

# Reformation

Rediscovered Worship Principles and Practices that Call for Thanksgiving



Jacob C. Behnken  
Lutheran Worship Turns 500  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary  
September 16-17, 2024

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
God's Gift of Worship	3
"I Did Nothing. The Word Did Everything."	4
"The Righteousness of God"	6
"Everyone's Sewer and Cesspool"	7
"So That the Word May Have Free Course"	9
"Nothing But the Divine Words of Scripture"	12
"A Dutiful Servant to All"	17
"A Spiritual Priesthood, Held in Common by All Christians"	20
"The Excellent Gift of God"	23
"Everything Full of Divine Appearances"	26
Conclusion	28
Bibliography	30
Appendix A: Luther's Formula Missae	33
Appendix B: Luther's Deutsche Messe	34

## God's Gift of Worship

Some atheists miss church. Don't take my word for it. Several newspapers in recent times have featured articles lamenting the lack of opportunities for atheists to gather for fellowship and mutual edification. In one of them from 2013, the authors describe how they started "The Sunday Assembly" for atheists "because the idea of meeting once a month to sing songs, hear great speakers, and celebrate the incredible gift of life seems like a fun, and useful, thing to do."<sup>1</sup>

The article goes on to discuss the "many awesome things" church has "going for it:" "Singing together in a group? Super. Hearing interesting things? Rad...A moment to think quietly about your life? Wizard. Getting to know your neighbors? Ace."<sup>2</sup>

A more recent article in another newspaper, however, admitted that such gatherings have failed to gain much traction and that this has left the author (another atheist) with a gap in his life. He admits that there are "groups and clubs" he could join, "but none of those gatherings provide singing, sermons, and solidarity all at once."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, God has created human beings for worship.<sup>4</sup> Even those who would deny God's existence still feel a need to worship, if not the true God, then something else in his place.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the first thing to do at this symposium on worship, therefore, is to acknowledge what a gift our heavenly Father has given us. Through the gospel of his dear Son, he has united us in fellowship both with himself and with one another (1 John 1:3). From all the people of this world, we have the privilege of worshipping him "in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). With that acknowledgement also comes the recognition that we have the one thing needful that fills the hunger and satisfies the thirst of this fallen world. Let's give thanks for it. It is indeed "good and pleasant" when God grants us this privilege, unearned and undeserved, to hear his Word and sing his praises (Ps 133:1). In this lost world, we have freely received and can freely give that which nothing else can replace.

Returning to the newspaper articles, our first reaction as Christians might be to wonder what, in particular, atheists would talk and sing about absent the Word of God. The creators of "The Sunday Assembly" suggest, "In essence we want to help people (ourselves included) to live better, help often, and wonder more."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Pippa Evans and Sanderson Jones, "At Atheist Church in London, No Faith Required," *The New York Times* (22 January 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/01/22/is-atheism-a-religion/at-atheist-church-in-london-no-faith-required>.

<sup>2</sup> Evans and Jones, "At Atheist Church."

<sup>3</sup> Perry Bacon Jr., "I Used to Be a Christian. Now I Miss Church," *The Washington Post* (21 August 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/08/21/leaving-christianity-religion-church-community>.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M.H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 85.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rom 1:23. Unbelievers "exchanged (ἔλλαξαν) the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles." They exchanged one thing for another.

<sup>6</sup> Evans and Jones, "At Atheist Church."

Such a purpose statement might interest us, but I doubt that it surprises any of us that much either. As those serving as or studying to be Lutheran pastors, we are intimately familiar with the *opinio legis*, that voice within that drives human beings to the false notion that they can earn salvation with their own merits and efforts. Absent the guiding light of God's Word, we would expect that people trying to worship would fall into a worship of human effort and ultimately a worship of the self.<sup>7</sup>

In this sense, "The Sunday Assembly" for atheists has something in common with all worship that has gone awry. Whether it is trusting that God can be bought off with the sacrifice of a priest in a mass, or that God's grace awaits those who with the power of their own will make a decision for Christ, or pagans who believe that their sacrifices will appease the gods, or even atheists who believe that, absent any god at all, they can find a better life if only they gather together once in a while, the fundamental falsehood on which all false worship rests is that it depends on human effort. Like all false doctrine, it fails to apply the doctrine of justification, the doctrine on which the church stands or falls.

We gather this year to reflect on and give thanks for five centuries of Lutheran worship. As we do, we recognize that human nature has not changed. Though the details may differ, the challenges we face today are really no different from those Martin Luther and his fellow reformers faced five hundred years ago. More importantly, however, we can also recognize that the answers have not changed either. The same scriptural principles that our forefathers applied to questions about worship remain just as valuable and practical for us today. As we gather for mutual edification, fellowship, and, yes, for worship at this symposium, let's begin by rediscovering what these timeless principles are and give thanks for them, and as we do so, let's also consider how each of those principles ultimately rests on the foundation of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, it is remembering and applying the central truth of Scripture - that God has saved sinners through the merit and mediation of his Son - that defines the legacy of Lutheran worship.

### **"I Did Nothing. The Word Did Everything."**

When Luther abandoned the relative safety of the Wartburg in March of 1522, it was, in large part, because of worship. Karlstadt had plunged Wittenberg into chaos with the hasty changes he had introduced - communion in both kinds, the discarding of historical vestments, and the abandonment of the Western Rite. In response, Luther chose not to wait for permission from Elector Frederick, the one man who, from a human perspective, was responsible for saving him from almost certain death. Instead, of his own accord, Luther left the Wartburg and returned to Wittenberg.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 182.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 142.

Upon his arrival, Luther responded to the mess Karlstadt had made with a series of eight sermons on eight consecutive days. Remembered as the *Invocavit* sermons for the Sunday of the church year he began preaching them, these eight little sermons show us how Luther dealt with the practical side of worship during his own ministry in his own congregation. In so doing, they teach us a great deal about Luther's approach to worship in general. In short, Luther relied on the Word of God to accomplish everything.

One could have been excused from assuming that Karlstadt's actions were the natural application of Luther's teachings.<sup>9</sup> Many of the reforms for which Karlstadt advocated did eventually become part of Lutheran practice.<sup>10</sup> Luther, however, was less than impressed.

Luther rejected Karlstadt's changes because he did not approve of the way Karlstadt had brought them about. Just as it was wrong for the Roman church to force a particular form of worship on all Christians, so it was wrong to implement reforms in worship by force.

Real reformation, Luther understood, would come only by the power of the Word. Luther trusted the Word of God to accomplish what God would will for his church. True reformers, therefore, needed to overcome the temptation to usher in hasty change by decree and allow God's Word to do what only it could. In his second sermon, Luther explained: "Therefore we should give free course to the Word and not add our works to it. We have the *jus verbi* [right to speak] but not the *executio* [power to accomplish]. We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure."<sup>11</sup>

The next day in his third sermon, Luther made the same point again. In explaining why it was unwise to make changes in worship without appropriate instruction first, Luther preached, "The Word must first capture the hearts of men and enlighten them; we will not be the ones who will do it. Therefore the apostles magnified their ministry, *ministerium* [Rom. 11:13], and not its effect, *executio*."<sup>12</sup>

Luther demonstrated an absolute and unwavering trust in the power of God's Word to do what it promises, and that trust shaped his approach to worship. First, it gave him patience. Even when change in worship was scripturally warranted (like communion in both kinds), he refused to rush headlong into it without first allowing God's Word to do its work on the hearts of people. Second, Luther's trust in the Word ensured that Lutheran worship would center on that Word. From beginning to end, Luther wanted worship in which the good news of Jesus would predominate.

---

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Dix, for example, makes this very assumption. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre, 1945), 631.

<sup>10</sup> Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 193.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther, "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg," pages 67-100 in vol. 51 of *Luther's Works*, ed. John W. Dobberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 76.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, "Eight Sermons," 83.

## “The Righteousness of God”

Luther's trust in the Word was more than intellectual assent; it was a trust forged in the fire of spiritual anguish and struggle. For years in the monastery, Luther had labored to achieve a righteousness that would avail before God, always trembling at the thought that his efforts fell short.

That expression “righteousness of God” was like a thunderbolt in my heart. When under the papacy I read, “In thy righteousness deliver me” [Ps. 31:1] and “in thy truth,” I thought at once that this righteousness was an avenging anger, namely, the wrath of God. I hated Paul with all my heart when I read that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel [Rom. 1:16,17]. Only afterward, when I saw the words that follow - namely, that it's written that the righteous shall live through faith [Rom. 1:17] - and in addition consulted Augustine, was I cheered. When I learned that the righteousness of God is his mercy, and that he makes us righteous through it, a remedy was offered to me in my affliction.<sup>13</sup>

Luther's discovery of the gospel lifted away the weight of his guilt and replaced it with a trust in the good news that would enable him to defy the devil and all of his servants in this world. For Luther, the gospel was everything. “One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ,” Luther wrote in *The Freedom of a Christian*.<sup>14</sup>

For Luther, this understanding that the gospel was the one thing needful for the Christian life had a natural application to worship. If the gospel was the one thing a Christian needed, then faith in the gospel was the only thing necessary for worship. Luther continued to explain in *The Freedom of a Christian*: “The very highest worship of God is that we should ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else should be ascribed to the one who is trusted.”<sup>15</sup> True worship is taking God at his Word. It is faith, a faith that does not trust in human effort or merit but looks to Christ alone for righteousness before God. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he wrote, “From this you will see that nothing else is needed for a worthy holding of mass than a faith that relies confidently on this promise, believes Christ to be true in these words of his, and does not doubt that these infinite blessings have been bestowed upon it.”<sup>16</sup> Just as it did for all matters of Christian faith and life, the doctrine of justification stood at the very heart of how Luther understood worship.

