

## *Luther on the Reform of Worship*

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THE REFORM of worship that Luther set in motion and that culminated in Wittenberg in 1525 is principally an event in the history of liturgy at the beginning of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. However, its importance is by no means limited to those interested in church history. In fact, research into Luther's reform of worship conducted between the two world wars had manifold consequences for the structuring of worship.<sup>1</sup> After the Second World War, several theologians developed the outline of a Lutheran doctrine of worship based upon a critical use of Luther.<sup>2</sup> This decade-long engagement with Luther's comments on worship affected the design of the "Agenda for Evangelical Lutheran Churches and Congregations," published in 1955 and then enacted in individual territorial churches.<sup>3</sup> This agenda in its reworked form continues to define our worship today. Thus, whoever wrestles with the question of worship in Luther's thought is also shaping the prerequisites for a better understanding and a deeper experience of evangelical Lutheran worship.

Luther's reform of worship has attracted attention in the twentieth century even outside Lutheran circles. After the Second World War Roman Catholic liturgiologists have also directed their attention to Luther's reform of worship. This, too, happened not only out of purely historical interests but also to promote liturgical reform that came to fruition during the Second Vatican Council. The Jesuit, Hans Bernhard Meyer (b. 1924), produced a dissertation in Innsbruck, "Luther and the Mass: A Liturgical Investigation of the Relation of Luther to the Mass of the Late Middle Ages."<sup>4</sup> Not only did this work arise in cooperation with Lutheran liturgical specialists, but in many instances it adjudged Luther's work in a positive light and as worthy of imitation.

Thus, knowledge of Luther's design for worship will remain a live possibility by virtue of countless publications<sup>5</sup> and through the enactment of worship forms also shaped by him. At all times, however, engagement with his writings, sermons, letters and comments

at table can themselves also deepen our understanding. Whereas those who would study the initial development of worship in the New Testament must deplore the extremely fragmentary nature of the sources,<sup>6</sup> anyone working on this theme always must wrestle with the dilemma of which sources to choose, given the variety.

The theme with which this essay will deal places in the foreground this question: Did Luther carefully conceive the reform of worship in Wittenberg or did he simply create a provisional form under the pressure of the moment? Those who desire to answer this question should first be clear what concept for the structure and essence of worship they themselves have. Rudolf Stählin (b. 1911) saw worship as “having grown out of a single tree, enduring throughout the centuries, with many boughs—new sprouts and withered branches—in all complexity and yet a single whole.”<sup>7</sup> This view, based upon an intellectual-historical perspective, can concentrate upon the formation of the trunk, that is, on the development of the “correct” form of worship. However, it seems to me more helpful both for understanding what developed in the past and for providing an orientation in the present to bring in more fully the historical context of Luther’s reform of worship.

The theme of this essay is divided into two parts. The first deals with Luther’s overall concept of worship, and the second with its realization. Then, we will consider the question of whether Luther’s reform of worship proceeded from some overall conception of liturgy or was only a temporary solution of the moment.

### I. Luther’s Concept of Worship

We begin with something of seemingly secondary importance. Luther spoke of the Mass *under the papacy*, not of a Roman and certainly not of a catholic Mass. He pronounced judgment on the Mass prior to the Reformation, that is, concretely on the late-medieval Mass in Germany. Keeping this historical situation in mind protects the reader from getting caught too quickly in later confessional struggles and judgments. How much Luther’s criticism still applies to the Roman Mass that the Council of Trent con-

structed or to the Mass celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church since the Vatican II Council, is a completely separate question.

### 1. *The Word of God instead of Human Accretions*

And, indeed, the greatest and most useful art is to know what really and essentially belongs to the Mass, and what is added and foreign to it. For where there is no clear distinction, the eyes and the heart are easily misled by such sham into a false impression and delusion. Then what men have contrived is considered the Mass; and what the Mass [really] is, is never experienced, to say nothing of deriving benefit from it. Thus alas! It is happening in our times. For I fear every day more than a thousand Masses are said, of which perhaps not one is a real Mass. O dear Christians, to have many Masses is not to have *the* Mass. There is more to it than that.<sup>8</sup>

Luther knew what he was talking about. He had prepared himself very carefully for his ordination as a priest. He worked through the exposition of the Mass by Gabriel Biel (1410–1495), the *Canonis misse expositio*,<sup>9</sup> which made his heart bleed.<sup>10</sup> After his first Mass on 2 May 1507, he celebrated the Mass as priest regularly and with great earnestness. With the publication in 1520 of the tract *A Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, The Holy Mass*, he developed the fundamental principles or rules—in a certain sense an overall concept—which are supposed to hold true for a Mass, that is, for proper Christian worship.

