

Becoming A Liturgical Lutheran Analysis Summary

Exploring the Journey of American Evangelicals into Confessional Lutheran Liturgy

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General:

Survey conducted using: Survey Monkey

Summary: The survey was conducted among American Evangelicals who are or recently have entered a liturgical Lutheran church in order to assess their misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with the Lutheran liturgy.

Problem Thesis:

The journey for American Evangelicals into Confessional Lutheranism is a long, difficult, and sometimes scary road. The shift from American Evangelicalism into Confessional Lutheranism is neither something that just happens overnight, nor is it an easy shift. The shift has linguistic, emotional, worldview, and epistemological challenges that accompany it, thus producing a great deal of anxiety, stress, and uncertainty for the individual. Not only does one experience this shift ideologically, but one also experiences misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with the changes from non-liturgical worship settings to the worship practices of the Lutheran liturgy. All of these changes/shifts present a challenge for Lutheran pastors in knowing how to minister to parishioners coming out of American Evangelicalism into their parish.

Objective of Survey:

The purpose of the survey is to identify the common misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles of American Evangelicals who have or are joining liturgical Lutheran churches. From the survey results, future work and study will occur to help Lutheran pastors better serve former Evangelicals, as well as future work and study will occur to help former American Evangelicals better understand the Lutheran liturgy.

Date of Survey:

Begin Date: Monday, May 6th of 2013

End Date: Monday, May 20th of 2013

Survey Participant Response:

Total Response: 125 participants

Of the 125 participants, 117 are now currently worshipping in a Liturgical Lutheran Church, while the remaining 8 are not consistently worshipping in a Liturgical Lutheran Church. For the sake of the following survey analysis, the data results will be based on the 117 participants. Special attention will be given to the other 8 individuals in the special focus portion of this analysis paper.

Statistical Accuracy:

Assuming a population of 100,000 individuals who have journeyed and/or are journeying from American Evangelicalism into Lutheranism, 125 participant responses yields the following statistical confidence:

-A confidence level of 95%

-A confidence interval of 8.76%

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Survey Results (Quantitative):

1. What is the church affiliation background of American Evangelicals who have journeyed into liturgical Lutheran churches?
 - a. Generally speaking, American Evangelicals journeying into Lutheran liturgy have slightly more than one Evangelical denomination in their background (i.e., approximately 1.6 denominational backgrounds).
 - b. The two most common American Evangelical backgrounds of those journeying into Lutheran liturgy were the Baptist denomination (i.e., 56.1%) and Non-denominational churches (i.e., 45.8%).

2. Which movement and influences have participants been impacted by within American Evangelicalism?
 - a. Generally speaking, American Evangelicals journeying into the Lutheran liturgy have 3.72 different movements and influences that they have been impacted by.
 - b. The top movement and/or influence responses are:
 - i. 62.9% were impacted by Revivalism.
 - ii. 62.9% were impacted by Fundamentalism.
 - iii. 56.0% were impacted by Dispensationalism.
 - iv. 55.2% were impacted by Pietism.
 - v. 47.4% were impacted by the Church Growth Movement.

3. Before beginning the journey towards Lutheran thought, how long had participants been in American Evangelicalism?
 - a. 63.7% of participants marked that they were in American Evangelicalism for 10-30 years.
 - b. The other 36.3% of participants varied from less than a year to over 50 years.

4. In reflecting on familiarity:
 - a. 84.5% of participants said that they were unfamiliar or very unfamiliar with the Lutheran liturgy before beginning their journey into it.
 - b. 96.6% of participants said that they are currently familiar or very familiar with the Lutheran liturgy.

5. Regarding the Rituals/Agenda and Altar Book of the Lutheran Liturgy (i.e., the rite or order of service of the Eucharist, or Holy Baptism, or Confirmation, or Matrimony, or Burial, etc...):
 - a. 63.2% agree or strongly agree that they experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles in their journey from American Evangelicalism into Lutheran liturgy.
 - i. More specifically, the top ritual misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles existed with:
 1. ...the rite of Holy Baptism (67.8% agree and strongly agree)
 2. ...the rite of Holy Communion (61.4% agree and strongly agree)

3. ...Confession of Sin and Absolution (59.5% agree and strongly agree)
 4. ...the rite of Confirmation (46.0% agree and strongly agree)
 - b. 29.4% disagree or strongly disagree that they experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles in their journey from American Evangelicalism into Lutheran liturgy.
 - i. More specifically, the top least ritual misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles existed with:
 1. ...the offering (88.7% disagree and strongly disagree)
 2. ...the Lord's Prayer (83.4% disagree and strongly disagree)
 3. ...the benediction (82.5% disagree and strongly disagree)
6. Regarding the Ceremonies of the Lutheran Liturgy (i.e., bodily expressions, speaking, singing, kneeling, bowing, making the sign of the cross, outward observances of the church year, ornaments, symbols, material objects employed in the church's worship, the church building, the altar, crucifixes, candles, vestments, etc...):
- a. 67.2% agree or strongly agree that they experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles in their journey from American Evangelicalism into Lutheran liturgy.
 - i. More specifically, the top ceremonial misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles existed with:
 1. ...the sign of the cross (56.7% agree and strongly agree)
 2. ...the liturgical chanting (54.0% agree and strongly agree)
 3. ...the kneeling and bowing (53.2% agree and strongly agree)
 4. ...the sacred vessels and vestments (52.7% agree and strongly agree)
 - b. 30% disagree or strongly disagree that they experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles in their journey from American Evangelicalism into Lutheran liturgy.
 - i. More specifically, the top least ceremonial misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles existed with:
 1. ...the singing (67.3% disagree and strongly disagree)
 2. ...the linen cloths (53.1% disagree and strongly disagree)
 3. ...the church building and its ornaments (50.7% disagree and strongly disagree)