---

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, “Table Talk Recorded by Anthony Lauterbach, 1538-1539,” pages 251-364 in vol. 54 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 308.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” pages 327-78 in vol. 31 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 345.

<sup>15</sup> Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” 350.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” pages 3-126 in vol. 36 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 40.

## “Everyone’s Sewer and Cesspool”

Luther’s unwavering emphasis on the word of the gospel is clear from the worship orders and hymns that he crafted for the Lutheran church. Throughout the centuries, critics of the Reformer have suggested that he was indifferent to worship; others have argued that he lacked sophistication in addressing matters of worship. Such perspectives, however, fail to appreciate how Luther’s approach to worship was the natural outgrowth of his theology. Everything Luther did in worship reflected his devotion to the gospel. When a worship form reflected the gospel, his inclination was to preserve it. When a worship form failed to reflect the gospel or militated against it, he did not hesitate to change it.<sup>17</sup>

This theological perspective undergirds the two orders of service Luther produced for the church, both his Latin *Formula Missae* of 1523 and his German *Deutsche Messe* of 1526. In between them but with the same perspective, Luther, together with Paul Speratus, published the first Lutheran hymnal, the *Achtliederbuch* of 1524. With these publications, Luther demonstrated an unwavering emphasis on the gospel and began a distinctively Lutheran approach to worship. In proposing orders and hymns that Christians could use for public worship, Luther, however, was not interested in novelty for its own sake; instead, he simply desired to restore worship to “its genuine Christian beginnings.”<sup>18</sup>

In *Concerning the Order of Public Worship*, Luther laid out three reasons for reforming the worship of the church. First, the church had silenced God’s Word in worship. Second, it had silenced God’s Word in favor of unchristian lies, and finally, it taught that this worship, based on lies, merited God’s grace.<sup>19</sup>

Luther’s orders of service and hymns sought to correct these abuses. In the *Formula Missae*, for example, he could approve of the traditional introits, which were simply recitations of Scripture,<sup>20</sup> but he removed the sequences, which were not.<sup>21</sup> Luther also criticized the historic choices of epistle readings because, from his perspective, they emphasized the works of men over the works of Christ.<sup>22</sup> For Luther, everything in worship was to serve the proclamation of the gospel.

For this reason, he reserved his highest criticism for the Canon of the Mass, the priest’s prayer before the Lord’s Supper that over the centuries had come to give overt expression to Rome’s theology of the mass’s meritorious sacrifice:<sup>23</sup> “This oblation, therefore, of our service and that of Thy whole family, we beseech Thee, O Lord, graciously to accept,

---

<sup>17</sup> Robin Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 177.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, “Concerning the Order of Public Worship,” pages 7-14 in vol. 53 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Luther, “Concerning the Order,” 11.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg” pages 15-40 in vol. 53 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 22.

<sup>21</sup> Luther, “An Order of Mass,” 24.

<sup>22</sup> Luther, “An Order of Mass,” 23.

<sup>23</sup> Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 271.

and to order our days in Thy peace and bid us to be delivered from eternal damnation and numbered among the flock of Thy elect.”<sup>24</sup> Luther would tolerate nothing like this that “smacked and savored” of sacrifice and removed the Canon in its entirety.<sup>25</sup> With his usual flair, he referred to it as “that abominable concoction drawn from everyone’s sewer and cesspool”<sup>26</sup> and left only the Savior’s pure *Verba* in its place.

Yes, Luther could recognize worship as a response of God’s people in thanksgiving and praise for all God had done for them.<sup>27</sup> He granted that the prayers of worshippers were good works, properly understood.<sup>28</sup> What he would never relinquish, however, was the truth that God saves human beings for the sake of Christ, entirely apart from mankind’s works or efforts, and he was unwilling to allow any practice in worship that would suggest such a view.<sup>29</sup> From personal experience, he understood that the inward-turning sinful nature never ceases looking within itself for the assurance of salvation, and as a result, it is always the most difficult thing for mankind to believe that it will be saved by grace.<sup>30</sup> Only the proclamation of law and gospel, the law that exposes our death and the gospel that restores us to life - can counteract it.<sup>31</sup>

Luther’s orders of worship and hymns reflected that proclamation. He preserved the *Kyrie*, for example, that implored the Lord to have mercy on us in all our needs. He preserved the *Agnus Dei* that proclaimed Christ to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world. With the *Achtliederbuch*, he gifted the church with hymns like *Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice*, which tells the account of the Son of God coming to this earth for our salvation, and *From Depths of Woe, Lord God, I Cry*, which teaches Christians to trust in the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness to rescue them from their wretched state. Yes, for Luther, everything in worship was to serve the proclamation of the gospel.

It was also this clear understanding of the gospel that prevented Luther from issuing liturgical diktats from Wittenberg.<sup>32</sup> Requiring man-made worship forms could never merit favor before God. Luther, moreover, was hesitant even to produce worship forms for others because he understood the moment he did so, the temptation to perceive them as the only right way for Lutherans to worship could follow.

---

<sup>24</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1947), 723.

<sup>25</sup> Luther, “An Order of Mass,” 26.

<sup>26</sup> Luther, “An Order of Mass,” 21.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 216.

<sup>28</sup> Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” 50.

<sup>29</sup> Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 60.

<sup>30</sup> Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” 59.

<sup>31</sup> Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 35.

<sup>32</sup> James Tiefel, “Liturgy and Its Use in Our Church,” The Institute for Worship & Outreach (2012), <https://www.worshipandoutreach.org/writings/blog/the-liturgy-and-its-use-in-our-church>, 12.



Luther, therefore, did not envision either his *Formula Missae* or *Deutsche Messe* as worship forms that would become the standard for his followers (though in many ways they became that). In his preface to the *Deutsche Messe*, Luther made clear that he was not publishing it with the intent that every town and village should begin using it immediately; instead, with characteristic humility, he explained that he was simply demonstrating how worship happened in Wittenberg and expressed his hope that others could make better orders of service than his own.<sup>33</sup>

Luther teaches the important lesson that in the way the church understands its worship forms, the very gospel is at stake. We can believe some worship forms are superior to others. We can choose to use some worship forms because we believe they proclaim the gospel better than others do. We can even have our own personal preferences for this form or that. What we can never do, however, and what Luther teaches us so clearly through his own words and example is insisting on our chosen forms as the only God-pleasing way to worship. To do so is to fall into legalism and to forfeit the legacy of Lutheran worship we have received. Far worse, it is to risk losing the very gospel itself.

### **“So That the Word May Have Free Course”**

While Luther’s defense of the gospel meant he could never tolerate insisting on a particular man-made form of worship, especially if people believed that form merited favor before God, that same defense of the gospel also meant Luther could never envision worship that in any way minimized the proclamation of that gospel. Peter Brunner points out that by definition Lutheran worship 1) must proclaim the gospel, 2) rightly administer the Sacraments, 3) and do these things in the name of the Triune God.<sup>34</sup> Anything less would fall short of Lutheran worship, or as Luther put it, without the Word, it would be better not to come together at all.<sup>35</sup> By definition, the means of grace are central to Lutheran worship.

This standard does not derive from legalism but from the acknowledgement that it is only in the gospel that God makes himself present on behalf of sinners. It is only through this means of grace that God creates and strengthens faith (Rom 10:17). Worship that departs from the gospel inevitably falls into work righteousness, which is ultimately idolatry and worship of the self.

Luther believed in the objective power of Word and Sacrament to accomplish what God promises. This faith in the means of grace meant that Luther was not so concerned about the subjective feeling of worshippers.<sup>36</sup> For him, everything was about the objective

---

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, “The German Mass and Order of Service,” pages 51-90 in vol. 53 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 61f.

<sup>34</sup> Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 222.

<sup>35</sup> Luther, “Concerning the Order,” 11.

<sup>36</sup> James Tiefel, “Liturgical Worship for Evangelism and Outreach,” *Logia* 2.3 (1993): 80.

