy indeed.

During the distribution, the congregation often sings one or more hymns. Usually, these are either specific to the Lord's Supper or to the theme of the day. At times, they deal with other aspects of our salvation or our Christian lives. It is good to sing these hymns wholeheartedly as we wait in the pew. It is also a good practice to bring one's hymnal up toward the altar, proceeding toward the Sacrament with songs of praise upon one's lips. Following the distribution, the pastor speaks the Dismissal to the congregation. It can either be spoken to each group [table] as it prepares to leave the altar, or can be said to the entire congregation after all have communed. [TLH p. 29; LW p. 152; CW p. 23]

THE NUNC DIMITTIS is the prayer of the ancient Simeon as he held the Christ Child in his arms. While not part of the earliest forms of the Liturgy, it is certainly most appropriate for us to sing. We have partaken of Christ and of His forgiveness. We have seen God's Salvation. The words mean, "Let me depart." [TLH pp. 29-30; LW pp. 152-153; CW p. 24]

The service now rapidly draws to its close. We permit nothing to detract from this climax of our worship.

THE THANKSGIVING is our prayer of thanks for the blessings of the Sacrament. One of two possible Post-Communion Collects is prayed as part of our giving thanks. [TLH pp. 30-31; LW pp. 153-154; CW p. 24]

THE SALUTATION—The Salutation and Response appear a third time in TLH. They are now a mutual blessing on the homeward way. [TLH p. 31]

THE BENEDICAMUS—"Bless we the Lord," is the call to the congregation to give to God the thanks due to Him. The response, "Thanks be to God," is a final sentence of thanksgiving to God for Word and Sacrament, for pardon and peace, for all that He has done for us. [TLH p. 31; LW p. 154]

THE BENEDICTION is the Blessing that God told Moses to have Aaron and his sons speak to Israel as an assurance of grace and peace. Because it was to be spoken by the High Priest Aaron and his successors, it is sometimes called the "Aaronic Benediction." It seals the service. "Benediction" means "Good Word" or "Blessing," and is often spoken by the pastor with arms outstretched to signify the all-encompassing arms of God which safely enfold His people. It
concludes with the sign of the cross to show that all the preceding worship service has been possible only because of the Cross of Calvary and that He intends it for the good of those baptized in His name. [TLH p. 31; LW p. 155; CW p. 25]

As indicated above, the First and Second Settings of Divine Service II in LW follow a slightly different form than does the traditional Order of Holy Communion. Since the only real differences between the First and Second Settings of Divine Service II are musical, let us only compare the First Setting with the traditional order of worship.

The Invocation and Confession [pp. 158-159] begin the service. The words of the Confession are slightly different, but the intent is the same. The option of the Absolution or the Announcement of Grace remains. The service continues with the Introit/Gloria Patri [p. 159]

The Kyrie is longer and more specific—the pastor announces to the congregation what is to be prayed for, and the congregation responds, "Lord, have mercy."

The Hymn of Praise can be either the Gloria in Excelsis, as is traditional, or This Is the Feast may be sung. The Hymn of Praise is not sung during Advent or Lent. The Gloria in Excelsis is proper to sing during the Christmas through Epiphany Cycle. "This is the Feast" is correct during Easter-Pentecost. The text of "This is the Feast" comes from John's vision of Jesus' heavenly homecoming in Revelation. [pp. 160-163]

Following the Hymn of Praise are the Salutation and the Collect of the Day. Then the appointed Scriptures of the day are read, with the appropriate responses and the Gradual being used. [pp. 164-165]

In a departure from TLH, CW's "Common Service," and LW's Divine Service I, the Hymn of the Day and the Sermon follow the readings. The Creed is not said until after the sermon. In this position, it becomes the congregation's response to the entire Service of the Word. [pp. 165-167]

If Holy Communion is not celebrated, the service concludes with the Offering, the Offertory, the General Prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and the Benediction. [pp. 175-177]

Should Holy Communion be celebrated, the Prayers follow the Creed. The Offering is then collected as the altar is prepared for Communion. Two different Offertories are possible. Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful is a prayer that Word and Sacrament would strengthen the Church and the congregation for life now and until life everlasting. What Shall I Render to the Lord? is a promise to God that the believer would look to the Lord for all things, especially salvation, and that he or she would live a life of sacrificial service. [pp. 168-169]

Following the Offertory are the Preface, the Eucharistic Prayer (optional), the Lord's Prayer, and the Verba. Then is said the Pax Domini, followed by the Agnus Dei. After this come the Distribution and Dismissal. The Post-Communion Canticle is either the Nunc Dimittis or Thank the Lord. The latter is a joyful response to the forgiveness of sins granted in the Sacrament. [pp. 170-174]
There is no responsive thanksgiving following the Canticle. The service continues with the Collect of Thanksgiving, omits Salutation and Benedictamus, and ends with the Benediction. [pp. 174-175]

