"Lord, to Whom Shall We Go?"

The Revision of Liturgical Space and Time in a "Virtual Worship" Era?

Rev. Dr. Alexey Streltsov
Lutheran Theological Seminary (Novosibirsk, Russia)

The title of my paper is revealing of what I am going to say. In turn, the reason why I was asked to engage with this topic at the present conference may have to do with a little essay I wrote at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 that was later republished by Gottesdienst online[1] and also on the International Lutheran Council's website.[2] The title of that essay was "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Digitization of the Church." I'm reasonably sure I was not the first one to write and speak on this topic, and since then there have appeared many reflections on the various ways Christian and Lutheran churches worldwide responded to the distinct challenges of recent times that put the regular worship life of the church in jeopardy.

I must confess that I did not follow the topic all too closely. My scholarly interests lie elsewhere, and so, like many other clergy, I was primarily driven by the pastoral concerns.[3]

As far as the COVID-19 pandemic and its lessons, sociologically things may look somewhat different in various parts of the world. Even in individual countries there may have been major differences in external circumstances—for example, in the United States, local regulations differed vastly between New York and the state of Florida. What is relevant to us, however, what we can observe and universally agree on, is that we indeed witnessed a global phenomenon that had more or less a direct impact on the lives of multiple individuals and communities. The only exception that comes to mind, is, perhaps, North Korea (I think the leadership there claimed the country did not have any COVID-19—a real miracle, I guess).

I am of the opinion that it makes little sense to go across the board and compare individual practical responses of the ILC Churches to the COVID-19 challenge in a formal setting. We could chat about it informally in a spare time, should we so desire. Little (or even not so little) variations in particular contexts should not divert our attention from the far more fundamental issues. To preserve the unity of historic faith and confession in the midst of changing external circumstances is what I believe our major task involves in this day and age. This unity has not only horizontal dimension in terms of its public expression in various world regions where we find ourselves, but it also encompasses centuries of Christian history. G. K. Chesterton once famously said that "tradition… is the democracy of the dead."[4] Indeed, when we read the description of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in Apology I of the second-century theologian Justin Martyr, we do not find a modern church environment with the nicely organized church property of the current first world. Yet we undoubtedly sense the unity of faith with those early Christians.

Thus, the basis of our discussion should be theological rather than sociological. When the foundation is in order, then things would be more reliable. Sure, any particular response will depend on local context but, if guided by correct theological presuppositions and considerations, it would generally be faithful to the Scriptures and confession of the Church.

Therefore, my presentation will consist of two parts. In the first part of my paper I will address the fundamental issues of Christology (with particular emphasis on the Incarnation), ecclesiology, and eschatology in so far as these central truths are reflected in the day-to-day liturgical life of the Church. I beg your pardon beforehand, should you view the first part of this presentation as a repetition of things you already know too well and use for the basic level catechetical instruction in your respective churches.

In the second part of my paper, however, I will address the issue of two divergent frameworks or conceptual schemes, in which the members of some of our churches may find themselves. Thus, I would further speak of the (in)commensurability of these conceptual schemes and suggest ways of dealing with the fundamental problem, which, I believe, is far more important than particular contexts that may require *ad hoc* solutions that cannot be reduced to the universal principles in and of themselves.

Church and her Liturgy: Christological, Historical, Sacramental, and Eschatological Considerations

The essence of Christianity and the Christian way of life consists in restoring fellowship with God, which once was lost due to the fault of our primordial ancestors. In turn, it can't happen other than through personal connection with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnated and became man in order to make atonement on the cross for all our sins and then triumphantly rise from the dead to grant life eternal to all who believe in him.

This salvific relationship does not happen other than through liturgical participation in the life of Jesus. From the time of the Pentecost the Christian Church heard the actual words of the Gospel while gathering ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό—"for the same thing"—translated in our Bibles as being "together" (Acts 2:44). That particular expression represents liturgical, sacramental language – not detached, to be sure, from particular acts of mercy within the Christian community. People would be born to life as Christian in the waters of Holy Baptism, and they would then communicate with Jesus by partaking of his Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. These were very concrete, physical acts.