Word. He summarized his approach to worship: “Let everything be done so that the Word may have free course instead of the prattling and rattling that has been the rule up to now.”<sup>37</sup>

Timothy Maschke writes, “For Luther, the presence of Christ, whose life and death justified the world, was central in theology and practice. Therefore, Word and Sacrament, the two places where God is present with his love and forgiveness, are central to the life of the Christian community.”<sup>38</sup>

One result of this understanding was Luther’s insistence that preaching occupy a central place in the worship life of the congregation. Maschke, in fact, argues that restoring preaching to its rightful place in worship was Luther’s single greatest contribution to worship.<sup>39</sup> Luther was revolutionary in this regard because the church of the Middle Ages generally did not conceive of God speaking to his people. The long and heavy influence of Aristotle’s philosophy (transmitted through Thomas Aquinas) had, in the minds of many, silenced God.<sup>40</sup> To Aristotle, “god” was only a “Prime Mover” who set the universe in motion but did not interact with creation in a personal way.<sup>41</sup> Under this influence, many Christians in Luther’s day did not conceive of God speaking in worship; instead, he received a sacrifice from the priest’s hands. It was against this conception of a nonspeaking God (*Deus taciturnus*) that Luther struggled, and it was, therefore, his profound assertion that preaching is God actually speaking to his people.<sup>42</sup> “Unlike Aristotle’s god, Luther’s God is never speechless. He speaks.”<sup>43</sup> To Luther, therefore, the spoken Word was just as much a means of grace as the Sacraments because in the Word, God actually speaks to his people in words that accomplish what they promise.<sup>44</sup> The spoken proclamation of the Word, therefore, is the living voice of the gospel and deserves the highest place in worship. In both his *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe*, as well as his directions for Matins and Vespers during the week, Luther emphasized the place of the sermon in the gathering of God’s people.<sup>45</sup>

Luther showed the same confidence in the visible word of the Sacrament of the Altar.<sup>46</sup> Again, it is worthwhile to consider how Luther’s theology compelled him to view this Sacrament in a way distinct from the church of his day. Medieval theologians had obscured the true treasure of the Lord’s Supper. From them, Luther would have learned that the

---

<sup>37</sup> Luther, “Concerning the Order,” 14.

<sup>38</sup> Timothy Maschke, *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 102.

<sup>39</sup> Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> Dennis Ngien, “Worship as Radical Reversal in Martin Luther’s *Theologia Crucis*,” *Reformation* 12 (2007): 16.

<sup>41</sup> Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 179.

<sup>42</sup> H.S. Wilson, “Luther on Preaching as God Speaking,” pages 100-16 in *The Pastoral Luther*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2009), 102f.

<sup>43</sup> Ngien “Worship as Radical Reversal in Martin Luther’s *Theologia Crucis*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*, 306.

<sup>45</sup> Luther, “An Order of Mass,” 38.

<sup>46</sup> Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 52.

Sacrament conferred grace only in the sense that, through the meritorious sacrifice of the priest, God gave Christians the grace to produce a life of love that is pleasing to him. As a result, the actual eating and drinking had lost their significance in favor of the work the priest performed to effect the sacrifice of the mass. Finally, it mattered little if the people paid any attention or if they were present at all. With the focus on the transubstantiation the priest effected, the adoration of the elements the priest was offering became more important than the eating and drinking for the forgiveness of sins. As Luther observed in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, the true blessing of the Sacrament was all but lost.<sup>47</sup>

In a different way, Luther's opponents on the opposite end of the theological spectrum, the Enthusiasts, denied Christ's presence in the bread and wine and, with similar results, lost the true meaning of the Sacrament in favor of an intellectual remembering of Christ and his death.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast to both errors, Luther's scriptural theology with its foundation on the justification of the sinner in Christ was altogether different. Luther believed that in the Sacrament, the Lord is really present and really acts. The eating and drinking matter because Jesus is truly present in the bread and wine of the Supper and through these earthly means confers forgiveness. Luther, therefore, rejected the errors in practice that stemmed from a false teaching of the Supper like private masses and communion in one kind.<sup>49</sup> Both his *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe* reinforced Luther's scriptural, childlike faith in the Sacrament. The presiding minister, according to Luther, should recite the Words of Institution in such a way that the congregation could hear them.<sup>50</sup> The people, free from any manmade requirements, should be able to receive the Sacrament with its gifts "in simple compliance with the institution of Christ."<sup>51</sup>

Unlike in the days of the Reformer, the Lutheran church of the present must grapple with the effects of Pietism and the Enlightenment. Pietism minimized the objective reality of the Word of God in favor of believers' subjective feelings in response to it. Weakened by this influence, many were even more vulnerable to the Enlightenment's rejection of anything in the Word beyond what was reasonable to human nature. Lutherans today must be wary of the difficulties and potential temptations that these movements have left in their wake. One is to limit the power of the Word to the emotional effect that it may or may not have. Another is to think of the Word of God only as something to digest on an intellectual level. To understand Luther on worship and to be his true spiritual heirs is to cast off the effects of these historical movements and to embrace a whole-hearted trust in the objective power of the means of grace. The Lord himself speaks to his people through the Word. Through water connected with that Word, he washes away sin. In, with, and under bread and wine, he gives his true

---

<sup>47</sup> Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," 23.

<sup>48</sup> Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, 97.

<sup>49</sup> Luther, "An Order of Mass," 34f.

<sup>50</sup> Luther, "An Order of Mass," 28.

<sup>51</sup> Luther, "An Order of Mass," 35.

body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins and in anticipation of the eternal feast of heaven. These things were objective and real for Luther, and they permeated his understanding of worship. As he simply said in the conclusion to the *Deutsche Messe*, “For among Christians the whole service should center in the Word and Sacrament.”<sup>52</sup> To that, may we always say, “Amen.”

### “Nothing But the Divine Words of Scripture”

Luther’s emphasis on the gospel in worship meant, first, that no manmade form could usurp it with the false teaching of work righteousness. As we have seen, Luther would never tolerate the “sewer and cesspool” of work righteousness to rule in worship, and he offered frequent warnings against it at a time in church history when legalism ran rampant. Second, Luther’s faith in the gospel meant that true Christian worship relied on the means of grace. As we will see, this reliance informed Luther’s view of form in worship.

For all the admonitions against using form for the wrong reasons, Luther nevertheless chose to preserve the historic forms of Christian worship. Especially in contrast with more radical reformers like Karlstadt and Zwingli, Luther’s approach to worship fell decidedly on the conservative end of the spectrum.<sup>53</sup> Neither the *Formula Missae* nor the *Deutsche Messe* differed extensively from the way the people would have worshipped before the Reformation. Luther explained in the introduction to the *Formula Missae*, “It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use.”<sup>54</sup>

To understand Luther on any issue is to remember that he was first and foremost a pastor. On the one hand, therefore, Luther’s hesitancy to change worship derived from his pastoral care for the weak in faith. Luther did not introduce rapid, major changes in worship because he had a concern for how the weak in faith would understand such changes. Such an approach could leave the weak and uneducated conscience-stricken, leaving them with the fear that they could have committed a sin against God if they in any way diverged from the worship practices they had known their entire lives. Luther was unwilling to put that or any other stumbling block in the path of the weak. Even when a change was necessary, communion in both kinds for example, still Luther preferred to let the Word accomplish its work and was, therefore, patient and deliberate in introducing that change. Indeed, Luther teaches us that the correct approach to worship is always a pastoral one.

On the other hand, it would be an oversimplification to assume that Luther’s hesitancy to abandon the Western Rite and other historical worship forms came only from his concern

---

<sup>52</sup> Luther, “The German Mass,” 90.

<sup>53</sup> Craig A. Satterlee, “Lutheran Practices of Worship,” pages 163-77 in *Historical Foundations of Worship: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Perspectives*, eds. Melanie C. Ross and Mark A. Lampert (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022), 165.

<sup>54</sup> Luther, “An Order of Mass,” 20.

for the weak. To the contrary, Luther found great value in the historic patterns of Christian worship. He pointed out that, aside from the abuses which he removed, the church's historic worship was really "nothing but the divine words of Scripture."<sup>55</sup> The songs of the Ordinary, the creeds, the pericopes, the psalms - all of them put the Word of God into the hearts and mouths of God's people. Not only did Luther see no reason to change such forms, but they also were a perfect complement to his emphasis on proclaiming the gospel in worship.

Always a practical man, Luther also recognized that, in the end, all worship must have one form or another anyway. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, he observed that it is simply impossible to live life in this world "without ceremonies."<sup>56</sup> With an insightful analogy, Luther went on to discuss the place of ceremonies in the life of the Christian:

Hence ceremonies are to be given the same place in the life of a Christian as models and plans have among builders and artisans. They are prepared, not as a permanent structure, but because without them nothing could be built or made. When the structure is complete the models and plans are laid aside. You see, they are not despised, rather they are greatly sought after; but what we despise is the false estimate of them since no one holds them to be the real and permanent structure.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from work righteousness, Luther found great value in ceremonies. He understood that ceremonies serve as a plan of sorts for the Christian life. Ceremonies, or what in different contexts people today might call customs or habits, give structure to life and inform human understanding and belief.<sup>58</sup> In worship, ceremonies provide a plan and a structure. Luther abandoned ceremonies that informed false beliefs like the Canon of the Mass, but he preserved ceremonies that proclaimed the divine words of Scripture like the Western Rite and the church year.