Another option for the Service of Holy Communion is found in Divine Service III in LW. Here, most of the liturgy is replaced with hymns having the same doctrinal and thematic content. The Kyrie, the Gloria in Excelsis, the Creed, and other parts of the service may be replaced with various canticles, chants and hymns. This service is based on the German Mass of Martin Luther. [LW pp. 197-198]

**ORDINARIES AND PROPERS**

As mentioned previously, some reference needs to be made not only to what is done weekly, but also what changes at various times during the Church Year. An overview of the entire Church Calendar will follow our examination of Matins and Vespers, but a bit more may be said at this time. Certain things within the Order of Service do not change from season to season or from week to week. These are called the Ordinaries. Other items, such as Collect of the Day, Scripture Readings, Introit, Gradual, and Proper Preface change on a weekly or seasonal basis during the Church Year. They are called Propers, since it is "proper" to use them at their designated time.

For many years, our Lutheran Church followed a one year cycle of Scripture readings (Lectionary). Many Lutheran congregations now follow a three year cycle. This was developed in an attempt to expose more of Holy Scripture to God's people from week to week. During the three years, readings are made from almost every book of the Bible. If a pastor preached on the Old Testament, Epistle/Second Reading, and Gospel texts appointed, he would have about nine years of texts without much duplication.

Add in series on the Introits, Psalms, Graduals, and Alleluia Verses and there are over ten years of possible sermon texts available with little duplication except at certain times during Church festivals such as Christmas. While there may be good reason for special series on such as the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, faithfully following the appointed readings for his sermons pulls the pastor is pulled away from the temptation to focus on familiar themes and pet peeves, and guides him toward preaching "the whole counsel of God."

**PARAMENTS AND VESTMENTS**

As with the other sections on liturgical practice, this area is far from complete. Its purpose is only to acquaint you with the skeletal framework of this subject. The two terms may be divided as follows for our purposes: Paraments are those "clothes" which are used for the adorning of the church, such as linens, draperies, etc.; Vestments are those articles of clothing worn by the clergy during the Divine Service. The two terms are used interchangeably at times, but here we will maintain the distinction.
A brief comment on architecture and appointments must also be made to understand the "why" of these two terms and their practical application. In the Lutheran Church, as in other liturgical bodies, the **Altar** occupies a place of prominence because it signifies God's presence, particularly the presence of the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion. It is the focal point in the Sacrament of the Altar. Here the communicants gather for the celebration; here are our prayers are offered; here are our vows are spoken and our offerings gathered. The altar is also a visible reminder of the sacrifice Christ made for our sins.

In our Church, the **Lectern** and, especially, the **Pulpit** also enjoy great prominence—much more so than in the Roman Catholic Church—because of the great emphasis on the Office of the Word, especially preaching—the proclaiming of the Word of God. It is natural, therefore, that these three should be the most richly adorned.

Of course, the **Baptismal Font** is also of great importance, for it is in Baptism that God washes away sins, places His Name on people, and adopts them into His family. However, practical consideration of the effect of water on rich and beautiful cloth must be made, and the Font is usually left unadorned, except for whatever carving, painting, or other permanent structural decoration there might be.

The paraments have an historic, practical place, as well as a decorative purpose. The size of our altars in general and the use of paraments in particular had their origin in the use of the stone tombs in the catacombs as altars by the early Christians. These tombs were then covered with a coat or cloak covered in turn by a clean piece of linen for the celebration of the Sacrament. **Candelabra** have a much earlier origin in the Old Testament Church, but were used in the catacombs and continued lighting the ancient Church. They are called "Office Lights." Often, candles on the altar are lighted for Holy Communion, and, in some areas, for Baptisms as well. Other congregations make use of a separate **Baptismal Candle** or use the **Paschal Candle** for the celebration of this Sacrament.

It stands to reason that when coats were used to cover the altar, they came in many colors. Today, generally speaking, we use a minimum of five colors: **Violet** is used for the seasons of penitence, Advent and Lent; **White** is for the festivals of our Lord—Christmas, Epiphany and Easter; **Red** is for Pentecost—the Festival of the Holy Ghost—and for martyrs' days and Reformation Day; **Green** is used following the Epiphany octave and during the non-festival part of the year; **Black** normally is used only on Good Friday. On this most solemn of days, it is also proper to remove all paraments from altar, pulpit, and lectern.

