



Wisdom from Wittenberg

MARTIN LUTHER'S
PASTORAL AND PRACTICAL
REVISIONS
OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE

The WELS National Conference on Worship,
Music and the Arts
June 13-16, 2017
Carthage College – Kenosha, WI

PRELUDE: “WE MUST DARE SOMETHING IN THE NAME OF CHRIST...”

The story behind Luther’s creative worship

In the year 1517, The Feast of all Saints – November 1 -- just so happened to fall on a Sunday¹. The alignment of this date and the day of the week wouldn’t have escaped the notice of Christian worshippers. In fact, it would have amplified the din in town and city streets throughout Christendom. Across Europe, thousands of Christians would have thronged to the doors of their churches for what must have seemed like a Sunday morning, Christmas Day, and the Memorial Day all rolled into one.

The scene in northern Germany would have been no different. But something different was about to happen, and it happened, in large part, due to a brilliant bachelor professor who, like the rest, would have been walking to and from a worship service on that particular Sunday morning. On All Saints Day, 1517, Martin Luther could not have imagined how much a document which he had written to his Archbishop and posted publicly the night before was going to change his life and his congregation. So much, in fact, that now, even 500 years later, we are still celebrating the man and his moment at the church door.

Though we often tend to focus on the man and his moment, we rarely take the time to imagine what was actually happening on the other side of the door. In fact, it’s rather difficult to imagine. The style and pattern of worship inside the All Saints’ Church on that famous All Saints’ Day, 1517 would hardly be recognizable to us.

Perhaps some figures might be illustrative: In 1517, mass was celebrated 9,000 times at the Castle Church alone-- a public or private mass offered every 53 minutes, without letup, for an entire year.² 40,000 candles were burned, consuming 4 tons of wax at a cost of \$100,000. The prime attraction at All Saints Church was the collection of relics: 19,000 cataloged items neatly arranged in ten aisles.³

But the real heart of Wittenberg worship on All Saints Day was receiving the indulgence: walk through the door, say the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed, confess your sins to one of the dozen extra priests available, say a prayer for the pope. Once done, most people simply left once the priest had elevated the host.

This was ‘worship in Wittenberg.’ Under such a structure, the people were held captive to the careful control of the catholic church and enslaved to the indulgence of the papacy. That the detailed document which Professor Luther had posted to the door was about to change all of that, none of them at the time could have possibly known.

The document that Luther had posted, *95 Theses, or A Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*,⁴ was a breach in the dam. What flowed through that breach was Christian freedom. Throughout the five years that followed

1517, Luther began to experience for himself the unexpected effects of freedom. Sometime in 1518, Luther had a spiritual breakthrough in which the truth of the Gospel finally set him free from the terrors of his conscience.⁵ By 1519, he was set free from his vows of monasticism. By 1520, he was publishing *The Freedom of a Christian*⁶ throughout Germany. And by 1521, Luther was finally called to defend that freedom before the Holy Roman Estates at Worms. Luther stood firm in his freedom, and the rest is history.

However, a breached dam often presents something of a problem. And that problem was quickly experienced by the worshippers in Wittenberg. Luther’s associates in Wittenberg saw their new-found freedom as something to be experimented with. After Worms, Andreas Karlstadt concluded that since Rome had broken with the preacher of Wittenberg, it was time for the people of Wittenberg to return the favor. While Luther was away at the Wartburg, Karlstadt took over in Wittenberg and went on an “iconoclastic binge”.⁷ Worship services were flooded with new ideas and new forms. Suddenly, Germans who were used to Latin chants and prayers were hearing loud German phrases while receiving communion in both kinds from priests who wore no robes. None of them were sure why it was happening. It seemed the only reason was ‘because of Rome.’

Throughout the five years that followed 1521, Luther would need to defend the gospel from the burst dam of freedom and creativity. Luther would respond from the Wittenberg pulpit in a way that was direct and abrupt.⁸ But he would also respond from his Wittenberg desk in a way that was subtle, quiet, and patient. Luther would find ways to change how communion was received. He would find a way to give the Wittenbergers a service of their own. But he would take his time in finding that way, and his approach would be pastoral and highly principled.

It would come about through a three-year-long worship project, begun in 1523 with an order of service meant to demonstrate how the mass could basically be used as is, save for a few critical changes. The project would reach its conclusion in 1526 with a second order of service, meant to show how worship life could be completely and creatively – but still pastorally and practically – adapted. These two documents, in which Luther recognized “something must be dared in the name of Christ,”⁹ would serve as two poles, each connected to the other, between which an ancient-future pattern of Christian worship would emerge.