From the very beginning, Luther's criticism of contemporary theology, church, and piety grew out of the fact that he viewed them from the perspective of the Scripture. He also employed this approach with the Mass. He developed this basic principle: "Now the nearer our Masses are to the first Mass of Christ, the better they undoubtedly are; and the further from Christ's Mass, the more dangerous."<sup>11</sup>

On this basis, Luther saw that in Christ's Words of Institution "lies the whole Mass, its nature, work, profit, and benefit."<sup>12</sup> From this insight he derived his basic understanding of what worship itself really is. At the same time he possessed a yardstick with which to measure the value of individual parts of worship.

Already in the earliest lectures on the Psalms from 1513 to 1515 Luther's concept of the basic structure for how God and humanity relate was clear. The God who speaks works through his Word to each individual person, for whom there remains only hearing and obeying. In this relation God is the active partner, the individual is the passive one.<sup>13</sup> Now in 1519, Luther stressed this for worship as well. For him worship is above all the gathering of the community in which God serves the assembled people.

Because the Word proceeding from God—above all, his promise (the gospel)—is the decisive thing, this Word must be made known. This demand, however, stood completely opposed to the praxis in the late-medieval Mass, where the notion had taken root that the priest *silently* prayed the Canon of the Mass. That Canon consisted of the offering up of the gifts and prayers for the church, prayers for the living, remembrance of the saints, petition for the acceptance of the offered elements, petition for the transubstantiation of the elements, the transubstantiation itself (Words of Institution), remembrance of Christ's work of salvation, petition for the acceptance of the unbloodied sacrifice, petition that we may be united with Christ's sacrifice, remembrance of the dead, petition for communion with the saints, blessing, and praise.

Over against this perspective, Luther stressed his conviction that God's Word must be made known. How in the world could anyone know what the Mass is, if the words, on which the Mass stands or falls, remain unknown? At the same time, Luther demanded that these words should also be understandable. Thus, he desired that the words be spoken out loud and no longer in Latin but in German.<sup>14</sup>

Luther was not only concerned that the Words of Institution be heard. He also wanted their content to be understood. For this reason, they had to be explained in the worship service itself. For the sermon is nothing less than an explanation of Christ's words. "What is the whole gospel but an explanation of this testament?"<sup>15</sup> For Luther, the proclamation of the Word, the sermon, logically belonged to the indispensable makeup of a worship service.

By bringing the proclamation of God's Word into worship as a central piece, all human additions suddenly appeared in a critical

light. In view of the many liturgical regulations and customs that had become a part of the late-medieval Mass, Luther wrote in 1520, “When Christ himself first instituted this sacrament and held the first Mass, there was no tonsure, no chasuble, no singing, no pageantry, but only thanksgiving to God and the use of the sacrament.”<sup>16</sup>

From this observation Luther developed an entire list of very critical comments concerning the structure of the late-medieval Mass. However, did this principle (“God’s Word instead of human accretions”) also mean for him that human additions had no place at all in the worship service or that they were totally arbitrary?

## 2. *Christ’s Testament instead of the Priest’s Sacrificial Offering*

By keeping in mind the fact that the Lord’s Supper has to do with Christ’s testament, Luther considerably deepened the central truth that in the Mass the action proceeds from God. Now, the testator determines who will get the estate. The heir, on the contrary, *receives* the estate.<sup>17</sup>

With this explanation, Luther underscored the basic structure of worship: the action proceeds from God, not from human beings. Christ distributes his Body and Blood with the help of bread and wine, but each person receives these gifts. From this orientation arose Luther’s fundamental critique of the late-medieval Mass.

This notion shaped the late-medieval Mass: that the priest presents the elements of the Lord’s Supper as an offering to God and thereby demands from God the fruits of the Mass for the participants at the Mass and for those absent—living and dead—for whom the Mass was endowed. This notion made possible Masses without the participation of the congregation. At the end of the Middle Ages endowments of Masses multiplied in order to reduce the punishment in purgatory. Frequently altars were endowed at which the “altarists” read Masses for particular persons in exchange for a living or a cash payment. The Castle Church in Wittenberg (dedicated in 1503 and completed in 1509) included nineteen side altars, at which—including the high altar—nearly 9000 Masses were sung or read in 1519 alone.<sup>18</sup>

These notions also lifted the priest above the parishioners, since he was granted the ability to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ and thereby to effect something before God. Biel wrote about this in his explanation of the Mass. The priest's dignity surpassed not only that of all earthly authority but also the dignity of the angels and the Mother of God herself, despite the fact that she was called upon to intercede with her Son.<sup>19</sup> As a result of these convictions, it appears that it is still impossible in 1995 to ordain women to a priesthood arising out of such a tradition.<sup>20</sup>

The change in elements brought about by the priest was to a certain extent understood as a magical act, in which the Words of Institution assumed the function of a magic formula. Some feared that the Words of Institution would be learned by the laity and then used by them to effect this very change. To prevent this, they were kept secret and spoken only in silence.<sup>21</sup>

Because Luther set forth Christ as the active one, priests could not bring a sacrifice to God but could only aid him in the distribution of the Testament. For this they needed no higher spiritual quality than that of any baptized Christian.