Survey Results (Qualitative):

1. General Observations:

- a. Generally speaking the participants stated that before they journeyed into Lutheran liturgy that their opinions of it were merely based on external perceptions. However, as they peeled the layers back and learned about the liturgy, their perceptions of the Lutheran liturgy changed drastically. Participant #7 stated,

“All of the pieces of the liturgy confused me until I understood the structure and meaning behind them, all of which point to God’s work for us through Christ. I was not familiar enough with my Bible to know that all of the liturgy came from it, and had a reason for being used in worship. I began searching to learn more about the liturgy because when we left the fundie church for a confessional church, a friend from the fundie church wrote an 18 page letter to us explaining what was evil and wrong about the Lutheran church...mainly that it was closely tied with the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, and so was associating with the whore of Babylon. Written prayers and the liturgy, he maintained, were dead works and not spiritual, so I began researching to see if he was correct. Needless to say, once I found out that the liturgy was God’s Word spoken all throughout the service, and understood that the Divine Service is simply a reception of God’s gifts, with our responses of thanks and praise to Him for His mercy through Christ, I never wanted to leave.”

Many participants stated that as they continually learned about the liturgy their presuppositions also continually changed. Participant #11 states,

“The outward appearance of confessional Lutheranism seemed to me formal and archaic. Yet, once I began to learn more about the historic church, I came to deeply appreciate the reverence and awe that came from following the pattern of sound words that have been passed down for centuries. The outward forms of reverence (kneeling/bowing/sign of the cross/chanting/etc...) may vary from congregation to congregation, but the Divine Service takes on such meaning and significance once one realizes what these things are and why we have them. Similarly, the candles, vestments, and other objects have no meaning unless one knows WHY they are there. I had no idea why they were used until my curiosity drove me to research and now I can view them as wonderful tools in teaching the meaning of God’s Word. The fact that everything has a purpose in the Divine Service is lost on many sitting in the pews, and that is a sad fact indeed. Worship is ever so much richer when we

understand why we're doing what we're doing (and why the Church has done these same things for centuries).

2. Qualitative results regarding the Rituals/Agenda and Altar Book
 - a. Of the 67.8% of those who experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with the rite of Holy Baptism, generally speaking their confusion existed not with the rite and/or order of the ritual but with the theology of baptism (i.e., namely infant baptism). One participant stated, *"It took a long time to 'unlearn' bad theology about this."*
 - b. Of the 61.4% of those who experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with the rite of Holy Communion, generally speaking their confusion existed not with the rite and/or order of the ritual but with the theology of communion. One participant stated, *"It's a long road from a symbol using grape juice to Words of Institution and True Body/True Blood. Lots of teaching is needed to re-learn."* Furthermore, participants noted that issues of closed communion were difficult to understand and accept.
 - c. Of the 59.5% of those who experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with the rite of Confession of Sin and Absolution, generally speaking their confusion existed due to Confession and Absolution being extremely foreign to their former Evangelical context and/or Evangelical understanding. As one participant stated, *"I was clueless!"* As noted by participants the cluelessness was due to them not understanding the office of the keys and how a pastor could forgive sins in God's stead.
 - d. Note: It is interesting to note that the top three ritual confusions were all means of grace. It is also interesting to note that the general struggles were due to the theology embedded in each of these means of grace.

3. Qualitative results regarding the Ceremonies of the Lutheran Liturgy
 - a. Of the 56.7% of those who experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with the sign of the cross, generally speaking their hesitations were due to believing that it was too Roman Catholic. As one participant stated, *"I thought only Romans Catholics did it, but once I learned that it wasn't just for field goals and extra points in overtime, I now think all Christians should do it."* Another participant stated, *"I feared it because I thought it was Catholic. However, I came to realize that it was a mark of true Christianity."*
 - b. Of the 54% of those who experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with liturgical chanting, generally speaking their struggle was due to their lack of experience with chanting. One participant stated, *"I cannot read chant music yet; though I play the violin. It is not intuitive to me."* Even though this struggle existed, generally speaking there was a very favorable opinion of chanting from the participants. Commenting favorably one participant said, *"I love to hear the prayers chanted. It makes me sad to visit other LCMS churches and to see how few pastors chant."*