500 years later, the past is present. We worship in the land of the free. Innovation is addictive. Our creative impulses are rocket-fueled by communication technology. Often the question we hear isn’t “what can we change?” but “how much of this do we really have to keep in order to stay Lutheran?” We enjoy our liberty to tinker and experiment with worship. But perhaps Luther’s principled project can compel us to be careful with our creativity as we seek to adapt and shape the worship life of our congregations.

TEN YEARS OF LUTHERAN WORSHIP

Worship reforms in and around Wittenberg, 1517-1527

Luther publishes 95 Theses... All Saints mass at All Saints Church	31 October 1 November	1517
Luther's Gospel breakthrough "As if the gates of heaven have opened"	May-August	1518
Conclusion of Disputation in Leipzig Luther released from monastic vows	16 July Late Summer	1519
<i>Babylonian Captivity</i> published <i>The Freedom of a Christian</i> published Luther burns <i>Exsurge, Domine</i>	6 October November 10 December	1520
Luther Excommunicated by Leo X Luther's stand at the Diet of Worms Luther's Wartburg Captivity begins Luther is done with private masses Wittenberg Movement begins	3 January 18 April 4 May 1 August Late Summer	1521
Luther returns to preach eight <i>Invocavit Sermons</i> <i>German New Testament</i> is published	March September	1522
Luther Composes <i>Ein Neues Lied</i> Martin Luther's 40 th birthday <i>Formula Missae</i> published	Late Summer 10 November December	1523
<i>Achtliederbuch</i> (Nuremberg) Luther's <i>Formula Messe</i> translated into German by Paul Speratus <i>Wittenberg Enchiridion</i> and <i>Chorgesangbuch</i> published	January Mid January Winter	1524
Luther Marries Katherine von Bora Luther's letter <i>To the Livonians</i> Collaboration on <i>Deutsche Messe</i> Luther Publishes <i>Bondage of the Will</i> Formal premiere of <i>Deutsche Messe</i>	13 June 17 June Mid October Mid December 25 December	1525
<i>Deutsche Messe</i> published (with preface) Birth of the Luther's son Hans	1 January 7 June	1526
Luther's Severe Depression Begins 10 th anniversary Letter to Spalatin	mid April 10 November	1527

TEN GUIDELINES OF LUTHER'S SERVICE

A complete outline of Luther's 1526 *Deutsche Messe*

- I. Desire for Christian freedom
("not off the top of my head")
 - a. Freedom balanced by love
 - b. Freedom bound by love
 - i. Bound for the sake of uniformity
 - ii. Bound for the sake of the week
- II. Desire for three services
 - a. A Latin Service for students
 - b. A German Service for laity
 - c. An Evangelical Service for homes
- III. Desire for 'a good Catechism'
 - a. Impetus for instruction
 - b. Examples of instruction
- IV. Wittenberg's Weekly Worship in General
 - a. Schedule of Sunday services
 - b. Weekday mornings
 - c. Weekday evenings
- V. Wittenberg's Sunday Service in Detail
 - a. Vestments, altar, and candles
 - b. Opening German Hymn or **Introit**
 - c. **Kyrie** and Collect
 - d. **Epistle**
 - e. German Hymn
 - f. **Gospel**
 - g. Creed (**"get the whole church singing"**)
 - h. Sermon (**"not my favorite blue duck"**)
 - i. Paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer
 - j. Admonition to the Lord's Supper
- VI. Desire for Clear Rubrics
("definitely write this down")
 - (V.) The Sunday Service, Continued
 - a. The Words of Institution
 - b. The Administration of the Sacrament
 - i. Appropriate hymns, incl. the German Sanctus and Agnus Dei
 - ii. Men and women stand to receive the sacrament
 - iii. The Elevation
 - c. The German Sanctus
 - d. Closing Collect and Benediction
- VII. Advice for Chanting (Additional Examples)
 - a. additional **Epistle**
 - b. additional **Gospel**
- VIII. Advice for patient implementation
- IX. Advice for Latin forms to be employed *pro temp* for Festival Services
- X. Advice for abolition in cases of abuse

Items in **bold** indicate musical engravings

I. “NOT OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD”

Creativity is careful to serve the gospel.

“The preaching and teaching of God’s Word must remain the most important.”¹⁰ This was Luther’s foundational worship principle. Everything he thought and did was not for himself, and not against Rome, but for the gospel. This is where Karlstadt had gone astray in 1522, and why his worship adjustments caused so much consternation for Luther and the people who relied on his pastoring.