Luther's first instinct, in fact, was to preserve the historical practice of the church. He recognized that abandoning the "models and plans" of historic worship forms would simply mean that new forms would take their place and that those new forms would not be better simply by virtue of being newer, a reality that church history demonstrates time and time again. Rather than create something new, he preferred to maintain the worship forms passed down throughout the history of the Christian church. No, he would not make laws about such things, but for his part, he commended historic worship forms to the degree that they brought glory to the gospel,<sup>59</sup> and he declared it unchristian to quarrel about them.<sup>60</sup> Like the

---

<sup>55</sup> Luther, "An Order of Mass," 38.

<sup>56</sup> Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 374.

<sup>57</sup> Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 375f.

<sup>58</sup> Philosopher James K.A. Smith speaks of the "liturgies" that form the basis of life and faith. Cf. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Vol. 1 of Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

<sup>59</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 52.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Luther, "A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians concerning Public Worship and Concord," pages 41-50 in vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 47.

rest of his approach to worship, Luther's interest in preserving historic worship forms stemmed from his faith in the gospel.

Luther understood the value such forms had in teaching the gospel to Christians. In worship, Christians learn the gospel. Luther, therefore, advocated retaining the readings of the church year, not because he wanted to "force anyone to fast," but because the church year proclaimed the Word of God to the people in a regular, organized way.<sup>61</sup> In his commentary on the Second Article in the *Large Catechism*, he noted:

But the proper place to explain all these different points is not in the brief children's sermon, but rather the longer sermons throughout the whole year, especially at the times appointed for dealing at length with such articles as Christ's birth, passion, resurrection, ascension, etc. Indeed, the entire gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this article. Upon it all our salvation and blessedness are based, and it is so rich and broad that we can never learn it fully.<sup>62</sup>

Luther understood that hearing about the words and works of Christ through the pattern of the Christian church year teaches the Christian faith, in the same way that singing the songs of the Ordinary and reciting the creeds inculcates the gospel into the hearts of worshippers week after week. He believed that Christians could never hear and learn about these things enough. Luther never insisted on external forms for their own sake, but his profound insights as a teacher also meant he could not ignore the ability that good forms have to teach the Christian faith. Indeed, they are a heritage, the way the church has taught the gospel from one generation to the next.

This heritage highlights yet another explanation for Luther's preference for historic forms in worship. Even as he faced the raging fury of Rome, Luther never abandoned his faith in the one, holy Christian church. Luther understood Christians' connection to one another through time and space. It was never, therefore, Luther's intention to create a different church; he sought to purify the one that already existed, the only one that ever could. That meant, while he never hesitated to sound the alarm over false doctrine and was quick to disavow any practice that would encourage it, still he refused simply to throw away the church's heritage and start over. Just the opposite, Luther wanted worship that maintained a strong link to the past.<sup>63</sup> He retained the historic worship forms of the Christian church because Lutherans are heirs of that heritage, the true church holding onto the gospel. Ours is the faith of the apostles and prophets. Adhering to historic worship forms is a testimony to that fact.

The Lutheran church, therefore, beginning with Luther himself, has, as a rule, respected and appreciated the contributions of the historic Christian church. In that

---

<sup>61</sup> Luther, "The German Mass," 90.

<sup>62</sup> Large Catechism II 32,33. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 435.

<sup>63</sup> Carl Schalk, *Singing the Church's Song: Essays and Occasional Writings on Church Music* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2015), 59.

appreciation it has demonstrated an awareness of the “snobbery” of modern times that tends to believe and act like anything of value must be new.<sup>64</sup> When historic practices are lost, we lose a part of our connection to the believers before us. We lose a part of what distinguishes us from the world around us.<sup>65</sup>

The Lutheran approach to traditional worship forms, therefore, has been to walk a middle road.<sup>66</sup> On the one hand, Lutherans recognize that the unity of the Christian church does not depend on such things. For this reason, the Augsburg Confession makes clear that the correct preaching of the gospel and administration of the Sacraments are sufficient for Christian unity and fellowship.<sup>67</sup> Faith unites us to Christ, our head, and to one another as fellow members of his body (1 Cor 12:27). No outward form could ever do that. On the other hand, however, the Lutheran church has expressed a clear preference for the worship forms of the historic church because they have recognized these outward forms as a means to express and maintain that unity. Early Lutherans, therefore, insisted that their position was to uphold them. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states:

At the outset it is again necessary, by way of preface, to point out that we do not abolish the Mass but religiously retain and defend it. Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord's Day and on the other festivals, when the Sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, after they have been examined and absolved. We also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things.<sup>68</sup>

Luther's appreciation for the historic was not from a lack of imagination about what could be. He was well aware that plenty of people were busy offering new orders for Christian worship, but he also understood that quantity did not necessarily translate into quality. “We must,” he wrote in his conclusion to the *Deutsche Messe*, “arrive at a common standard to assess and control the profusion of orders.”<sup>69</sup> Not only did Luther think that new orders for worship should undergo a review process before they would be accepted but in his colorful way made clear that, in his mind, novelty for its own sake was not a virtue:

For I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one, and more so because of the fickle and fastidious spirits who rush in like unclean swine without faith or reason, and who delight only in novelty and tire of it as quickly, when it has worn off. Such people are a nuisance even in other affairs, but in spiritual matters, they are absolutely unbearable.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 191.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 153.

<sup>66</sup> Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 41.

<sup>67</sup> Augsburg Confession VII 2,3. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 42.

<sup>68</sup> Apology XXIV 1. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 258.

<sup>69</sup> Luther, “The German Mass,” 90.

<sup>70</sup> Luther, “An Order of Mass,” 19.

As Luther considered worship forms, he was also well aware of the danger of sectarianism.<sup>71</sup> He personally contended with the Enthusiasts who taught an inner-working of the Spirit separated from the means of grace. Just as Luther had theological reasons for upholding historic worship forms, so his opponents who abandoned them likewise did so for theological reasons.<sup>72</sup> For Lutheran pastors, this is critical to recognize. Just as Luther's opponents in Rome insisted on the Canon of the Mass because of their legalism, so the Enthusiasts believed human effort could access God's grace apart from the means of grace and, in the end, fell into legalism as well, just from the opposite direction.<sup>73</sup> How critical it is for Lutheran pastors to recognize this ditch and to follow Luther on the middle road. Against those who would claim for themselves an inner-working of the Spirit, Luther would point again and again to the objective power of the Word and Sacraments.

Interestingly, even what Luther chose not to do has something to teach us about worship. In addition to publishing the *Formula Missae* and the *Deutsche Messe*, Luther mused about producing a third service, one of a different kind altogether. "The third kind of service," he wrote, "should be a truly evangelical order and should not be held in a public place for all sorts of people."<sup>74</sup> Luther went on to describe a "brief and neat order" with "Word, prayer, and love."<sup>75</sup>

Luther, however, never produced such a service, and even as he envisioned it, he revealed his reasons why. First, he did not sense that the people of Wittenberg were ready for such a service. They were not requesting it, and he believed they lacked the spiritual maturity for it. Second, he was afraid that if he created it only for himself, "it might turn into a sect."<sup>76</sup> Again, Luther did not want to separate Lutherans from the practice of the historic Christian church. Finally, Luther concluded producing such a service would be unsuccessful: "For we Germans are a rough, rude, and reckless people, with whom it is hard to do anything, except in cases of dire need."<sup>77</sup>

In summary, Luther was a reformer but never a rebel.<sup>78</sup> While he would have nothing to do with forms that stemmed from legalism and while he would insist that such forms be eliminated just as King Hezekiah destroyed the bronze snake when it became the object of idolatry,<sup>79</sup> nevertheless, he recognized the value of form for Christians in their worship. It was valuable for the weak in faith. It was valuable in teaching the faith, and it was valuable in reminding us that we belong to the one, holy Christian church. Through its history, the

---

<sup>71</sup> Luther, "The German Mass," 78.

<sup>72</sup> Tiefel, "Liturgical Worship for Evangelism and Outreach," 80.

<sup>73</sup> Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, 173.

<sup>74</sup> Luther, "The German Mass," 63.

<sup>75</sup> Luther, "The German Mass," 64.

<sup>76</sup> Luther, "The German Mass," 64.

<sup>77</sup> Luther, "The German Mass," 64.

<sup>78</sup> Schalk, *Singing the Church's Song*, 59.

<sup>79</sup> Luther, "The German Mass," 90.



Lutheran church has maintained historic worship forms because they have found “no better way” for maintaining worship centered in the means of grace.<sup>80</sup> Everything depends on the gospel.

### “A Dutiful Servant to All”

Of course, difficult questions about worship can still remain. Christ has brought fulfillment to the Old Testament’s worship code and, in so doing, has given us the freedom to worship him in the Spirit and in truth (Col 2:16,17; John 4:24). For this, we give thanks, but we also recognize that with freedom comes responsibility. In ministry, the line between faithful practice and legalistic rigidity can get blurry, just as the line between Christian freedom and carelessness can. As he cautioned against both extremes, Luther navigated the narrow Lutheran middle and, as he did, once again demonstrated that his practice always returned to the gospel message itself. Writing against the “heavenly prophets,” he declared “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.”<sup>81</sup>

As Luther sailed between the Scylla of treating form in worship with a legalistic attitude and the Charybdis of disregarding its importance altogether, he gives a demonstration of how he handled the larger issue of Christian freedom. Understanding this biblical, Lutheran approach to Christian freedom is essential in approaching the issue of worship because it can keep us from the false conclusion that discussions of worship begin and end with freedom only in the sense of individual preference.