### *3. Faith instead of "Good Works"*

The decisive reality of worship is God's action. God acts without human beings entreating him. God instigates matters and bestows a promise through his Word. Human beings are the recipients, who accept this Word with thanksgiving and trust him, that is, believe him. They are incapable of climbing up into heaven and moving God to be gracious. Instead, God must make the first move, that is, through his word make a particular promise that human beings grasp with firm faith, so that the Holy Spirit then follows.<sup>22</sup>

Luther led the fight against the sacrificial character of the late-medieval Mass on the basis of pastoral responsibility. He attacked it because it gave Christians a false sense of security and thereby became their undoing. With this he struck down all attempts to earn God's grace through so-called good works—which his con-

temporaries understood much more as particular acts of piety than as works of love for the neighbor. In the Smalcald Articles of 1537 he held firm to the central article that faith in Jesus Christ alone justifies and from that perspective developed a thorough-going critique of the late-medieval Mass.

The Mass in the papacy must be regarded as the greatest and most horrible abomination because it runs into direct and violent conflict with this fundamental article. Yet, above and beyond all others, it has been the supreme and most precious of the papal idolatries, for it is held that this sacrifice or work of the Mass (even when offered by an evil scoundrel) delivers men from their sins, both here in this life and yonder in purgatory, although in reality this can and must be done by the Lamb of God alone, as has been stated above. There is to be no concession or compromise in this article either, for the first article does not permit it. . . .

Besides, this dragon's tail<sup>23</sup>—that is, the Mass—has brought forth a brood of vermin and the poison of manifold idolatries.

The first is purgatory. They were so occupied with requiem Masses, with vigils,<sup>24</sup> with the weekly, monthly, and yearly celebrations of requiems,<sup>25</sup> with the common week,<sup>26</sup> with All Souls' Day,<sup>27</sup> and with soul-baths<sup>28</sup> that the Mass was used almost exclusively for the dead although Christ instituted the sacrament for the living alone. . . .

The second is a consequence of this: evil spirits have introduced the knavery of appearing as spirits of the departed and, with unspeakable lies and cunning, of demanding Masses, vigils, pilgrimages, and other alms. . . .

The third are pilgrimages. Masses, forgiveness of sins, and God's grace were sought here, too, for Masses dominated everything. . . .

The fourth are fraternities. Here monasteries, chapters, and vicars have obligated themselves to transfer (by legal and open sale) all Masses, good works, etc. for the benefit of the living and the dead. . . .

The fifth are relics. In this connection so many manifest lies and so much nonsense has been invented about the bones of dogs and horses that even the devil has laughed at such knavery. Even if there were some good in them, relics should long since have been condemned. . . .

The sixth place belongs to the precious indulgences, which are granted to the living and the dead (for money) and by which the pope sells the merits of Christ together with the superabundant merits of all the saints and the entire church.<sup>29</sup>

## II. Luther's Implementation of Liturgical Reform

All who truly want to understand Luther must not limit themselves merely to his dogmatic pronouncements but must at the same time consider his actual behavior. This is particularly true for his order of worship.

### *1. Evangelical Reform of Worship apart from Luther*

Luther was not in a hurry to draw immediate consequences from his insights into the essence of worship and thereby reform the Mass. This first began rather while he was in hiding at the Wartburg. The professor of theology, Andrew Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486–1541), sparked the discussion of a new form of the Mass when he published a series of theses on 19 July 1521. In them he labeled as sinful distributing only the bread at the Lord's Supper.<sup>30</sup> To be sure, Luther rejected this assertion in a letter dated 1 August. However, he left no doubt that he held the practice of offering the chalice to be scripturally sound and, hence, better. He even proffered the following declaration: "But I also will never say another private Mass in all eternity."<sup>31</sup> With these words he drew a practical consequence from his concept of worship.