It is noteworthy that Jesus himself in his earthly ministry acted physically, bodily, spatially. He physically touched people. He even used some unexpected things such as his saliva and soil from the ground to restore people. The same thing goes for the Apostles as far as their physical involvement in the life of the churches they founded. In the canonical Acts and other books of the New Testament we do not see Apostles flying up in the air covering large distances at one instance[5] as if they were Hollywood superheroes from the Marvel universe. Instead, we see them traveling physically from place to place, taking time, encountering multiple obstacles along the way. Look at the travels of St. Paul, for example. He had to wait for the proper season to sail across the Mediterranean. He faced plenty of danger during his travel. Unlike this, the Gnostic and Apocryphal gospels and Acts contain fairy-tale stories of how space and time were supposedly overcome by these early heroes of faith in the most elementary way.

Well, my topic today is about "virtual" worship. It looks like the modern word comes from the medieval Latin word *virtualis*, which meant "effective"—that is, having some "effect" without having the "form" or appearance of what would normally cause this effect. As far as the modern word's meaning, the second and third meaning in the Cambridge Dictionary describe how this word is used in our context. According to the dictionary, "virtual" means "created by computer technology and appearing to exist but not existing in the physical world"—as in the following sentence, for example: "In the game players simulate real life in the virtual world." Another suitable explanation (that is to say, suitable for our purposes) is that "virtual" means "done using computer technology over the internet, and not involving people physically going somewhere."

Thus, there is a telling dichotomy between "virtual" and "real." "Virtual reality" is contrasted with "real life." It is not a *real* reality, so to speak. Well, if you like myself have been trained in the old-fashioned Lutheran doctrine, then you are well familiar with the *cliché* language of "real presence." Thus, this "virtual" language coming to us from the digital world and the gaming industry is grossly reminiscent of the Reformed, Zwinglian-type doctrine.

Think of the "virtual" in a typical computer game. It is a "fake" reality. It does not really happen. Nothing is there. I mean, bad things can happen. You may put on a helmet and run into the wall thinking that you are in a different world. But your body is still located within a confined room with all its limitations. Even with drug addicts, who use hallucinogenic drugs to "take trips" apart from one's body, such use can only result in a growing disassociation from the real world as we know it through our senses—and this is nothing else than living in illusion.

One could argue: *But people still experience pleasure doing this. More than that, they can earn money in "real life" by doing things of a virtual nature. Then can even make a living if they are good at it. So, it really works!*

Well, this is not the first time in history when we observe this tension between the physical world and the world of "perception." Look at early baroque art, for example: Caravaggio, Bernini, and the like. Or, consider the emphases in the intellectual world of that time. The stress was on "affects"—that is, perceptions, emotions, sensations. The external world was not important; what really mattered was how I perceive this world around me. This did not negate objective reality at that time but rather emphasized how people felt about things. Compare this with Luther's emphases on "for me." It may look and sound the same as some modern accents on human identity and self-perception, but for him it was not an either-or but a both-and. In other words, Christ really dying for everybody lays a necessary foundation to my saving faith in that He redeemed me and so is my Lord.[6]

The way the Church is described from her birth at Pentecost presupposes communal worship (Acts 2:42). You could say that the church, properly speaking, is the church at worship. To be sure, we use the word "church" in a number of ways: we can imply by this word a church building, a certain society of individuals who share the same or similar religious beliefs, a religious business corporation that resolves professional questions of securing salaries for its staff and providing a pension plan. However, within the limits of this paper I speak not of polity. I speak theologically. Those other

meanings of the words "church" are not theological meanings. The church is not the "platonic republic," explains Melanchthon in the Apology, refuting the accusations of Roman polemicists. At every confessional Lutheran conference one or more speaker usually highlights at some point the famous definition of the church from *Augustana* 7. This Conference is no exception. I will spare you the repetition, but I trust that it goes through your mind now as I mention it. The key thing there is that it implies "gathering." Of course, it not just any kind of gathering or assembly; it is not primarily a social event, for example, but it is a gathering nonetheless. No gathering, no church.

So far we have said something about "virtual." Let us now say something about "worship." This is once again a problem of language. What is "worship"? I struggle to find a corresponding term in my native Russian language. I mean, it is possible to come up with an equivalent, but it sounds awkward—not natural in a traditional church setting. And it is "loaded" in that it is viewed as something of a generic Protestant nature—something that new Protestant movements would use but not traditional Christians, including Lutherans. We would rather use such words as "Mass," "Liturgy," or "Divine service." The emphasis is on what God does for us.

Well, within the English language the word "worship" is deeply integrated into its pattern of speech and by itself it does not draw confessional boundaries. Still, the word "worship" is rather ambiguous. It might refer to what I do. I worship God. In theory I can do this at a specially designated place with other people or in the comfort of my personal home—just as I could go to a movie theater to watch a movie or watch it on my television at home. For some people, of course, watching at home means compromising on sound quality and looking at a much smaller screen compared to the movie theater. However, wealthier people can organize a "home theater" and thus solve that problem.