For Luther, Christian freedom is never a license to indulge one’s personal preference in an arbitrary way. Rather like every other doctrine, Luther always couched the issue of Christian freedom in the context of the doctrine of justification. Christians have freedom because Christ has set them free. In Christ, they are no longer slaves to sin but free to live a life of righteousness (John 8:31-36; Rom 6:15-18). With this concept of freedom always at the forefront, Luther understood Christian freedom as the freedom to serve others.<sup>82</sup> As he famously framed his argument in *The Freedom of a Christian*, “A Christian is a perfectly free Lord, subject to none,” and yet at the same time, “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan E. Schroeder, “Worship & Outreach: A Lutheran Paradigm.” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File (2010), 14.

<sup>81</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments,” pages 79-223 in vol. 40 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 130.

<sup>82</sup> Earle Treptow, “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, and the Use of Variety in Worship,” *The Institute for Worship & Outreach* (2012), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” 344.

This understanding undergirded Luther's approach to Christian freedom in worship. Again, at his return from the Wartburg in 1522, we see how Luther dealt with the fallout from Karlstadt's hasty and careless worship reforms in Wittenberg. We see him making an application of Christian freedom as service to others: "Free is that in which I have a choice, and may use or not, yet in such a way it profits my brother and not me."<sup>84</sup> Luther did not deny that Christian freedom granted believers the opportunity to make choices, but at the same time, he pointed out how the natural result of exercising Christian freedom would be a decision that benefits others. The moment the sinful nature succeeds in tempting the Christian to use freedom as an opportunity to indulge the flesh, for selfish ends, true freedom has been lost. Luther wrote:

There are very many who, when they hear of this freedom of faith, immediately turn it into an occasion for the flesh and think that now all things are allowed them. They want to show that they are free men and Christians only by despising and finding fault with ceremonies, traditions, and human laws; as if they were Christians because on stated days they do not fast or eat meat when others fast, or because they do not use the accustomed prayers, and with upturned nose scoff at the precepts of men, although they utterly disregard all else that pertains to the Christian religion.<sup>85</sup>

Christian freedom is service, and the driving force behind it is love. To a group of Christians squabbling about worship, Luther wrote, "This I said to the preachers so that they may consider love and their obligation toward people, dealing with the people not in faith's freedom but in love's submission and service, preserving the freedom of faith before God."<sup>86</sup>

Considering Luther's approach to Christian freedom in worship is an opportunity for us to contemplate how we think of Christian freedom. In the milieu of our society, it can become all too easy to associate freedom with personal choice, as though one equals the other. While the earthly freedoms we enjoy are no doubt a reason to give thanks to God, we do well to recognize the wall of separation between that kind of freedom and Christian freedom.

Maintaining that separation allows us to think of freedom in worship the way Luther did. Simply because an issue falls in the realm of Christian freedom does not mean decisions about it are arbitrary and are not worthy of care.<sup>87</sup> Often, such decisions matter a great deal. Furthermore, when we are considering and making decisions about worship (many of which do involve Christian freedom), we can recognize that they most often are important because worship is important.<sup>88</sup> We can recognize that our decisions about worship are opportunities to exercise Christian love.

---

<sup>84</sup> Luther, "Eight Sermons," 74.

<sup>85</sup> Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 372.

<sup>86</sup> Martin Luther, "A Christian Exhortation," 48.

<sup>87</sup> Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 223.

<sup>88</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*, 327.

As we do, we can also recognize that none of the decisions we make about worship happen in a vacuum. Instead, they affect brothers and sisters throughout our fellowship. The truth is, in fact, that there are many areas of our ecclesiastical lives in which we limit our freedom for the benefit of brothers and sisters. Consider, for example, our worker-training system. Obviously, Scripture does not mandate it. In freedom, a group of Christians could make an entirely different arrangement. Out of love and concern for one another, however, and for mutual benefit, we agree on a consistent way of educating our next generation of called workers. Or, as another example, consider the way those workers receive divine calls into their places of service. Again, God does not mandate one way of accomplishing this high and noble task, and many of the procedures and policies we have for this work, while good and wise for many reasons, could, in theory, work differently and remain God-pleasing. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we nevertheless agree to carry out this aspect of our work together consistently for the benefit of all. In essence, we limit our freedom because we recognize that doing so is the only way to carry out such work in an orderly way. Just as important, however, is recognizing that doing so is part of Christian freedom, properly understood. It is an exercise of demonstrating Christian love - both toward those who have the God-given responsibility of carrying out these tasks and toward our fellow believers across our fellowship.

Granted, there are unique reasons why it is especially important for our church body to be united in its education and calling process, and of course, the matter of worship practice is not a perfect parallel. There is simply no need for us to have the exact same worship practice in every one of our congregations, nor would it be beneficial to pretend so. The varied settings and gifts of individual congregations make different worship practices both a necessity and a blessing. Still, there can be blessings in a certain level of unity, not the least of which is it can reflect our consideration for each other. Decisions about worship practice can and do affect our fellow believers across our fellowship.

The exercise of genuine Christian freedom, always with Christian love as its guide, would suggest that we consider those brothers and sisters as we exercise that freedom in worship. Historically, Lutherans have been comfortable setting what we today would likely consider rather strict expectations for how pastors and congregations would conduct worship. For example, in his *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel* where he was superintendent, Martin Chemnitz, the very man credited with preserving the first Martin's theology, saw no contradiction with Christian freedom in essentially mandating an order of service for the congregations he oversaw. While he first acknowledged Christian freedom and rejected any ceremony used to advance work righteousness, he proceeded to write the following:

“[T]here is still a manner of benefit inherent in keeping ceremonies as uniform as possible, and because this also serves to maintain unity in doctrine, also because common, simple, weak consciences are all the less offended and rather the more improved, it is therefore viewed as good that, as much as possible, uniformity in

ceremonies with the neighboring Reformation churches should be achieved and maintained. And for this reason, in the matter of ceremonies, all pastors in the churches of our principality shall henceforth strictly abide by and conform to the order described below, and it shall not be neglected without exceptional and considerable cause.”<sup>89</sup>

This is certainly not an argument that our churches return to the ecclesiastical structure of the sixteenth century. It is, however, an acknowledgment that the true exercise of Christian freedom, especially in a matter as important as worship, means considering the ways that our decisions will affect each other. In practical terms, that may mean seeking out the guidance and advice of brothers in ministry before departing too far from the norm. It may mean recognizing that there is a healthy middle in practice. It may simply mean approaching worship with a degree of humility. As Luther proposed his orders of worship, he indicated his willingness to receive correction from others, and if someone could suggest a better way, he was more than willing to listen.<sup>90</sup> No doubt, we can learn from that attitude. Whatever decisions we may make, Christian freedom means always keeping in mind that our freedom is, as Peter Brunner writes, “radically different from human arbitrariness.”<sup>91</sup> Whatever the conclusions we reach, therefore, we will seek to make them out of love for others. Worship can never simply be about “what I want.”<sup>92</sup> Such a use of freedom, or more accurately, an abuse of freedom, would be a contradiction in terms.<sup>93</sup>

### **“A Spiritual Priesthood, Held in Common by All Christians”**

Unlike his adversaries, Luther devoted great care to how the people would react to changes in worship because he understood that, ultimately, worship is their work and privilege. Luther taught that God’s people are to be active in public worship. They are to speak and to sing the Word of God to one another. This was more than a pious wish on the Reformer’s part; it reflected a foundational theological principle of the Reformation.

For far too long, the church of Rome had robbed God’s people of their rightful inheritance. Not only had it deprived the people of the gospel comfort Christ had won for them, but it had made worship the domain of the clergy alone. That the priest offered the sacrifice of the mass was all that mattered, and the result was that the people’s presence - let alone their participation - became a secondary concern, if it was a concern at all. For Luther,

---

<sup>89</sup> Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae, *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel: How Doctrine, Ceremonies, and Other Church-Related Matters Shall (by God’s Grace) Be Conducted Henceforth*, Vol. 9 of *Chemnitz’s Works*, trans. Jacob Corzine, Matthew C. Harrison, and Andrew Smith; eds. Jacob Corzine and Matthew Carver (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2015), 79.

<sup>90</sup> Luther, “An Order of Mass,” 39.

<sup>91</sup> Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 223.

<sup>92</sup> Schroeder, “Worship & Outreach: A Lutheran Paradigm,” 8.

<sup>93</sup> Holger Sonntag, “‘Freedom Shall Be and Remain a Servant of Love:’ Distinguishing Faith and Love as a Criterion for Liturgical Practice in Luther’s Theology,” *Logia* 18.1 (Epiphany, 2009): 44.

the issue once again came back to the gospel. Work righteousness had caused the church to forget both the real purpose of worship and, as a result, the people of God's place in it.