The Wittenbergers felt this validated their point of view. Some private masses were discontinued. Beginning on 29 September 1521 Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and several students participated in celebrations of the Mass in private houses during which both bread and wine were distributed. Luther's fellow Augustinian, Gabriel Zwilling (ca. 1487–1558), celebrated Masses using both kinds in the Augustinians' Chapel of the Holy Spirit—that is, until the prior, Konrad Helt (d. 1548), forbade it. On Christmas Day in the Castle Church Karlstadt began to celebrate the Lord's Supper distributing both kinds and handing the chalice to the communicants.<sup>32</sup> On 24 January 1522 the Wittenberg City Council passed a new decree ordering church life, despite the fact that Elector Frederick the Wise (1463–1525; ruler from 1486) had prohibited any changes. In it the council laid down that paintings and altars must be reduced to three. Immediately thereafter they cited the

basic principle formulated by Luther: “Thus the Mass should not be celebrated in any other way than the way Christ instituted it in the Last Supper.” A few liturgical portions were left in, but the Canon of the Mass was excised because it did not conform to the Scripture. The communicants were allowed to receive the Host and put it in their mouths and to take the chalice in their hands and drink out of it.<sup>33</sup>

With this the City Council had gathered into an order the various things about which Luther had voiced his approval. Did not Luther have reason to rejoice over this success, that Wittenberg had realized his idea of true Christian worship? Not in the least! Instead, he came out decisively against it, and not only because the electoral chancellery stood helplessly opposed to the activities in Wittenberg or because the Imperial Governing Council threatened punishment against these innovations. Luther objected much more because things had proceeded in a false direction. He demanded the following: from the inside to the outside, not the other way around. That is to say, God’s Word must first work faith in the heart before this faith can express itself outwardly in new forms of worship. It is wrong to change externals before the proper faith is present, “For the Word created heaven and earth and all things [Ps. 33:6]; the Word must do this thing, and not we poor sinners. In short, I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion.”<sup>34</sup> Here Luther expressed his protest against the promulgation of too many liturgical and church orders too fast. It was a protest he maintained his whole life long.

## *2. Concern for the Weak in Faith*

Luther’s criticism of the Wittenbergers’ behavior was shaped in large measure by concern for the weak in faith, as Paul had urged in Romans 8:7–13. In his first sermon delivered after his return from the Wartburg at the Wittenberg city church on 9 March 1522, he reproached his listeners in this way. “And here, dear friends, one must not insist upon his rights, but must see what may be

useful and helpful to his brother, as Paul says, . . . ‘All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful’ [1 Cor. 6:12].”<sup>35</sup>

In that Luther raised this comment of Paul to a criterion for the structure of the liturgy, the congregational connection to worship became an integral, constitutive part of every liturgy. How he took this into account may be shown on basis of several examples.

In *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament*, published in April 1522, Luther justified his rescinding certain innovations in Wittenberg and once again offering only the Host in the Mass. He expressly emphasized that the innovations—offering the cup to the laity—were appropriate. Nevertheless he complained that “there are not enough people who are qualified to do it.”<sup>36</sup> At the same time, he affirmed that he did not wish to stand in the way of anyone who celebrated the Lord’s Supper using both kinds, as long as it did not occur in the presence of those who were weak in faith. The danger was too great that they would participate in the Supper and then afterwards confess this as a sin or absent themselves from the Lord’s Supper altogether.<sup>37</sup>

Luther demanded that out of love consideration be taken for the consciences of the weak for a certain period of time until the gospel had been more fully proclaimed.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. *Excising Unscriptural Elements*

Proposals for a new pattern for the liturgy came not only from Wittenberg. In other places, too, pastors and preachers undertook changes in the Mass and introduced new orders of worship. For example, Thomas Müntzer (c. 1489–1525) did so in Allstedt in 1523. As a result, beginning on 18 July 1523, the pastor in Zwickau, Nicholas Hausmann (1478/79–1538), begged Luther for liturgical advice. On 4 December 1523 Luther was able to send him the *Formula missae et communionis pro ecclesia Wittenbergensi* (“The Form of Mass and Communion for the Church of Wittenberg”), in which Luther still preserved Latin as the language of the liturgy.

It is customary to cite the title without mention of Wittenberg. This was already begun in both German translations of this writing,

which were published in Wittenberg and Nuremberg beginning in 1524. With this omission it became easy to forget that Luther was not publishing a master proposal for an evangelical form of worship. Instead, he was reporting on the state of liturgical reform in Wittenberg in 1523. That other congregations used Wittenberg as their model was their decision.

Luther criticized the Canon of the Mass and the priests' claims to a monopoly over the Sacrament implied therein. He reported that everything which had the least echo of sacrifice had been excised, including the Canon.<sup>39</sup> However, Luther by no means removed everything that went beyond what the New Testament reported about the institution of the Lord's Supper. On the contrary, he referred instead to 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and announced that "In the meanwhile we shall prove all things and hold fast what is good."<sup>40</sup> Included in this "proving" was the fact that Luther acquainted himself with the form of worship used in the early church, using especially the "Rationale divinorum officiorum" that William Durandus, bishop of Mende (1230/31–1291), wrote sometime before 1291 and since 1459 was available in print.<sup>41</sup> Thus, Luther could describe how the various liturgical elements had been introduced into the worship service<sup>42</sup> and pass judgment for himself on the later, spurious additions to the liturgy.