Continuing the analogy, when I view a service online, do I worship? Yes, surely—at least I can worship at this time (rather than casually looking through the screen to locate some familiar faces in the pews or just enjoying the sounds of the nice organ music). *But do I participate at the liturgy,*
at the Divine Service, in this way? This is a harder question to answer.

Direction is a factor. If the service's main direction is from me to God, then I can think of different way how to do it. But if, rather, the main direction is from God to me—that is, God delivering His gifts to me for my sake and benefit—then I want to be in the place that God has appointed as the place where He will act with His benefits. God is everywhere, but He is not everywhere *for us* (to use Luther's emphasis again). I can't move God to be where He has not promised merely by wishful thinking, just as I cannot make a sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood in an outwardly Reformed setting just by my internal faith.

Another implication of participation in liturgical assembly is that within Christianity we are to keep a proper balance between "individual" and "communal." It is true that we are part of a faith which presupposes personal salvation. I can't be saved just by virtue of belonging to a particular clan or a tribe, through blood connections, or other associations of some sort. I cannot be saved for someone else and someone else cannot be saved for me. I will personally account for what I've been doing in my body, whether good or bad. But at the same time, I confess the Church, among other items of faith, when I speak the words of the Creed. And the Church with her Christological, liturgical, and sacramental nature is such that what she does cannot be reduced to the merely individual. One does not serve the sacrament to him or herself. It must be received from the outside—that is, given by somebody else.

When we use Luther's Christological language of salvation being *extra nos* (outside of us), we imply at the same time that salvation does not come to us other than through the Word and Sacrament. The Word must be preached by somebody, and the Sacrament must be given by somebody. That includes Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Sacrament of the Altar—and Holy Ordination, for that matter. Hence the language of "two or three."

Worship outside of the communal liturgical setting is a home devotion. There is nothing wrong with it. Moreover, Lutheran piety assumes home devotion.

I remember explanations given by the late pastor and professor Charles Evanson during his teaching at our Seminary in Novosibirsk. He taught that services of matins and vespers at the congregation are a type of home devotion of the pastor in which he invites his members to join him. Speaking of home devotion proper, we distinguish it from the public liturgy. The push toward the individual is nothing new. In the medieval times private Masses were somewhat common. The princes had their own chapels. And even at the public liturgy the magistrates and other special guests had special places, away from the public. In our time of current "mass society" (that is, modern urbanized society) one could say that this comfort—of being separate from the crowd—has become accessible to the wider population.

So far we have spoken about the dichotomy of virtual and real, about worship and the main direction of liturgical flow, and about individual vs. communal aspects of worship. There are two other aspects of the liturgy related to the aforementioned topics that should be treated under the same token. That would be space and time. By this, we mean liturgical space and liturgical time as it is reflected in the title of this paper. Of course, today there is no single place in the geographical sense, like the Old Testament temple, where for the faithful all gather to receive the grace of God. Nevertheless, in every case there is a particular and concrete place—namely, that place where the Word is pronounced and the Sacraments are distributed. This is what the priests of the church speak and do. In every city, town, or village with ongoing ministry of Word and Sacraments, there is such a space. It may be just one place in any given city or several places where the service is conducted. But there is certainty that it is not just any place. It is a place designated for this special purpose.

As Lutherans we try to organize a pulpit and altar even in the most primitive conditions (and coming from Siberia, believe me, I know what I'm saying when I speak of "primitive conditions"), because these are the focal points of the ingathering of the people. And our theology, our ecclesiology implies that in each case one and the same Church is gathered—the Church which is one, which is present in this particular place in her fullness although there are different individuals within each such gathering. The famous prayer from the Didache with its analogy between the gathering of the bread and the gathering of the Church in one place comes to mind.[7] This fullness, completeness, catholicity of the church is due to the complete presence of Christ whom the priest proclaims in preaching and whom he administers in the Holy Communion.

What happens during an attempt to transfer church and the church gathering to a virtual mode? At a minimum, loss of significance of the particularity of place in people's perception; loss of definite character of liturgical space; and detriment to the understanding of the faithful of the ways in which God's presence is communicated to the world. As far as time goes, similar considerations may be offered. "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 2:2). In the preached Word of the Gospel Christ reaches the hearers and ignites faith in their hearts resulting in proper confession of their lips. Can I listen to the sermon outside of the divine service? Sure, why not. However, to me it is not obvious from the outset how it is different from the general reading of pious Christian literature or listening to didactic speeches.