Not only, therefore, did Luther seek to restore the teaching of the gospel to worship, he sought to restore the people's proclamation of it as well. Luther understood that in his New Testament church Christ has made all believers into a holy nation of priests. After decrying the Roman priesthood that had for so long obfuscated the gospel, Luther spoke of the genuine New Testament priesthood of all blood-bought, redeemed children of God: "This is a spiritual priesthood, held in common by all Christians, through which we are all priests with Christ.<sup>94</sup> In Christ, God has made us into a nation of royal priests and given us the privilege of proclaiming the praises of him who has called us out of darkness and into his light (1 Pet 2:9). Not only, therefore, did Luther proclaim that we are the freest of kings and priests forever, but he pointed out that all things pertaining to our salvation are subject to us. He wrote, "The nature of this priesthood and kingship is something like this: First, with respect to the kingship, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm. As a matter of fact, all things are made subject to him and are compelled to serve him in obtaining salvation."<sup>95</sup> In short, the gospel does not belong to the clergy as some kind of higher caste in Christendom. The gospel belongs to God's people to proclaim.

Luther, therefore, sought to restore this understanding to public worship. That is not to say that full congregational participation in worship happened all at once.<sup>96</sup> As always, Luther exercised patience in his reforms. Already in his preface to the *Formula Missae*, however, he expressed his desire that the church would soon have "as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during the mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*."<sup>97</sup> In his services, Luther wanted God's people participating in worship. He wanted them participating because through it God's people would be hearing and learning the gospel for themselves, and through it they would be carrying out the God-given privilege that was theirs in Christ - to proclaim the love of Christ to each other and all the world.

The importance of God's people participating in worship is yet another reason Luther and Lutherans after him have generally advocated for historic forms of worship. In addition to connecting us with the historic Christian church, in addition to providing an excellent way for God's people to learn the truths of the Christian faith, historic Christian worship provides an excellent way in which God's people can be active participants in worship. From responsive dialogues and prayers to canticles and hymns, historic Christian worship puts the Word of God into the mouths of God's people. It enables them, as the Apostle Paul urges the believers

---

<sup>94</sup> Martin Luther, "The Misuse of the Mass," pages 127-230 in vol. 36 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 138.

<sup>95</sup> Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 354f.

<sup>96</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*, 299.

<sup>97</sup> Luther, "An Order of Mass, 36.

in Ephesus, to speak to one another with “psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit” (Eph 5:19).

Unlike such worship forms, the worship forms that have developed in the centuries after the Reformation tend not to emphasize the participation of God’s people. This difference in emphasis is not coincidental; rather, it reflects a distinct theological perspective. Historically, those who advocated for many of these later forms have not believed in the power of the means of grace. Instead, they have tended to believe in the power of man’s free will to take hold of God’s grace. As a result, such worship forms tend to appeal either to the intellect or the emotions on their own terms because the people who practice them believe these are the keys to motivate the human will.

The contrast with Lutheranism could not be starker. Worship with the only intent of manipulating emotions would have appalled Luther.<sup>98</sup> Instead, Luther wanted the priesthood of all believers speaking and singing the means of grace to each other because he knew that, through it, the Holy Spirit works when and where he pleases. The participation of God’s people in worship is a matter of the gospel.<sup>99</sup>

Repeating the same words and canticles, singing the same hymns to mark the occasions of the church year, following the same outline for worship week in and week out, all these practices have the advantage of allowing God’s people to participate in worship with confidence and understanding.<sup>100</sup> Sometimes, historic worship is subject to the charge that it is boring, unimaginative, or lifeless, but repeated elements of worship need not be tedious when we remember their meaning and practice them accordingly.<sup>101</sup>

Though there is nothing new under the sun, ours is nevertheless a time of self-centered narcissism.<sup>102</sup> A consumerist mindset tries to dictate almost every decision in life. “But what is in it for me? What am I going to get out of it?” Too often, Christians can stumble into thinking this way about worship too. They think of it only in terms of how it makes them feel and what they perceive to be deriving from the experience. The great tragedy of narcissism, however, is that staring at one’s reflection in the pool causes people to miss out on everything going on around them. It robs life of a higher purpose.

Luther’s understanding of the spiritual priesthood of all believers restores that purpose, and though believers can exercise that priesthood in every part of their lives, yet in worship it shines like nowhere else. Our work in worship is not for our benefit alone. It is for those whom we are serving on both ends, God and our neighbors. In worship, God’s people join in the high and noble task of proclaiming the one thing needful for all the world. To

---

<sup>98</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, “Luther’s Liturgical Reforms and the Origins of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*,” *Cross Accent* (Fall/Winter, 2015): 38.

<sup>99</sup> Johnold Strey, *Christian Worship: God Gives His Gospel Gifts*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2021), 276f.

<sup>100</sup> Schalk, *Singing the Church’s Song*, 63.

<sup>101</sup> Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, 122.

<sup>102</sup> Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, 107.

young and old, to great and small, to every tribe, nation, language, and race, God has given us the eternal gospel to proclaim (Rev 14:6).

In an age when the Sunday morning newspaper and a cup of coffee or the escapades of the night before or something altogether different seem to be keeping more and more away, in an age when so many think about worship as nothing more than “something we’ve gotta do,” remembering Luther’s rediscovery of the gospel - and the place God’s people have in proclaiming it - can reinvigorate us these five centuries later. It can help God’s people to recognize worship as the joyful privilege it is.

### **“The Excellent Gift of God”**

The importance Luther placed on the people’s participation in worship also highlights one of the central ways the Lutheran church has always accomplished that. Of course, it is that creation of God Luther spoke of as one of God’s greatest gifts. About music, Luther opined:

I would certainly like to praise music with all my heart as the excellent gift of God which it is and to commend it to everyone. But I am so overwhelmed by the diversity and magnitude of its virtue and benefits that I can find neither beginning nor end or method for my discourse. As much as I want to commend it, my praise is bound to be wanting and inadequate. For who can comprehend it all?<sup>103</sup>

Not only did Luther treasure music as a gift of God beyond words, but he also recognized in it a gift God had given so that the church could use it in proclamation of the even greater gift of the gospel. Luther continued:

Thus it was not without reason that the fathers and prophets wanted nothing else to be associated as closely with the Word of God as music. Therefore, we have so many hymns and Psalms where message and music join to move the listener’s soul, while in other living beings and [sounding] bodies music remains a language without words. After all, the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music and by providing sweet melodies with words.<sup>104</sup>

Not everyone has agreed with Luther, either before or after. Augustine worried that music was so lovely that it could distract the worshipper from the beauty that really mattered - God’s Word.<sup>105</sup> Calvin agreed and restricted music to unaccompanied psalm singing in the worship life of Geneva.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Martin Luther, “Preface to Georg Rhau’s *Symphoniae lucundae*,” pages 321-24 in vol. 53 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 321.

<sup>104</sup> Luther, “Preface to Georg Rhau’s *Symphoniae lucundae*,” 323f.

<sup>105</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, 10.33.

<sup>106</sup> Martin Tel, “Calvinist and Reformed Practices of Worship,” pages 178-91 in *Historical Foundations of Worship: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Perspectives*, eds. Melanie C. Ross and Mark A. Lamport (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022), 181.

Luther, however, gave thanks for music and upheld its place in worship. He was not interested in a Puritan-like mindset that rejected the use of God's gifts in worship, a mindset that had a preference for the Word to the exclusion of rite and form.<sup>107</sup>

As the people participated in worship through music, Luther recognized several dimensions of purpose. First, praising God through music was the people's response to the gospel. It was the sacrifice properly understood, a doxological sacrifice of thanksgiving for all God has done through Christ.<sup>108</sup> Second, it was proclamatory. As God's people spoke the gospel to one another, they encouraged each other, and the Holy Spirit built them up in the faith.<sup>109</sup>

This perspective on music's place in worship is worth contemplating because often in our present age, people think of music in worship as just another means to manipulate emotions or appeal to individual preferences.

Luther would not have denied the appeal of music (nor was he unappreciative of it), but he also understood that music had a higher purpose in worship than stirring emotions. Music in Lutheran worship is a vehicle for communicating the gospel, and it was for this reason that Luther not only wanted to cultivate music's place in worship but wanted God's people participating in it. Lutherans sing because through song we proclaim the gospel to one another. Through music, God gives his people a powerful vehicle to communicate the Word and chase the devil away.<sup>110</sup> As Carl Schalk points out, music "expands [believers'] participation in the prayer life of the church."<sup>111</sup>

Neither did Luther's ministerial view of music in worship mean he was indifferent to the quality of the music used in worship. Far from it, in Luther we find not only a theologian but a discerning musician who sought excellence in worship. Luther, for example, understood that if music was to serve as a vehicle for the gospel, then the music should fit the text.<sup>112</sup> It needed to be the right vehicle. In addition, he was interested in cultivating a musical heritage for the church. One of the pervasive myths about Luther (without any historical support) is that he used secular music (or favored doing so) in the church. This, however, is simply not the case.<sup>113</sup>

Throughout his life and work, Luther demonstrated that he wanted excellent music for the church. He wanted to employ the best of God's gifts for worship. This drive for excellence explains in part why he produced the *Formula Missae* in 1523 but did not produce the *Deutsche*

---

<sup>107</sup> Mark Searle, "Ritual," pages 51-60 in *Study of the Liturgy: Revised Edition*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Arnold SJ, and Paul Bradshaw (New York: Oxford: 1992), 56.