Much of the present order of service, after all, *did* preach the gospel, provided it was heard in public (and not just said in private) and provided that the clutter of indulgences was done away with. If the people would have made their way past the portuincular priests, they would have gone in to hear sermons preached in their everyday language, just like we do. At the same time, they would have heard prayers *not* in everyday language, just like we do. The people knew that “kyrie” meant “Lord, have mercy” and that “Credo” meant “I believe.” Why alter it? Luther’s advice was to adhere to established patterns, especially in 1523 but also in 1526, since arbitrarily departing from them would be self-serving at best and Karlstadtian at worst.

In both services, the established pattern of liturgy was retained. Luther said, “This is necessary so that no sect arises from public worship as if I had devised this service out of my own head.”¹¹ Luther’s subtle critique of Karlstadt and his motives deserves to be emphasized: “An order of liturgy is not simply to fulfill a personal need or plan or idea but must always serve the gospel.”¹² On its surface, the “Wittenberg Movement” might seem driven by the desire for greater inclusion, or clearer communication. But in our own desire for what is new, we often miss the point. *Since we are rooted firmly in a rich tradition, we do not avoid the new but are careful to avoid novelty, eccentricity, or quixotic attempts at newness for its own sake.*¹³ Since the gospel, not the individual, compels the Christian life, shouldn’t the same gospel, not the individual, drive the Christian’s worship?

On the other hand, perhaps Karlstadt had raised an interesting question. “If there are moments when the service isn’t clearly communicating the gospel, what do we do then?” To many, the Lord’s Prayer had become automatic. To many more, the mystery of the Lord’s Supper was just that—it was unintelligible. Here, Luther found ways to adapt. And Luther’s ‘way,’ as published in 1526, would be a form of *worship catechesis*.

The preface of the 1526 *Deutsche Messe* seems to be written by a man more interested in ‘a good catechism’¹⁴ than ‘a new service.’ In fact, when we look at the service itself, we recognize that the two interests are one and the same. “The preaching and teaching of God’s Word must remain the most important.” Where the Lord’s Prayer needs to be

taught, let it be taught. Where the Lord’s Supper needs explanation, let the preacher provide one. And so Luther did.

It is important to realize that Luther’s intention was primarily *catechetical*. Otherwise, there will always be a temptation to extract some of Luther’s statements at random, and then make the mistake of pressing Luther’s ‘new service’ into the service our modern-day ideas about what worship should be. Those ideas might sound like this:

- “Such orders are needed for those who are still becoming Christians.”¹⁵ i.e. Luther was providing a new service that was more approachable to those ‘new to the faith.’ This idea overlooks the fact that in Luther’s day, no one ‘church shopped,’ adult baptisms would have been nearly unheard of, and every parishioner would have been trained in the routines of church life almost since birth. It seems that in Luther’s mind, the service was about more than initiation...
- “This service should be arranged for the sake of simple laypeople”¹⁶ i.e. Luther was adapting to the culture of the people in Wittenberg. Unless the service was translated into their language and idiom, they would be unable to hear and respond to the gospel. This idea might overlook the fact that Luther’s Latin service had been translated into German only a few weeks after it had been published and that people all over Germany were already worshiping in German. It seems that in Luther’s mind, the service was about more than language...
- “Now there are three kinds of liturgies or Mass”¹⁷ i.e. Luther was willing to offer alternatives. A Latin service would be preferred by some, a German service would be preferred by others’ another service would be preferred by others. This idea might overlook the fact that Luther never took the time to draft a third service didn’t object as the first two were merged.¹⁸ It seems that in Luther’s mind, the service was about more than preference...

Rather than pitting any these efforts against the other, Luther honored them all as expressions of *catechesis*. And he employed ancient and modern tools simultaneously in this effort. Luther sought to defend the gospel for a *Christian culture which had a good knowledge of Christian tradition*. To do this, he produced a Formula Missae which removed everything at odds with the gospel, while retaining everything that wasn’t. At the same time, Luther sought to declare the gospel to a “population becoming secularized and needing reintroduction to its Christian roots.”¹⁹ To do this, he produced a *Deutsche Messe* in which the truth of the gospel could still be ‘caught’ (as emphasized by the retained rituals²⁰) and ‘taught’ (as emphasized by the added explanations).

Illustration:

How do you transform a 25-page document written in German 491 years ago into a 90-minute worship service for a thousand English-speakers at a conference and ensure that the gospel stays at the center? When I received the invitation, I realized that there would be a need to balance preaching with teaching, and edification with education.