If we read the great sermons of the past teachers of the Church such as St. John Chrysostom, Martin Luther, or Bo Giertz (I could give various other names, to be sure), do we engage in the same type of activity as their original hearers in their liturgical context? I dare to say that there is a marked difference. To be sure, "the Word of God is living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), and so to the extent any recorded or written sermon contains God's Word it still bears fruits dozens and hundreds of years after it was originally spoken. The Bible itself is the prime example of how God's time conquers limitations of our human time—how the eternal enters into this perishing world.

However, whenever we hear an argument that one can stay at home and—without going to Church—read the Bible and so engage in his or her spiritual growth in this way, we would probably say that such false assumption is precisely the reason why the Bible must be properly explained, interpreted, and preached from the outside. A prime example from the Scripture is the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 with its remarkable dialogue: "So Philip ran

to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him" (Acts 8:30-31). Another pressing point is St. Paul's rhetorical question in Romans 10:14: "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" All the other ways of how we interact with God's Word, with the teaching of the church, with catechetical instruction, are various ways and instruments to draw us into that place where the gifts of Christ are delivered to the saints in the due time of the public worship.

In addition, our liturgy is inherently eschatological. By participating in the traditional liturgy, we train ourselves for life in heaven, for the heavenly worship there. When we come to participate in the heavenly chorus to sing praises to God the Father, to God the Son, and to God the Holy Spirit, we essentially do what we will continue doing in eternity. And what is a greater comfort than getting a glimpse of heavenly life while we are still here on earth.

The (In)commensurability of Two Distinct Conceptual Schemes Concerning the Liturgy of the Church

Going back to the coronavirus situation, it is obvious that churches worldwide encountered significant challenges in continuing their regular liturgical practices. The rapidly growing threat of dangerous viral contagion (or declaration of such threat) put conduct of regular church services into jeopardy. The main question that confronted churches was this: what should be done if it is no longer possible to conduct the services, or, what should be done if, even if services continue, most people can't get to them because of unforeseen circumstances?

In many cases some palliative solution was found by temporarily transferring services to the digital format or offering "virtual" services alongside the traditional or regular ones. Few people took a risk to conduct sacraments over the Internet. Such cases were mostly limited to North America, became widely discussed and, as a rule, got a very negative reaction. More typically, the situation

looked like this: a minister would conduct a service (with or without the Holy Communion) in the church premises. He can be alone in the church or accompanied by one or several assistants. Whatever happens at the altar is recorded on camera and instantly displayed online via one of the social networks. It might be that there are a few other people in the church besides the liturgist, but it's not that relevant here.

Parishioners were invited then to participate in the services straight from their homes by connecting to the live broadcast. In some cases, it was impossible to view a service live online due to technical or other reasons. Then, it was assumed, parishioners could watch it at a later time.

Let me share an experience from a year ago, which I had in a non-Lutheran setting. I was speaking at a modern Protestant church on the "Family in the Bible." Let's say that that church was much larger numerically than our small Lutheran parish in that particular city. When I arrived, I found out that very few people were in the audience, which made me a bit upset. The local pastor reassured me though that a far greater audience was watching remotely.

And indeed, the video recording equipment there was technologically remarkable, with three cameras being used simultaneously to record my presentation through the work of several video and sound engineers. The pastor then explained to me that at first he was a bit apprehensive when the pandemic had arrived, in view of the cancellation of services due to government regulations, drop of membership, and the like. However, they were able to regroup and happily find out that going to a virtual mode made things even better. From the explanation of that Protestant church leader, I further learned what he meant by speaking of things "getting better." When you put on a nice show, do it well, speak well, have good music, good video quality, and excellent sound, then the individual spiritual concerns of the members are met. They stay in the privacy of their homes, but nevertheless are spiritually fed and thus experience spiritual growth. And so, it resulted in good donations to the church on their behalf. Members were actually happy that they can stay at home and mind their own business while also maintaining their spiritual status.

When I heard this pastor ranting about the successes of his current ministry, I couldn't help but think of two things. One, if it's mostly a matter of providing a better income for the church's administration, then how is it different in principle from the sales of indulgences that was a starting point of the Reformation? And, secondly, during our conversation I recognized that we use the same basic biblical words in a completely different sense. When he speaks of the "church" or "worship," it is not the same as when I speak of "church" or "worship." We exist in different worlds, which is emphasized by the kind of language we use in our rhetoric.