<sup>108</sup> Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism: Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict*, (New York: Oxford, 2004), 20.

<sup>109</sup> Mark Mattes, *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 114.

<sup>110</sup> Mattes, *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty*, 121.

<sup>111</sup> Schalk, *Singing the Church's Song*, 33.

<sup>112</sup> Helmar Junghans, "Luther on the Reform of Worship," *Lutheran Quarterly* XIII (1999): 329.

<sup>113</sup> Joan K. Sander, "Luther and the 'Devil's Tunes,'" *Concordia Journal* (April, 2003): 130.



*Messe* until three years later in 1526. Luther refused to produce an inferior German service. In fact, plenty of German orders of service of questionable quality existed before Luther's *Deutsche Messe*, and his colleagues had to urge him to produce his own. Luther, however, was not willing to put out a half-baked product. He wanted a well-crafted German service, not a wooden translation of the Latin but a service that spoke the language of the people. He wanted music that fit with that language and that was of the highest quality.<sup>114</sup> To accomplish his vision, he not only devoted his own considerable skills to the task but also collaborated with the finest musicians and composers Germany could offer. The result was the *Deutsche Messe*, a legacy that served generations of German-speaking Lutherans in worship well.

Luther's concern for the linguistic and musical integrity of the *Deutsche Messe* illustrates the broader point that Luther wanted the very best for worship. Luther recognized the gospel of Christ as the most beautiful gift of God. As a result, Luther recognized that it was worthy of the most beautiful adornment that people could give it through music, the arts, and language. Indeed, the privilege of worshipping the true God is grounded in the fact that Christ took on human flesh and entered our world; as a result of this beautiful good news, Christians can now use the most beautiful things of this world in our worship of him.<sup>115</sup>

Luther's pursuit of excellence in worship was apparent not only in his liturgical efforts but in his efforts to write excellent hymns and in his encouragements for others to do the same.<sup>116</sup> Luther encouraged German poets to write German hymns for the people to sing in worship. He encouraged musicians to write tunes to carry them. He praised efforts that he considered worthwhile, and at the same time, he was not afraid to suggest that some efforts fell short.

Luther's *Achtliederbuch* of 1524 would, therefore, become the first among many Lutheran hymnals. Fulfilling Luther's desire that the people would have a way to sing the gospel to one another during worship, singing hymns has become synonymous with the Lutheran church. We are the singing church. In hymns, we learn to express the gospel in beautiful ways. We find comfort in our times of need. We express our fellowship with one another both in mourning and rejoicing, and we pass those ways on to our children as we teach them to sing hymns too. Of Luther's many contributions to worship, one that has certainly touched the lives of countless souls is his hymnody, as well as his encouragement that other Lutherans would continue to compose and sing excellent gospel-centered hymns.

Luther's pursuit of excellence in worship is worth contemplating for a number of reasons. First, human nature can so quickly fall into a "good enough" mentality. As pastors with busy lives and schedules, it is important to guard against the satisfaction with mediocrity

---

<sup>114</sup> Clif Daniell, "Luther on Public Worship: Serving God and Being Served by Him," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 15 (2019): 95.

<sup>115</sup> Ngien, "Worship as Radical Reversal in Martin Luther's *Theologia Crucis*," 22.

<sup>116</sup> Sander, "Luther and the 'Devil's Tunes,'" 131f.

that can creep into any regular pursuit.<sup>117</sup> Trust in the power of God's Word and Sacraments was neither for Luther nor is for us an excuse to give less than our best in worship.

An additional danger is that we forget that humans are more than brains. We experience the world with more than intellect. God has blessed us with multiple senses through which we experience and learn. The world's marketing agents know this and use that knowledge.<sup>118</sup> The Christian church is wise to recognize it as well and reflect it in our worship. Worship that makes use of sights, sounds, smells, and taste captures our attention and engages the whole human creature. They are ways human beings process the world around them, and when we recognize that, we can employ all of them in worship.

The pursuit of excellence also suggests that the church and its leaders of today must continue to advocate for the education of future preachers, church musicians, and other artists. If indeed we are going to have excellence in worship, then we need those with the training necessary to make it happen.

Finally, Luther's vision of excellence in worship highlights yet another benefit of historic worship forms. As Daniel Zager observes, maintaining the Western Rite creates a stable environment for the production of church music and art.<sup>119</sup> As the church holds to the historic forms of Christian worship, the music and art of centuries past fit seamlessly into its worship. Likewise, the music and art created today will continue to have a place in the worship of future generations.

The postmodern world has largely rejected the concept of objective beauty. Many see it is a figment of an individual's imagination, leaving personal choice and feeling as the only standards to decide what is and what is not beautiful. In contrast, Luther developed as a theologian in a society that regarded beauty as an objective thing.<sup>120</sup> Luther believed in putting those beautiful things to use to glorify the most beautiful thing: the gospel of Christ. For Lutherans today, it therefore remains important to continue to educate about what is truly beautiful and to make use of it in worship.

Luther himself maintained his trust in the power of the Word to accomplish the spiritual blessings only it could, while at the same time upholding the principle that worship deserved the most excellent efforts his people could possibly offer it. To Luther, the gospel deserved the best. It was worth it.

### **“Everything Full of Divine Appearances”**

Though Luther insisted on excellence, though he wanted to employ that which is beautiful in proclamation of the gospel, none of that changed the fundamental fact that Luther was a

---

<sup>117</sup> Tiefel, “Liturgical Worship for Evangelism and Outreach,” 83.

<sup>118</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 127.

<sup>119</sup> Daniel Zager, *The Gospel Preached through Music: The Purpose and Practice of Lutheran Church Music* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 2013), 30.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas Korcok, *Serpents in the Classroom: The Poisoning of Modern Education and How the Church Can Cure It* (Irvine: 1517, 2022), 74.

theologian of the cross. In contrast to his opponents who glorified the works of man in worship, Luther was content with the glory of the cross hidden in the means of grace. More than anything else, it is Luther's insistence on upholding the cross of Christ that defines his approach to theology. Rediscovering and giving thanks for principles and practices of Lutheran worship, therefore, means considering the cross.

The theology of the cross characterizes Lutheran worship. It means that the worshipper approaches God in humility. Luther understood that the one who approaches God in a humble state, like the repentant tax collector, is in fact the one closest to God.<sup>121</sup> Likewise, it means that those who worship God must also recognize that they carry a cross in this world, that in this fallen world they still find themselves in a world of struggle.<sup>122</sup> The theology of the cross reinforces the fact that in worship, it is the worshipper who ultimately needs to be served by God.<sup>123</sup> Finally, the theology of the cross teaches us that in the gospel, God does not just express the empty sympathy of this world, but he heals our greatest affliction.<sup>124</sup>

In contrast, it is always a theology of glory that makes people imagine they can approach God on their own merits and emphasizes man's service to God over God's service to the sinner.<sup>125</sup> It is a theology of glory that imagines believers find special success and prosperity in this world. It is a theology of glory that denies the hiddenness of the gospel's true glory with the inevitable result that it will, in one way or another, confound law and gospel.<sup>126</sup>

As heirs of Luther's theology, it is essential to recognize this distinction. As Timothy Wengert points out, the fastest-growing Christian denominations in our society proclaim the false promises of prosperity and happiness in this world.<sup>127</sup> The praise songs that come from them often reflect that theology.<sup>128</sup>

Ultimately, the very gospel itself is at stake. Through dying to ourselves, daily repenting of sin, and finding full forgiveness in Christ, we become theologians of the cross, theologians who are content with the way God speaks to us in Word and Sacrament.<sup>129</sup>

It is in the theology of the cross that we can recognize even in the trials and tribulations of this world the divine appearances of God's grace. In his *Commentary on Genesis*,

---

<sup>121</sup> Mattes, *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty*, 82.

<sup>122</sup> Wengert, "Luther's Liturgical Reforms," 38.

<sup>123</sup> Daniell, "Luther on Public Worship: Serving God and Being Served by Him," 89.

<sup>124</sup> Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," pages 33-58 in *The Pastoral Luther*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 46.

<sup>125</sup> Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," 90.

<sup>126</sup> Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, 87.

<sup>127</sup> Wengert, "Luther's Liturgical Reforms," 29.

<sup>128</sup> Mattes, *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty*, 34.

<sup>129</sup> Mattes, *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty*, 34.