Luther began by leaving the familiar elements ‘as is.’ In the same way, we’re able to sing a very familiar “Kyrie” and “Agnus Dei.” Hopefully, the familiarity of it might be edifying. Luther also introduced some newer elements to offer a deeper sense of the gospel message. Similarly, we retained his paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer (though we speak it responsively to encourage participation) and his admonition to the Lord’s Supper.

Luther also embedded some gospel themes in the structure of his service. Perhaps you noticed that the Words of Institution are chanted in the exact same tones as the gospel. This was intentional on Luther’s part. In our service, perhaps you noticed a connection between the theme of All Saints Day – though you are persecuted, yet you will be blessed - realized in the story of five centuries of Lutheran worship. Blessed are the dead, for their works follow them, as the works of Lutheran poets and composers have shown! Rather than serving as historical re-creation, the order of service itself has been placed into the service of the All Saints Gospel.

Perhaps we could have done more. Should we have added a note explaining the reasons behind the centrally located altar or the presiding minister’s chasuble? Perhaps we are content to let these striking visual symbols speak for themselves.

Discussion:

- A. Does ‘worship catechesis’ sound like an overwhelming task?²¹ How do you do it? Service folder notes? Bible classes”, tutorial services? Sermons, adult instruction, catechism class?

- B. Have you ever been part of a service where education came at the cost of contemplation? When this happens, how might the ancient patterns²² help us to get back into balance?

- C. We want to ensure that the changes we make are made for the sake of edification and evangelism (gospel-driven) and not for our own sakes or even to satisfy people’s desires (ego-driven). What are some diagnostic questions we can ask ourselves to ensure the proper motivation for creativity, change, and adaptation?

II. “NOT MY FAVORITE BLUE DUCK”

Creativity is careful to serve the arts

Though Luther considered Karlstadt’s experiments to particularly troubling, he also realized that they weren’t particularly unique. By 1524, worship experiments were underway all over Germany. Many were initiated by reformers who were becoming increasingly estranged from Luther in the wake of Karlstadt’s Wittenberg movement. Over in Allstedt, Thomas Müntzer-- in addition to his work propagating Anabaptism-- was busy composing a vernacular service²³ and vernacular translations of ancient hymns. Nearer-by in Zwickau, Nicolas Hausmann, the very pastor to whom Luther had dedicated the *Formula Missae*, sent Luther a whole batch of new masses in German for critique.²⁴

Luther’s critique was that they all suffered from the same problem: the old tunes hardly fit the newly translated texts.²⁵ Pragmatic as they might have been, these masses experiments done with no awareness of the arts. Though they seemed to achieve re-formation of the service, what they Luther actually received seemed to be nothing more than “loosely connected amalgams of prayer, preaching, and singing.”²⁶

Luther’s solution, as he set to work on a German service for Wittenberg, was to hold himself to a higher standard of excellence and authenticity. To achieve this, he was willing to enlist professional help. In October, 1525, as the texts and tunes of the *Deutsche Messe* were nearing completion, Luther requested the Elector to dispatch court composer Conrad Rupsch and his protégé Johann Walther to collaborate with him on the Wittenberg project. For the next three weeks, they scrutinized all the texts and tunes especially of Luther’s new paraphrase of the Sanctus.²⁷ By mid-November, the completed drafts were on their way back to Torgau for Electoral approval. The texts were clean, the notes well-matched and well-tuned. Whether or not he intended it, Luther was putting church musicians on notice: if something is worth doing, it’s worth doing right.

But Luther also put preachers on notice, and this was by no means unintended. His advice on how the sermon should be fit to the worship service sound like this:

“I think that if we had a German postil (a biblical commentary in sermon-form) for the entire year, it would be best to appoint the sermon for the day to be read entirely or in part out of the book—and not just for the benefit of those preachers who can do nothing better. ...otherwise we will reach the point where everyone will preach his own ideas and instead of the Gospel we will have more sermons about ‘blue ducks.’”

Luther’s critique can certainly seem confusing—until we realize sad state of preaching in and around Wittenberg. Preachers were either so clumsy in explaining a given text

or so eager to offer their own ideas that the sermons soon spun off into nonsense. Luther’s sharp critique boils down to this: those who can’t appreciate the art of preaching ought to read and imitate someone who can.

