

## Concerning Chasubles, Traditions, The Lutheran Confessions and PowerPoint.

For the last few weeks you have seen the pastor wear a chasuble. Our WELS *Christian Worship Manual* says, “As the alb traces its history to the indoor tunic of ancient Rome, the chasuble has its roots in the outdoor cloak. Paul had this garment in mind when he asked Timothy to bring his cloak to Rome (2 Timothy 4:13). The chasuble is usually thought to be the principle vestment for the main Christian service. It is a poncho-shaped garment that slips over the head and hangs from the shoulders to about the knees. The chasuble has no actual sleeves; the sides of the garment are not as long as its front and back, since the wearer must have his arms free to carry out his duties at the service. The color of the chasuble usually matches the liturgical color of the season. Often decorative *orphreys* (strips of specially embroidered cloth) are attached to form a **Y** or Latin cross in the front or back of the vestment. Where congregations take special pride and care of pastoral vestments, the chasuble is invariably made of the finest and most expensive fabrics. While many Lutheran congregations have reclaimed the use of the alb and stole and have come to appreciate them as the historic vestments of Christian worship, the chasuble has not become as common. (*Christian Worship Manual*, page 98).”

Although the majority of our WELS churches do not use the chasuble, our WELS liturgical literature certainly allows for its use. Our Lutheran Confessions go even further. The **Augsburg Confession** says in Article XV on Church Ceremonies, “Our churches teach that ceremonies ought to be observed that may be observed without sin. Also, ceremonies that are profitable for tranquility and good order in the Church (in particular, holy days, festivals and the like) ought to be observed. (CONCORDIA, page 65).” The **Augsburg Confession**, Article XXIV, also states, “The Mass is held among us and *celebrated with the highest reverence*. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are also preserved (CONCORDIA, page 73).”

These quotes do not mention chasubles specifically. Yet, the original Lutherans had this in mind and included chasubles and other vestments in the category of the “usual ceremonies.” The Lutheran Church did not abandon these traditions because the Lutherans did not see themselves as forming a new church. They were no radical sect. Instead, by preserving the ancient, traditional customs and rites of the Church they were saying that they were part of the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church that traced its roots back to Christ and the Apostles.

So why and when did the Lutheran Church stop using the chasuble and other Lutheran rites (such as private confession and absolution)? Please allow an extremely simplified answer: A number of forces attacked the pure doctrine and practice of the Lutheran Church. Already in the 1500’s Calvinism made inroads into Lutheranism. Besides denying the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in Holy Communion, Calvinism also had a distrust of anything that looked “too Catholic” which really meant anything too ceremonial. Calvinism sought to get rid of all clergy vestments, most church art and most ceremonies. This was in keeping with their theology that over-emphasized the spiritual and downplayed the outward and physical.

In the 1700’s and 1800’s Lutheranism was attacked by Pietism and Rationalism. As we are studying in Sunday morning Bible Class, Pietism, like Calvinism, distrusted outward ceremony and placed an over-emphasis on inner spiritual feeling. Rationalism placed the emphasis on the intellect, and denied the supernatural. This cold logic had no interest in ceremonies, vestments or rites.

By the middle of the 1800’s there were still many fine Lutherans. However, Lutheranism had lost something. The outward appearance and outward practice of Lutheranism had shifted away from the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church. Its outward appearance more closely followed the philosophies of

Calvinism and Pietism. The Lutheran Church abandoned many of the fine rites, ceremonies, vestments and traditions that she had used profitably for many years.

So what's the big deal if we don't have all the traditional ceremonies? The danger in de-emphasizing the outward and the ceremonial is that the worship service now points the Christian to their own spiritual experience, their own abilities of Bible interpretation, their own zeal or, worst of all, the personality and skills of the pastor. However, the Scriptures teach us that salvation is external to us. Salvation comes *objectively* from God to sinners through outward means, namely the Word and sacraments. While it is true that ceremonies and traditional rites and vestments do not give us salvation, yet their use reinforces the scriptural truth that salvation is something different than what we can obtain on our own.

There's an old rule of thumb that goes something like this, "What you do in worship strongly influences what you believe." Therefore, Christians want worship to be noticeably different from anything else we experience in our common, secular life. We want the music to sound different. We want the building to be shaped different. We want the clothes and the ceremonies to look different. Why? Because the message is different! There is nothing like the gospel in the world. Only the gospel tells us that Jesus Christ is true God who took on real human flesh to suffer and die to pay for our sins. Only the gospel has the power to give faith and, through Spirit-created faith in Christ, to give us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Only the *objective gospel* of what Christ did *for us* has the power to deliver us from sin, death and the power of the devil. You will not—you cannot—find that message anywhere out there in the 'real' world. Since the gospel is different, we want the church and its worship to reflect this difference in all it is and does.

Sadly, many churches would rather blend in with the world rather than stand out from the world. You see that in how they worship. Some churches design their 'worship facilities' (they don't call them churches), to look like auditoriums, not traditional churches. They play pop music instead of the great hymns of the Christian Church. They have their pastors dress in a business suit or in business casual and address the 'audience' as if he were a motivational speaker instead of an ambassador of Christ. They remove altars, crucifixes, candles and stained glass and replace them with screens for PowerPoint presentations.

But such methods do not really harmonize with the objective, traditional message and practice of the Christian Church. Lutherans understand this and Lutherans who treasure their connection in the one, holy, apostolic and Christian Church want our worship to look different, sound different and even taste, touch and smell different. That's why we also want to look different than a lot of other denominations out there. That's even why we want to look different than some of our own WELS 'traditions.' Much of American Protestant Christianity and even a few of our WELS traditions (not doctrines) came out of Pietism and the de-emphasis of the objective gospel.

By restoring the profitable and excellent rites, traditions, ceremonies and practices of the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church, as expressed in our Lutheran Confessions, we are saying the same thing that our Lutheran forefathers insisted upon when they drafted the **Augsburg Confession**. We are no radical sect. We are part of the one true Christian Church on earth. We treasure its history. We accept its rites and traditions because they are our rites and traditions.

Now, again, it's true. Chasubles and stained glass, candles and crosses do not save us or forgive us. The Bible does not command us to use them. Nor does the Bible ever forbid the use of PowerPoint. But how you worship reveals volumes about what you believe about how God saves us. Lutherans believe that God saves us by what Christ has done for us, not by any choice or work on our part. Our traditional Lutheran worship has been carefully crafted and lovingly passed down to us so that we may participate in this great Christ-centered tradition. Even though you may not have known it before, chasubles are one small part of that great tradition.