Luther offered this poignant reminder to those who thought they lacked anything for their spiritual lives:

You have no reason to complain that you have been visited less than Abraham or Isaac. You, too, have appearances, and in a way they are stronger, clearer, and more numerous than those they had, provided that you open your eyes and heart and take hold of them. You have Baptism. You have the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where bread and wine are the species, figures, and forms in which and under which God in person speaks and works into your ears, eyes, and heart. Besides, you have the ministry of the Word and teachers through whom God speaks with you. You have the ministry of the Keys, through which He absolves and comforts you. “Fear not,” He says, “I am with you.” He appears to you in Baptism. He baptizes you Himself and addresses you Himself. He not only says: “I am with you,” but: “I forgive you your sins. I offer you salvation from death, deliverance from all fear and from the power of the devil and hell. And not only I am with you, but all the angels with Me.” What more will you desire? Everything is full of divine appearances and conversations.<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther confessed:

Here is the first and chief article: That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, “was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification;” and he alone is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world;” and “the Lord has laid on him the inquiry of us all;” furthermore, “All have sinned,” and “they are justified without merit by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...by his blood.” On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world.<sup>131</sup>

Luther confessed that everything the church does rests on the foundation of the gospel. Everything depends on the gospel, not just what the church teaches but also what it practices. Luther measured every practice against the standard of the gospel.

This perspective enables us to understand Luther’s work in the area of worship. While on the surface, his words and actions might sometimes appear contradictory, Luther’s confession of the gospel relieves any apparent tension. In worship, Luther wanted the gospel to reign supreme. With an absolute trust in the power of the gospel, he would tolerate no form that would contradict or cloud its message. When people suggested forms merited God’s grace, he rejected them. At the same time, he valued the historic forms of Christian worship because he recognized in them excellent vehicles for the gospel, gifts from the one holy, Christian church, that enabled the people to carry out their work of proclaiming the

---

<sup>130</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, Vol. 5 of *Luther’s Works*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 21.

<sup>131</sup> SA II.1.1-3,5. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 301.

gospel with the very best of God's gifts. At the same time, he remained a theologian of the cross, always in humble submission to the Word of God.

Where does this leave us these five hundred years later? We may sometimes feel that the challenges we face in our age are unprecedented. At the same time, however, through our Lutheran heritage, God has blessed us with principles and practices that will serve us well as we serve the Lord and his people in worship.

These principles invariably bring us back to the beginning, the gospel of Christ. God grant that in every way our worship would magnify and proclaim that gospel. Where our worship succeeds in that, no matter what may come, no matter what changes we may endure, everything else will fall into its proper place.

## Bibliography

- Bacon, Perry Jr. "I Used to Be a Christian. Now I Miss Church." *The Washington Post* (21 August 2023). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/08/21/leaving-christianity-religion-church-community/>.
- Bayer, Oswald. *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*. Translated by Thomas H. Trapp. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Brunner, Peter. *Worship in the Name of Jesus*. Translated by M.H. Bertram. St. Louis: Concordia, 1968.
- Chemnitz, Martin and Jacob Andreae. *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel: How Doctrine, Ceremonies, and Other Church-Related Matters Shall (by God's Grace) Be Conducted Henceforth*. Vol. 9 of Chemnitz's Works. Translated by Jacob Corzine, Matthew C. Harrison, and Andrew Smith. Edited by Jacob Corzine and Matthew Carver. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2015.
- Daniell, Clif. "Luther on Public Worship: Serving God and Being Served by Him." *The Confessional Presbyterian* 15 (2019): 89-96, 205-6.
- Dawn, Marva J. *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.
- Dix, Gregory. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. London: Dacre, 1945.
- Evans, Pippa and Sanderson Jones, "At Atheist Church in London, No Faith Required." *The New York Times* (22 January 2013). <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/01/22/is-atheism-a-religion/at-atheist-church-in-london-no-faith-required>.
- Herl, Joseph. *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism: Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict*. New York: Oxford, 2004.
- Junghans, Helmar. "Luther on the Reform of Worship." *Lutheran Quarterly* XIII (1999): 315-33.
- Kolb, Robert and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. and Charles P. Arand. *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Luther on the Theology of the Cross." Pages 33-58 in *The Pastoral Luther*. Edited by Timothy J. Wengert. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Korcok, Thomas. *Serpents in the Classroom: The Poisoning of Modern Education and How the Church Can Cure It*. Irvine: 1517, 2022.
- Leaver, Robin A. *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Luther, Martin. "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments." Pages 79-223 in vol. 40 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Conrad Bergendoff. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church." Pages 3-126 in vol. 36 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Abdel Ross Wentz. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians concerning Public Worship and Concord." Pages 41-50 in vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Ulrich S. Leupold. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Commentary on Genesis*. Vol. 5 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen. St. Louis: Concordia, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Concerning the Order of Public Worship." Pages 7-14 in vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Ulrich S. Leupold. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg." Pages 67-100 in vol. 51 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by John W. Dobberstein. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Freedom of a Christian." Pages 327-78 in vol. 31 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Harold J. Grimm. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The German Mass and Order of Service." Pages 51-90 in vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Ulrich S. Leupold. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Misuse of the Mass." Pages 127-230 in vol. 36 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Abdel Ross Wentz. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg." Pages 15-40 in vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Ulrich S. Leupold. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae Iucundae*." Pages 321-24 in vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Ulrich S. Leupold. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Table Talk Recorded by Anthony Lauterbach, 1538-1539." Pages 251-364 in vol. 54 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.
- Maschke, Timothy. *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2009.
- Mattes, Mark C. *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017.
- Melchert, Norman. *The Great Conversation: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford, 2007.
- Ngien, Dennis. "Worship as Radical Reversal in Martin Luther's *Theologia Crucis*." *Reformation* 12 (2007): 1-32.
- Pettegree, Andrew. *Brand Luther*. New York: Penguin, 2015.
- Reed, Luther. *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1947.
- Sander, K. Joan. "Luther and the 'Devil's Tunes.'" *Concordia Journal* 29.4 (April, 2003): 130-2.
- Schalk, Carl. *Singing the Church's Song: Essays and Occasional Writings on Church Music*. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2015.
- Schroeder, Jonathan E. "Worship & Outreach: A Lutheran Paradigm." Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File (2010). <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/handle/123456789/2994>.
- Searle, Mark. "Ritual." Pages 51-60 in *Study of the Liturgy: Revised Edition*. Edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Arnold SJ, and Paul Bradshaw. New York: Oxford, 1992.

- Satterlee, Craig A. "Lutheran Practices of Worship." Pages 163-77 in *Historical Foundations of Worship: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Perspectives*. Edited by Melanie C. Ross and Mark A. Lamport. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022.
- Senn, Frank C. *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.
- Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Vol. 1 of Cultural Liturgies. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.
- Sonntag, Holger. "'Freedom Shall Be and Remain a Servant of Love:' Distinguishing Faith and Love as a Criterion for Liturgical Practice in Luther's Theology." *Logia* 18.1 (Epiphany, 2009): 37-44.
- Strey, Johnold. *Christian Worship: God Gives His Gospel Gifts*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2021.
- Tel, Martin. "Calvinist and Reformed Practices of Worship." Pages 178-91 in *Historical Foundations of Worship: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Perspectives*. Edited by Melanie C. Ross and Mark A. Lamport. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022.
- Tiefel, James. "Liturgical Worship for Evangelism and Outreach." *Logia* 2.3 (1993): 73-88.
- . "Liturgy and Its Use in Our Church." The Institute for Worship & Outreach (2012). <https://www.worshipandoutreach.org/writings/blog/the-liturgy-and-its-use-in-our-church>.
- Treptow, Earle. "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, and the Use of Variety in Worship." The Institute for Worship & Outreach (2012). <https://www.worshipandoutreach.org/writings/blog/lex-orandi-lex-credendi-and-the-use-of-variety-in-worship>
- Vajta, Vilmos. *Luther on Worship*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958.
- Wengert, Timothy J. "Luther's Liturgical Reforms and the Origins of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*." *Cross Accent* (Fall/Winter, 2015): 27-41.
- Wilson, H.S. "Luther on Preaching as God Speaking." Pages 100-16 in *The Pastoral Luther*. Edited by Timothy J. Wengert. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Zager, Daniel. *The Gospel Preached through Music: The Purpose and Practice of Lutheran Church Music*. Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 2013.



## **Appendix A: Luther's *Formula Missae*<sup>132</sup>**

Introit  
Kyrie  
Gloria in Excelsis  
Prayer of the Day  
Epistle  
Gradual and Alleluia  
Gospel  
Nicene Creed  
Sermon  
Offertory  
Preface  
Verba  
Sanctus and Elevation  
Lord's Prayer  
Pax  
Communion  
Agnus Dei  
Communion  
Final Collect  
Salutation  
Benedicamus  
Benediction

---

<sup>132</sup> Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 103f.

## **Appendix B: Luther's *Deutsche Messe*<sup>133</sup>**

Hymn or German Introit

Kyrie

Prayer of the Day

Epistle

German Hymn

Gospel

Apostles' Creed

Sermon

Lord's Prayer (paraphrased)

Exhortation to Communicants

Consecration and Distribution of Bread

German Sanctus

Consecration and Distribution of Wine

German Agnus Dei or Hymn

Post-Communion Collect

Aaronic Benediction

---

<sup>133</sup> Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 105.