In comparison to 1522, a change has been introduced into the distribution of the Lord's Supper, because now the communicants were also offered the cup. Luther justified this based on the fact that in Wittenberg the gospel had been impressed upon the people for two years, so that the weak had now experienced sufficient forbearance. Now it was important not to strengthen the intransigent by continuing to tolerate the weak.<sup>43</sup>

Luther stuck to this line of argument. Later, in 1527–28, while developing *Instruction by the Visitors for the Pastors in Electoral Saxony* as the standard for constructing an evangelical church, he took account of the fact that in the previous years the evangelical message had been proclaimed with varying degrees of clarity. Thus, he took pains not only to insure adherence to the evangelical teaching regarding the Lord's Supper but also to maintain the possibility that those insufficiently instructed might for a time receive only the

Host.<sup>44</sup> Luther's conviction, that the structure of the liturgy must take into account the spiritual condition of the worshipers, deserves special attention.

#### 4. *Inclusion of the Singing Congregation*

During the Middle Ages, two developments squeezed the congregation out of active participation in the celebration of the liturgy. What belonged to the official liturgy of the Mass was to be prayed by the priest himself, since choral singing was no longer viewed as possessing full authority. Those pieces left the choir were so artfully constructed that the congregation could no longer participate in them.<sup>45</sup>

Already in the *Formula missae et communionis pro ecclesia Wittenbergensi* of 1523, Luther expressed the desire for many German songs that could be sung by the congregation during worship. He complained that qualified poets and musicians were lacking, who could create useful, Christian and spiritual hymns.<sup>46</sup> The next year Luther and others brought out German songs that were enthusiastically received by congregations and spread rapidly throughout Germany. As Luther introduced a German Mass in 1525 in Wittenberg, the situation regarding congregational songs differed radically from before.

Luther used these hymns. He constructed a completely sung worship service that incorporated the congregation. The priest sang the prayer of the day [collect], the Epistle lesson, the Gospel, the Words of Institution, the post-communion prayer, and the final blessing. The congregation sang an opening hymn, the Kyrie, a hymn between the readings, the Creed, and hymns during the distribution of the Lord's Supper.<sup>47</sup>

Luther did not anticipate choral singing in the German Mass of 1525, which was thought of as the worship service for regular Sundays. Choral singing had its place in the Latin Mass used on festival days. In the German Mass of 1525 Luther involved the congregation in an active way to an extent that was unknown in the Middle Ages. Despite this, a development emerged through

time parallel to what had occurred in the Middle Ages. To the extent that church music blossomed, the choir took over congregational singing. Church musicians and theologians chose for the congregation what they considered to be the most valuable songs and thereby overwhelmed the congregation to some extent. This made the congregation's full, personal participation in worship difficult. Some found little joy in these (for them) extremely difficult church hymns and became alienated from the worship service. Moreover, it could also happen that in some places church music became separated from worship and developed independent forms for its performance.

##### 5. *Consideration for the Various Groups in a Congregation*

The agenda, *The German Mass and Order of Worship*, first rolled off the presses in the early part of 1526. Luther's discussion there of those who earnestly want to be Christians is generally well-known and often cited.<sup>48</sup> His comments—that such people could gather separately in a house, that they would not need many songs or much in the way of an order of worship—are interpreted as a denigration of the liturgy and a lack of understanding for or interest in it. They are even used as justification for not attending worship. In this way it is not always kept in mind that Luther here is thinking of a community of Christians that practices intensive, communal spiritual care for one another and brotherly and sisterly exhortation according to Matthew 18:15–17. Luther had to admit that the people for such a community were neither available nor exactly lining up to join.

Thus, these remarks prove less Luther's disparagement of the liturgy than much more the necessity of it for all who want to be Christians and do not yet live in an inner, spiritual community.

Luther did not orient the pattern of the worship exclusively toward the spiritual experiences of the participants. Instead, he also considered their spiritual receptivity. That cannot be otherwise if the goal of worship is communicating the content of the gospel.