That the virtual format is becoming a new norm also within the Lutheran circles is obvious from a grant report I now give to fellow Lutherans as a rector of the seminary in Novosibirsk to explain activity over a given period of time. One of the statistical items on the report is to give an estimate of the number of "virtual… ministry events in the reporting period." Every time I have to indicate the number of "virtual divine services" as zero. Well, this may simply mean I am lazy or a new type of luddite resisting progress. Or it might mean that for me the concept of "virtual divine service" is a conundrum, a fiction, another evidence that there are implications to the language we use and decisions we make when transferring the services to the digital format or running "virtual" services alongside traditional in-person services.

Please, receive my address and my presentation not as an attempt at confrontation, but rather as an invitation to discussion. What do we believe, what do we confess when we engage in certain activities? Actions speak louder than words. So, my proposition is that there is a discrepancy between our subscription to the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and a reliance on the virtual format for conducting worship services (especially ones containing Lord's Supper as a part of it). This discrepancy may result from a lack of understanding of what such implications and consequences are. In this case, this is just a matter of explanation and coming to fuller understanding of the faith, just as it was with Apollos in Acts who was "fervent in spirit" (Acts 18:25), yet Priscilla and Aquila had to "[take] him aside and [explain] to him the way of God more accurately"

(Acts 18:26). I hope that your responses (whether positive or negative) either immediately after this presentation or in a long term would further contribute to this discussion.

At this point I have to make an important side remark. My way of speaking, my critique of quasi-liturgical individualism and reliance on the virtual format does not relate to the sick and dying and other people who have obvious physical limitations preventing them from being in the regular worship setting of the church. Nor does not relate to the church militant that is periodically subject to (rampant) persecution from the state. The thrust of my presentation is obviously somewhere else. St. Augustine famously said that it is not the lack of the sacrament *per se* but rather contempt for the sacrament that condemns. But even with sick and elderly people, a home visitation by the pastor to bring absolution and communion in-person is superior to distance participation. Several months ago, I had an opportunity to stay with the pious disabled lady for an extended period of time. She said: "I wish I could participate at the Divine Service but I can't. So, I read my Bible at home, look at the service on the Internet, and wait for the pastor to visit me at home to give me communion." Yet she was exceedingly glad when she was able to get to the regular church setting, even if it were a one-time opportunity. She understood.

Another example. One of our recent catechumens used to be detained in a maximum-security correctional facility. The prison didn't allow priests to come there to conduct services. So, a few individual believers secretly met at the end of the corridor under the staircase to say a few prayers together and encourage one another. They wished they could do something else, do more than that, but they were not able to. So, they had to settle for what they were allowed to do.

I do not speak of emergency situations (however, the Achilles' heel of Lutherans is that they take exceptional cases and try to turn them into a norm). I rather speak of a setting where "virtual worship" becomes routine, a viable option, part of the proverbial "new normal." Whenever that happens, we must be clear of what it is—what is happening.

The whole question is pregnant with philosophical and theological dimensions. Depending on how we answer this question, we will or will not engage in "virtual worship."

I find it appropriate to use the language of two different concepts of what the church is and what her worship or liturgy is. We can refer to it as two rival frameworks or conceptual schemes. An American analytical philosopher, Donald Davidson, already challenged fifty years ago the notion that there may be a transfer of ideas and exchange of concepts between two different conceptual schemes,[8] because there is simply no way of recognizing whether we translate accurately when moving from one scheme to another. Even more relevant here is the approach of C. Kavin Rowe who, in his relatively recent (2016) book, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions*, provides a case study to ascertain that our theological language reflects our way of life, as it is something that may not be appreciated or understood without actual lived experience. You can neither understand nor practice Christian life apart from Baptism—your own Baptism. Likewise, the problem of liturgical migration into the virtual world results in more than just another format or a way of doing things. The baby is thrown out with the bath water. The danger is that some new language would eventually be developed reflecting a different confession which uses words that technically sound the same but have a new and alien mode.

That involves theology and spirituality. Our Christian and Lutheran spirituality emphasizes the value and centrality of bodily and material things in view of the Incarnation. Gnosticizing tendencies tend to do away with the body—to "spiritualize" in a sense of disengagement from the limitations of material world involving space and time. Our traditional Lutheran liturgy emphasizes the real presence of Jesus in the Word and Sacraments made available to us in a concrete, earthly setting. Alternative understanding of worship would center rather on the perceived personal spiritual and emotional comfort of the worshipper—on the sense of self-fulfillment, self-realization of the worshipper. In radical terms this other—"virtual"—understanding of worship

would concentrate on psychological concerns rather than theological ones, and in this way the church would suddenly find herself occupying the turf of numerous "personal growth" psychological coaches. To be sure, any particular local church can be geared toward entertainment without going the digital route. However, switching to digital would eventually cause even formerly solid congregations and individuals to adopt a gospel contrary to the one they formerly received (cf. Galatians 1:6–9).