These colors were chosen because **violet** is associated with royalty and with mourning (**black** with deepest mourning); **white** is the color of purity; **red** is the color of fire and of blood; **green** is the color of life. The use of the five colors is a result of the Catholic Council of Trent in 1546. We may use more colors, as did the ancient Church. Other colors being used with greater frequency are **blue** (the color of purity, also the traditional color of the Virgin Mary) for Advent, **gold**—the most precious color—for Easter, and **scarlet** for Holy Week, from Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday. The scarlet brings to mind that "although our sins be as scarlet," the blood of Christ Jesus washes them away.
The colored paraments on the altar are covered by a piece of pure linen which hangs down on both ends. This is called the **Fair Linen**. A small piece of square linen is placed upon the fair linen for the communion vessels to sit upon. This is the **Corporal**, from the Latin "corpus" (body). Their bright whiteness indicates holiness while, in a practical consideration, the fabric is much easier to clean should it be soiled by communion wine or candle residue. Many liturgical scholars connect these two linens with the grave clothes left behind by our resurrected Lord Jesus Christ (John 20:5-7; Luke 24:12).

The napkins used at Holy Communion are called **Purificators**. A veil commonly covers the communion vessels both before and after the celebration. The original purpose appears to have been to keep the flies and other insects out. Supposedly, two are needed—the **Chalice Veil**, prior to the celebration, and the post-communion veil afterward. Probably the majority of our congregations use only one veil for both times. These are more recent additions to the list of Communion cloths. Additional altar paraments also may be used but we will not list them here.

The **Communion Vessels**—though they do not fall into the category of paraments and vestments—certainly deserve mention. Briefly, these are: the **Pyx** or **Host Box**, in which the host (wafers) are stored; the **Paten**, or plate, upon which the hosts are placed for the distribution; the **Flagon**, the storage vessel for the wine; and the **Chalice**, the large cup. These vessels are traditionally made of silver, and in some cases are richly engraved or ornamented with precious stones—the chalice in particular. Many of them are gold lined. A large number of our congregations today are using the individual glasses, though these authors feel that it destroys to some extent the concept of "communion," or common fellowship. However, it does not affect in any way the validity of the Sacrament.

The parament for the pulpit or the lectern is commonly called the **Fall**. They may be the width of the reading desk, or they may simply be a narrow band of cloth which in many cases is used as a book marker. If the lectern and pulpit are carved, no fall is necessary.

Colored paraments customarily are made from the finest material the congregation can afford. Silk is considered the best fabric.

Many things might be said concerning church architecture, appointments, variations of paraments, stained glass, and such, but this will suffice for our purposes here.

When the **Vestments** for the clergy are mentioned, one finds more definite opinions expressed than on almost any other liturgical matter. Perhaps only changes in our hymnals are more likely to cause liturgical unrest.

What is it that determines if a vestment is "Lutheran" or not? But before we answer this question, let us pose and answer another: Why vestments at all? Vestments (paraments also) are **ADIAPHORA** [pronounced ah-dee-AH-for-ah]—things neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture. They are human inventions, but with a distinct purpose. The idea of a gown and the other vestments for the pastor is to cover him as a man, and to let him stand as God's spokesman before the congregation.
Now, what type of vestments are Lutheran? First we ask, "What makes it Lutheran? Is it because Luther wore it? Is it because it dates from the Old Testament of the early centuries of the New Testament Church? Or is it simply what we were accustomed to when we were children, or became accustomed to during our lifetimes?"

Many arguments can be waged on all sides of the question. The black robe was the common street and classroom garb of the clergy in the Middle Ages and in Luther's time, and was carried forward by succeeding generations. White vestments with various color combinations were worn over the black robe by the officiant at worship services. The Lutherans in general retained these historic vestments after the Reformation, but the Calvinists kept only the black robe. In 1733, Frederick Wilhelm I of Prussia ordered the Lutherans to do away with all vestments except the black robe. He repeated the order more strongly in 1737, as he attempted to force the parties to merge as one church. The age of Rationalism followed, and what had first been the unpopular order of a Calvinistic king became the accepted thing to do.

What is Lutheran in vestments? It depends on the viewpoint. Great variety is found in our Church. The best vestment is the one decided upon by the congregation and the pastor in their midst. One school of thought should never sneer at another. These things are and will remain matters of Christian liberty. Some years ago, the common opinion was that the Lutheran pastor should wear the plain, black, V-necked gown—and only that. This was generally supplanted by pastors wearing the short white garment—the Surplice—over the black, flowing Robe or over the more tailored and buttoned Cassock.

More and more, the white or natural flax-colored Alb is the garment of choice, often being belted with a rope or banded cloth Cincture. More pastors now also wear the Collar both in and out of worship services. Also worn by the majority of pastors is the Stole, the colored band of cloth about the neck, which hangs down on both sides of the chest. It denotes the yoke of service, and is worn in the proper liturgical color for the season. Recently, the Chasuble has made a significant return to Lutheran vestments. This poncho-like over-garment received its name because of its shape: Its Latin root "casula" means a "cottage" or a "little house." When a pastor wears the chasuble, it normally covers his stole and any cross or crucifix he might have around his neck.

Probably the best way of saying what is Lutheran in vestments is to say that ANY VESTMENT WORN BY THE LUTHERAN CLERGY IS LUTHERAN, for herein also is the exercise of Christian liberty shown—and Luther heartily espoused this liberty.