Although Luther introduced a German Mass in Wittenberg in 1525, he did not want to abolish the Latin Mass completely. For

there were in Wittenberg a Latin school and a large number of students. Latin was the language of almost all the universities in Europe. People who were familiar with Latin worship could speak with people in other lands and thereby serve Christ.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, in the Wittenberg of 1525 there were still other worship services designated for particular groups. Thus, at five or six o'clock in the morning on Sundays there was a service of preaching intended especially for the household servants.<sup>50</sup> This was necessary because the maids and menservants could not come to a later worship service on account of their household chores. Here the time for worship was accommodated to a particular group so that they could hear the Word of God. Then, too, on weekday mornings and evenings there were worship opportunities for the school children.<sup>51</sup>

The worship offerings in Wittenberg in 1525 were thus extremely varied. The receptivity of the worshipers was seriously taken into consideration. Moreover, there were also differences with respect to the texts. In the weekday services, parts of the catechism were read and explained on Mondays and Tuesdays; Wednesdays, selections related to love and good deeds from Matthew's Gospel; and Saturdays, selections from John's Gospel, which overwhelmingly taught faith.<sup>52</sup>

### III. Luther on Worship: Slapdash, Arbitrary, or Free?

From the time of his sojourn at the Wartburg, Luther had felt under pressure to formulate a new order of worship—by 1525 finally even by the elector, John the Steadfast (1468–1532, ruler from 1525). Luther stressed that the Wittenberg order of worship dare not be universally binding and thereby made into a law.<sup>53</sup> One can assemble even more of his comments which leave the impression that, with respect to the order of worship, Luther found himself in dire straits and willy-nilly concocted a provisional order.

This view, however, overlooks how intensively Luther had for years wrestled with the form and essence of the liturgy and with the reform of the late-medieval Mass and how he had in fact de-

veloped an overall concept for worship. This concept grew out of his confrontation with the late-medieval Mass, but it is for that very reason not simply a rejection of the late-medieval Mass. Luther carefully examined the actual parts of the liturgy with the help of Scripture in order to celebrate a service of divine worship according to the Word of God.

Regarding the melodies used in the liturgy, he saw to it that the intonation of the melodies matched that of the text—just as he had learned from the humanists in Erfurt. Before completing his work, Luther turned for advice to the musical director at the Castle Torgau, Konrad Ruppsch (c. 1475–1530) and Johann Walther (1496–1570), who in 1526 had become the cantor of the city church in Torgau.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Luther certainly did not undertake the reform of the liturgy out of “confusion caused by uncertainty,” to use the dictionary’s definition of *Verlegenheit*.<sup>55</sup>

However, did he not approach the liturgical texts and practices with too little understanding for their meaning? And did he not view the pattern of the worship service as something completely arbitrary? Did he not finally say

We however take the middle course and say: There is to be neither commanding nor forbidding, neither to the right nor to the left. We are neither papistic nor Karlstadtian, but free and Christian, in that we elevate or do not elevate the sacrament, how, where, when, as long as it pleases us, as God has given us the liberty to do. Just as we are free to remain outside of marriage or to enter into marriage, to eat meat or not, to wear the chasuble or not, to have the cowl or tonsure or not. In this respect we are lords and will put up with no commandment, teaching, or prohibition. We have also done both here in Wittenberg. For in the cloister we observed mass without chasuble, without elevation, in the most plain and simple way which Karlstadt extols [as following] Christ’s example. On the other hand, in the parish church we still have the chasuble, alb, altar, and elevate [the host] as long as it pleases us.<sup>56</sup>

Behind these statements in no way stands the conviction that what happens in the worship service is completely arbitrary. Instead, Luther is protesting against attributing to human additions in worship the appearance of divine regulations. He simply dismisses arguing over externals in the worship service: for example whether the liturgical garb should or must be red, white, or black.

For from such things arise fights and divisions, but without improving the Mass itself.<sup>57</sup> However, he does not do this because it appears arbitrary to him. At the end of his order for the German Mass, he states what is decisive. "In short, this or any other order shall be so used that whenever it becomes an abuse, it shall be straightway abolished and replaced by another." And this change is not up to the arbitrary choice of any old person; instead it has a substantive basis. "For the orders must serve for the promotion of faith and love and not be to the detriment of faith. As soon as they fail to do this, they are invalid, dead and gone."<sup>58</sup>

Here Luther touches upon a central problem of liturgical texts and practices. They are symbols for proceedings that can lose the acceptance of many worshipers. They are then dead, despite the correctness of their actions and their weighty content, and no longer fulfill their purpose in divine worship.

For this reason there can never be a "correct" worship service. Even when the concept of the worship is the proper one, there is not for that concept a single pattern of worship that alone is the correct one. Thus, Luther never wanted to work out the "correct" worship service. Instead, he shaped it on the basis of his conception of worship, using the liturgical tradition for his Wittenberg congregation at a particular time. He did not act in a slapdash manner, and he viewed liturgical texts and practices as anything but arbitrary. Rather, in Christian freedom and out of pastoral concern for his flock, he took up into the new form what appeared to him would further faith and love in the Wittenberg of his time. Luther's concept of worship poses this question to us: Do our evangelical, Lutheran orders of worship further faith and love among our congregational members?