My thesis is that these two different understandings of worship are incommensurable, and, therefore that it would be impossible to settle on a common denominator that would satisfy both parties. There is no common denominator here. It is one or the other. Moreover, there is no neutral ground from which to make "objective" judgements about these conceptual schemes. If you are inside one of them, you would be unable to relate to the way people do things within a different framework. We cannot get by, making nominal adjustments and switching from one conceptual scheme to another. It takes more than that. Once again, if it's a matter of a lack of Lutheran catechesis, then let us by all means provide more instruction to those struggling with these issues to "connect the dots" and explain why our faith is the way it is. If, however, our counterparts keep insisting on doing things their way because of pragmatic "expediency," then we must make serious assessment whether we are one in doctrine.

To move from one conceptual scheme to another, one has to go through a transformation of mind. One needs to learn—or reacquire—a different language. And by that, I mean that one has to learn to use words in the sense that the Bible and the Confessions use them and not in the way another entity may be using them.

Basically, this transformation cannot come other than through repentance. In his keynote presentation, Bishop Juhana Pohjola mentioned the impact of the book of the Australian theologian John Kleinig on the Protestant theology of the body. I concur with his assessment and further propose that a proper response to the contemporary assaults on the faith coming in the sphere of moral theory,

anthropology, social studies, and the like, must include a reassessment of the place of "virtual worship" in the life of the church.

It would hardly come as a surprise if our post-COVID-19 world continues to undergo rapid digitization. Education, medicine, and the job market… all these spheres will be affected by the virtual world more heavily than ever, bringing to you digital freedom—or digital slavery. Will the Church at large follow the suit? I don't know. I know that there are still some of us who, while using the opportunities of the virtual digital world for the benefit of the church, will continue to insist that having regular liturgy of Word and Sacrament is still what makes us church—and nothing else.

Conclusion

Going back to the title of this paper, the question "Lord, to whom shall we go" is obviously a rhetorical one. "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). There is none other than Christ to whom we might go to be saved from death and the devil.

Going to Christ means encountering Him at the Font, in the confessional booth, on the pew in the church while hearing His words through the mouth of a priest, and, finally, meeting Him at the altar when the faithful partake of the feast, which has no end. While preparing to meet and see God face to face in the life to come, we do well to prepare our bodies and souls for this eschatological reality while remaining here on earth.

No matter what happens in the world around us, liturgical space remains liturgical space, and liturgical time remains liturgical time. It may not and does not fall prey to any technological mindset or any humanly pre-conceived notions of reality.

When we are inside the Church as the Body of Christ, we walk by faith and know from our spiritual experience what it is to be and remain a Christian. For those who are outside, we issue an invitation to enter inside, to taste and see that the Lord is good (cf. 1 Peter 2:3). As far as those who share with us in the sacrament of Baptism, yet have a very different understanding of the matters

of faith, those who believe, confess, practice, and teach differently, we would do well to call them to change their perspective and invite them to embrace the Trinitarian and Christological character of their baptism.

Thank you for your attention.

Rev. Dr. Alexey Streltsov
Rector
Lutheran Theological Seminary
Novosibirsk, Russia

ILC 2022 World Conference
Kisumu, Kenya

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1. https://www.gottesdienst.org/gottesblog/2020/4/6/a-guest-essay-by-the-rev-dr-alexeystreltsov-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-the-digitization-of-the-church

2. https://ilc-online.org/2020/04/18/essay-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-the-digitization-of-the-church/

3. The only other occasion I remember dealing with a similar topic—also on a popular level—was delivering a paper at the International Lutheran Theological Conference in Prague back in 2011 on "Lutheran Education in the Twenty-First Century in View of Modern Communication Technologies." That paper was later published in *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, Volume 4, Number 3, 2017: 16-23. (https://media.ctsfw.edu/Text/ViewDetails/15337).

4. The full quote goes like this: "Tradition means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about." Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, ch. 4.

5. I owe this reflection to remarks by the old-time church historian V.V. Bolotov.

6. Small Catechism, second article of the creed.

7. "Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom." *Didache,* ch. 9.

8. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 1973.