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THE SCRUTINIES

THE CATECHISM FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP IN LENT AND EASTER

5: Confession & Forgiveness The Office of the Keys

It sometimes comes as a surprise to other Protestants to learn that Lutherans have had a long tradition of not only Corporate ("public") Confession, but also Individual ("private") Confession. Confession of either kind, with its Absolution, is one of the Christian church's great treasures, and this generation should not allow either of these supremely pastoral traditions to fall by the wayside. Luther spoke of Confession and Forgiveness as the Third Sacrament.

The season of Lent would be a good time for parishes to incorporate (corporate) Confession and Forgiveness once again within the regular schedule of your weekly worship: See *ELWorship* pages 94-96. Be sure to see also See [Essay 139](#) for some qualifications.

And further, Lent is an ideal time to make Individual Confession and Forgiveness (*ELWorship* pages 243-244) widely available, perhaps as often as once a week, using a Chapel, if you have one, or the pastor's study as a kind of Reconciliation Room.

Or you might even consider the sanctuary's chancel. Church buildings that have recently renovated previous "two-room" worship spaces — nave here, chancel there — into a nave-level "one-room" configuration might be wondering how to honour the old elevated chancel. Here's an opportunity to turn that old chancel into a kind of Reconciliation Room. In most cases such architectural modification need not cost anything other than the labour required to position two kneelers and two chairs within the space, and can easily be reversed after Lent to "how things used to be".

In any case, here is the fifth of six Scrutinies intended for use in Sunday worship in

Christian congregations during Lent and Easter. See Essay 146 for an introduction to this brief series.

As I maintained in introducing this series, I'm indebted to both Don Johnson and Frank Senn for the concept — and even the language! — of adapting Luther's Small Catechism for use in parish worship. Again, I salute both of these friends for their inspiration and their imagination!

And also as I noted in [146](#), I'd likely have this Rite conclude the sermon. In the best circumstances, I'd do without a print piece altogether, since Pastor and Assisting Ministers do most of the speaking, and the people themselves have *ELWorship* for the texts of the *Small Catechism*, pages 1160 - 1169.

Once again, could some sort of visual aids be useful in communicating certain of the meanings explored here? I'll leave that possibility to your own imagination...

Following my note in See [Essay 149](#) above, we begin this Scrutiny with the last three paragraphs on page 1165 in *ELWorship*.

As before, you might want to enlist several voices to speak at (A).



**The Rite of the Scrutinies ~ 5:
Confession and Forgiveness / The Office of the Keys**

P = Pastor A = Assisting Minister Congregational responses in **bold**.

Prayers

The people stand.

P Gracious and everlasting God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you created the human family and restored it as well. Look with mercy on your adopted people. Set the offspring of your new race within your new covenant, so that what we cannot attain by our own efforts, we may joyfully receive by grace, as beloved children of your promise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

P God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God of Sarah, and Miriam, and Hannah, you appeared to your servant Moses on the holy mountain and led the children of Israel out of slavery, sending to them the angel of your goodness to guard them by day and by night. We pray, O Lord, send your holy angel to guard your

servants who belong to you, and lead us all to complete the promises of our baptism, in our conformation to your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The people sit.

The Exposition of the Office of the Keys / Confession and Forgiveness

- P Beloved, we shall open to you now the Office of the Keys, that is, the gift of Confession and forgiveness, whereby we are assured of God's forgiveness and acceptance as beloved children of our heavenly Parent, heirs with Christ in the promises of God's prodigal providence.
- A1 The Office of the Keys receives its name from the figure Jesus uses in Matthew 16:19 in granting his people the authority to forgive: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven..."
- A2 In the popular piety of Jesus' day, sins were to be forgiven only by God, and only at the end of the age, in the fullness of God's kingdom. So it became one of the sources of scandal among the religious leaders of the day that Jesus himself should assume this authority to forgive, and that he should share this authority with his followers.
- A3 In the Order for Individual Confession and Forgiveness, the pastor may lay both hands on the head of penitents in assuring them of God's forgiveness. The laying-on-of-hands is a very ancient gesture that enacts and dramatizes the promise of the spoken word: God's good will towards us in forgiving us and accepting us, without qualification and without condition.

The people stand.

- P Dearly beloved: The Holy Spirit spoke to our forbears in faith and instituted the Office of the Keys, whose meanings are of such eloquence and brevity that its truth can neither escape our understanding nor burden our memory. So let us learn the meaning of Confession and Forgiveness with attentive minds and write its truth in the pages of our hearts.

Pastor and people repeat the last three paragraphs in the Small Catechism, ELWorship, pages 1164-1165, "How people are to be taught to confess", the Pastor taking the role of interlocutor.

- P Beloved, allow this brief abundance so to live in your hearts that at all times you may use the defense of this gift against all snares of the Enemy. Enjoying the protection of the One whom we confess, let us persevere in the confirmation of our Baptism, so that receiving the forgiveness of sins and newness of life, we

may have our share in the fullness of God's Dominion, according to God's promises in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Next time: Holy Communion...