In our day, liturgical efforts sometimes tend toward an ecumenical liturgy that allows the most churches possible to participate. For common worship services such efforts are doubtless worthwhile. However, as a rule such efforts tend to correspond to the counter-reformation structure of the Mass. For Pope Pius V (1504–1572, pope from 1566) allowed the Council of Trent to implement a new pattern for the Mass with the intention of strict uniformity. The "Missale Romanum" promulgated by him in 1570 was, apart

from a few exceptions, to be the binding norm for the entire Western Church.<sup>59</sup>

Even in his later years Luther represented a different conviction. Thus, he thought it best that in territory of the Freiberg superintendent the customary ceremonies be maintained even six years after the introduction of the Reformation. For he feared that efforts toward uniformity would raise liturgical decisions to the level of articles of faith and lead to controversy. He could well imagine that with agreement in the chief things (that is, in the content of the proclamation) differences in external ceremonies would lead to enrichment and that the many voices would, as in music, result in a beautiful harmony.<sup>60</sup>

More important than uniformity for Luther was having a liturgy that furthered faith and love in congregations of a particular cultural context, according to their spiritual condition. At the same time, it was important for him that this liturgy matched his concept of worship. In this way, Lutheran liturgy always remains faced with this never-ending task: to use the liturgical tradition so that in the worship service God himself can act upon and serve current congregations in an easily accessible, enlivening way.

#### NOTES

This article, translated from the German by Timothy J. Wengert with permission of the author, was originally published as “Luthers Gottesdienstreform—Konzept oder Verlegenheit?” in: *Herausforderung: Gottesdienst*, Vol. 1: *Liturgische Studien und Forschungen* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), pp. 77–92. Depending upon the context, the word *Gottesdienst* has been translated worship, worship service, divine worship, or liturgy. Abbreviations: *BSLK*: *Bekennnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); *LW*: *Luther's Works*, American Edition, edited by J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86); *MLStA*: *Martin Luther Studienausgabe*, edited by H.-U. Delius, 5 vols. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979–92); *WA*: Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. [Schriften]*, 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993); *WA Br*: *Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–85); *WA TR*: *Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–21).

1. See, for example, Karl Holl, “Was können wir für die Neugestaltung unseres evangelischen Gottesdienstes von Luther lernen?” *Luther-Jahrbuch* 6 (1924): 3–21; Friedrich Gebhardt, “Die musikalischen Grundlagen zu Luthers Deutscher Messe,” *Luther-Jahrbuch*

10 (1928): 56–169; Marie Louise Henry, “Luthers bleibende Bedeutung für die Gestaltung des Gottesdienstes: Bericht über einen Vortrag von Hauptpastor D. Knolle, Hamburg,” *Luther* 23 (1941): 77–82.

2. See Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958).

3. Cf. Frieder Schulz, “Der Gottesdienst bei Luther,” in: *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546*: Festgabe zu seinem 500. Geburtstag, edited by Helmar Junghans, 2 vols. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 1:297, 2:811–813.

4. Hans Bernhard Meyer, *Luther und die Messe: Eine liturgiewissenschaftliche Untersuchung über das Verhältnis Luthers zum Meßwesen des späten Mittelalters* (Paderborn: Bonifacius, 1965). See also the literature given in Schulz, “Der Gottesdienst bei Luther,” 1:297 & 2:813.

5. On the continuing publications, see the yearly “Lutherbibliographie” in *Luther-Jahrbuch* under the subsection “k) Gottesdienst, Gebet, Kirchenlied, Musik,” where in 1995 alone forty-two titles are listed.

6. See, for example, from the same volume in which this essay originally appeared, Werner Vogler, “Mahlfeier oder Synagoge?” in: *Herausforderung: Gottesdienst*, p. 64.

7. Rudolf Stählin, “Die Geschichte des christlichen Gottesdienstes von der Urkirche bis zur Gegenwart,” in: *Leiturgia: Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*, edited by K. F. Müller and W. Blankenburg, vol. 1: *Geschichte und Lehre des evangelischen Gottesdienstes* (Kassel: Stauda, 1954), 2.

8. *LW* 35:81–82 (*WA* 6:355.13–20).

9. Gabriel Biel, *Canonis misse expositio*, edited by Heiko A. Oberman and William J. Courtenay, 4 vols. (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1963–67); *Registerband*, edited by Wilfrid Werbeck (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976).

10. *LW* 54:264 (*WA TR* 3:564.5–6, no. 3722).