- c. Of the 53.2% of those who experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with the kneeling and bowing, generally speaking their struggle was due to simply not being exposed to it before. Participant #28 stated, *“Other than at the communion rail, I have never seen this.”*
 - d. Of the 52.7% of those who experienced misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles with the sacred vessels and vestments, generally speaking their struggle was due to not understanding or being familiar with it. In fact one participant even said that, *“Lifelong Lutherans seem to have little understanding of the significance of the garments.”*
4. What has been the best thing about the journey into Lutheran liturgy?
- a. Generally speaking the participants stated that the best thing about their journey into Lutheran liturgy was the continuity, consistency, and clarity of the divine service. Participant #1 stated that the best thing is,

“Being in a church where I don’t have to worry if I’m going to hear the Word of God each week. In my evangelical church, I never knew what I was going to get. It was never consistent. My Lutheran church is stable, and I know exactly what I’m going to get: Word and Sacrament, law and gospel, repentance and faith, historic Christianity. I don’t dread Sundays anymore.”
 - b. Furthermore, there was a great appreciation for the historic heritage of the liturgy. Participant #10 stated, *“I am connected to a story and a way of worship that is as old as the church. I am catholically connected with sacramental Christians the world over.”*
 - c. Finally, there was a great appreciation for the privilege of being able to attend a divine service where they could ‘receive’ from God and ‘hear’ a Christ-centered message.
5. What has been the worst thing about the journey into Lutheran liturgy?
- a. Generally speaking the participants stated that the worst thing about their journey into Lutheran liturgy was the loss of friends and family, as well as the fear of persecution and the persecution itself. Participant #1 shares that the worst part of the journey is, *“The fear of being misunderstood by my Baptist parents, of them thinking I’ve gone off the deep end... The fear of being ostracized by my former church.”*
 - b. Furthermore, participants noted that it was difficult dealing with lifelong Lutherans who did not appreciate the gift of their liturgy. Participant #40 speaks to this saying, *“Dealing with lifelong Lutherans who aren’t as passionate about their faith and who want to jump into the muck of Evangelicalism. I am made to feel like a troublemaker for not approving of or wanting to jump into the muck with them. I’ve been there and it is not pretty.”* Participant #45 comments on

this saying that one of the worst parts of this journey is, *“Seeing lifelong Lutherans not understanding what they have and become bored with it or wanting what they think would be exciting.”*

- c. Finally, participants shared that one of the struggles with the journey into Lutheran liturgy has been the tremendous learning curve; there is just simply so much to learn.
6. What advice, encouragements, thoughts, and/or insights can you give to those that are currently going through the journey into Lutheran liturgy?
 - a. Generally speaking the participants would like to share with others going through this journey into the Lutheran liturgy that they can relax and be patient, for the journey takes time. Participant #23 states, *“Don’t expect to understand it all at once, and even if you don’t get everything right in worship, it doesn’t mean you’ve broke anything. God’s Word still works.”*
 - b. Furthermore, they would like encourage those journeying into the Lutheran liturgy to be open minded by asking a lot of questions to their new Lutheran pastors, as well as to read, read, and read as much as they can about the Lutheran faith and the Lutheran liturgy. Participant #35 says, *“Ask lots of questions, even after the divine service, about things that confuse you even if it’s for silly things.”*
 7. What advice, encouragements, insights, and/or thoughts can you give to Lutheran pastors so that they might better minister to former Evangelicals joining their liturgical churches?
 - a. Generally speaking the participants would like to share with pastors that former Evangelicals coming to the Lutheran church need pastors to be patient as they teach them. Participant #36 says to pastors, *“Teach your people what it means to be confessional, and what it means to worship in Spirit and Truth. Don’t mess with the liturgy to dumb it down or make it easier or less boring! Do you kiss your wife every day? Is that boring?”*
 - b. Furthermore, pastors need to be prepared for many questions. Participant #22 says to pastors, *“When they [former Evangelicals] ask, don’t take it as a challenge to your authority but as a seeker looking to understand.”*

Special Focus:

In comparing the 117 participants who are currently attending a Lutheran church that upholds the Lutheran Confessions as expressed in the Book of Concord and practices the historical liturgy with the 8 respondents who are not currently attending a liturgical church, one significant thing needs to be noted. Both the 117 participants and the 8 participants noted that they are currently familiar or very familiar with the Lutheran liturgy (Specifically 96.6% of those currently attending say that they are very familiar or familiar with the liturgy, whereas 75% of those not currently attending a liturgical Lutheran church say that they are very familiar or familiar with the liturgy). However, when participants were asked about specific items of the liturgy (i.e., the Nunc-Dimittis, The Pax Domini, The Sanctus, The Salutations and Collect, Etc...) those who are not attending a liturgical church scored much higher in the realm of not understanding these terms and concepts. Therefore it may be concluded that a person's definition and degree of familiarity with the liturgy may be directly tied to whether or not they are attending a liturgical church. Thus it is plausible that one can familiarize himself with the Lutheran liturgy to a certain degree theoretically speaking, but without attending and participating in the Lutheran liturgy through a congregation, one's familiarization may still be lacking or incomplete.