11. *LW* 35:81 (*WA* 6:355.3–4).

12. *LW* 35:82 (*WA* 6:355.34).

13. See Helmar Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1984), 274–87, especially 282–83.

14. *LW* 35:90 (*WA* 6:362.26–35).

15. *LW* 35:106 (*WA* 6:374.3–4).

16. *LW* 35:81 (*WA* 6:354.28–31).

17. *LW* 35:85–87 (*WA* 6:357.10–359.29).

18. See Helmar Junghans, *Martin Luther und Wittenberg* (Munich: Koehler & Amelang, 1996), 45, 51–52.

19. Gabriel Biel, *Canonis misse expositio*, lectio 4 BC, 1:31–33.

20. On the declaration of 28 October 1995, see “Glaubenskongregation bekräftigt Nein zur Priesterweihe von Frauen,” *Herder-Korrespondenz* 49 (1995): 680.

21. See Meyer, *Luther und die Messe*, 214–37.

22. *LW* 35:82–83 (*WA* 6:356.3–19).

23. An expression borrowed from Rev. 12:3–4 and repeatedly used by Luther.

24. Luther here probably has in mind vigils celebrated on the eve of a particular Mass for the dead.

25. Masses for the dead celebrated on seventh and thirtieth day after the death and on its anniversary.

26. The week after the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels (29 September), during which countless Masses for the dead were read.

27. 2 November.
28. Baths endowed on behalf of the poor and indigent for the purpose of reducing the deceased's punishment for sin.
29. Smalcald Articles II.ii.1, 11, 12, 18, 21, 22, 24 in *The Book of Concord*, edited by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 293–96 (*WA* 50:200.7–26; 204.24–209, 11; BSLK 416, 7–17; 419, 18–424, 3).
30. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, vol. 2: *Shaping and Defining the Reformation: 1521–1532*, trans. by James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 26.
31. *LW* 48:281 (*WA Br* 2:372.73 [no. 424]).
32. Brecht, *Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, 26, 34.
33. *MLStA* 2:527.20–528.5.
34. *LW* 51:77 (*WA* 10 III: 18.8–12/25–30).
35. *LW* 51:72 (*WA* 10 III: 5.6–10/20–24).
36. *LW* 36:249 (*WA* 10 II: 24.10).
37. *LW* 36:256 (*WA* 10 II: 30.28–31, 3).
38. *LW* 36:256 (*WA* 10 II: 31.6–8).
39. *LW* 53:21–22 (*WA* 12:207.14–208.1).
40. *LW* 53:22 (*WA* 12:208.6–7).
41. See *MLStA* 1:366.
42. *LW* 53:20–21 (*WA* 12:205.23–207.9).
43. *LW* 53:34–35 (*WA* 12:217.6–16).
44. *LW* 40:290–91 (*WA* 26:214.1–216.6, especially 214.37–215.14).
45. Meyer, *Luther und die Messe*, 36, 48–49, 75–76.
46. *LW* 53:36 (*WA* 12:218.15–23).
47. Schulz, “Der Gottesdienst bei Luther,” 300.
48. *LW* 53:63–64 (*WA* 19:75.3–23).
49. *LW* 53:62–63 (*WA* 19:74.11–13).
50. *LW* 53:68 (*WA* 19:78.27–79.4).
51. *LW* 53:68–69 (*WA* 19:80.1–24).
52. *LW* 53:68 (*WA* 19:79.17–80.3).
53. See *LW* 53:62 (*WA* 19:72.3–73.6).
54. Brecht, *Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, 254.
55. *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, 19<sup>th</sup> edition, vol. 28: *Deutsches Wörterbuch: Reh-Zz*, edited by Günther Drosdowski (Mannheim: Brockhaus, 1995), 3685a. Translator: The German reads, “Verwirrung verursachten Unsicherheit.” In the heading of this section, the word *Verlegenheit* is rendered slapdash. In a letter to the translator dated 9 March 1999, Prof. Junghans wrote concerning the use of this term: “The theme of “Verlegenheit” was assigned to me. The idea was to ask whether Luther had introduced liturgical reform pragmatically, without an underlying concept.”
56. *LW* 40:130 (*WA* 18:112.33–113.5). Cf. also *WA* 5:401.15–19 (*Operationes in Psalmos*) and *LW* 36:250 (*WA* 10 II: 24.25–27).
57. *LW* 35:80–81 (*WA* 6:355.4–9).
58. *LW* 53:90 (*WA* 19:113.4–10).
59. Josef Andreas Jungmann, “Messe,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1962), 7:326.
60. *WA Br* 10:259.5–260.17 (no. 3846): Luther's answer to Superintendent Caspar Zeuner in Freiberg, dated 9 February 1543.