Luther’s expectation for excellence in artistic craft appeared throughout the *Deutsche Messe* and the resources which accompanied it. Whenever he translated ancient collects and litanies,²⁸ he did so in ways that recognized and appreciated their ancient form. When he enlisted the most respected poets in Germany to translate old hymn texts and compose new ones,²⁹ he expected clear and elegant language. When he commended pastors to chant the lessons, he gave them specific instructions to ensure it was done well.

Why was Luther so adamant about art forms? Perhaps the instance of the preacher’s problem is illustrative. When a preacher’s bungles a text or worse, ruminates on something completely besides the text, what is happening to the message of the gospel. When the poet bruises the language and the composer mis-matches the tune, is not the same disservice to the gospel taking place? When Luther considers the arts in worship, he’s not interested in art for art’s sake. “In Luther’s view, music in the church functions as *viva vox evangelii*.” How does music and art carry out this task? “by faithfully reflecting in its own terms the honesty, integrity, truthfulness, and winsomeness of the gospel.”³⁰ Luther is well within his pastoral rights to expect any tool used express the gospel would be expertly handled and any tune that accompanies the gospel would be expertly crafted.

Luther’s passion for the arts is a simple extension of his foundational principle. Once the creative arts have been placed into the service of the gospel, it follows that our creative impulse would also be placed in service to the arts. Luther would have recognized that “art consists in two parts: *ars* and *ingenium*. The first consists in the laws and rules that can taught and learned. The second is found in the creative impulse of the artist, which is a gift from God.” There is always a temptation to ‘do our own thing’ with the forms we have, but there is also a value in making sure the second gift – *ingenium* - serves the first.

Luther would probably have no problem reminding us: “Your genius may be a gift of God. Your ideas for adapting a service may be great. Your next sermon series may be a creative gem. But have you taken the time to appreciate the form of art that you are improving or replacing? Or are you simply offering an ape-like imitation?” *Ars* without *ingenium* is insufficient. But *ingenium* without *ars* is “despicable.” Luther shows us that the pursuit of excellence through artistic standard and craft leads the individual (be they preacher, player, planner, or otherwise) to appreciate their role as a steward of God’s creative gifts, realizing that God has blessed our congregation with far more than our cherished “tavern tunes,” our humble “tin whistles,”³¹ and our favorite “blue ducks.”

Illustration:

What would Luther think of a group of 21st century Americans hearing the Gospel and the Epistle chanted in English, but with German notes from the 16th century? Does this fit or are we imitating like apes? How should we honor the artform of Luther's chant without being letting it become a blue duck? Actually, we considered ways of recasting the chants in 21st century American contemporary tunes. We even called in the professionals—but in the end we realized that it might be best simply to leave the thing alone. We retained Luther's original as is (see fig. 3) due to the fact that the German and English can actually sing a very similar tune.

At other times, we realized that the old forms needed a new artistic rendering. The text of Luther's first hymn *Ein Neues Lied* is so historically bound that it would be hard to incorporate it in a service centuries removed from Vos' and Esch's death. Luther's original:

*A new song here shall be begun—
The Lord God help our singing!
Of what our God himself has done,
Praise, honor to him bringing.
At Brussels in the Netherlands
By two boys, martyrs youthful
He showed the wonders of his hands,
Whom he with favor truthful
So richly hath adorned.*

But when we commissioned a completely new poetic text, we again called in the professionals. Laurie Gauger was asked to set the old text to the old tune with new words reflecting the struggle of 21st century martyrs. What she provided us proves that Luther's old hymn can still speak the gospel to today's dangers in today's language.

*We praise the Christ with martyred saints
Who die, his name confessing;
We sing with joy, we sing with pain
this hymn of blood and blessing.
For his dear Word they lose their lives
And leave the world that scorns them;
He blesses their last sacrifice:
With gleaming gold he crowns them,
With robes of white adorns them.*

Discussion:

- A. Preachers or Planners: Think of a time when you suddenly realized that when you've gotten in over your head or been flown over by a 'blue duck'. Did it present an opportunity to seek professional help? (that's not some double entendre!) What did you learn from the experience?

- B. Jon Schroder has a pretty good handle on what matters artistically in American worship: "Nothing impresses quite like excellence" Compare this with the value our people place on innovation? Which matters more to you? Which matters more to them?

- C. Choose between the story of a pastor eager to compose his own prayers of the day or the story of a church member composing a hymn for a congregation's 125th anniversary. What kinds of time, effort, and resources are required to craft an artform which "faithfully reflects in its own terms the honesty, integrity, truthfulness, and winsomeness of the gospel?"

III. “DEFINITELY WRITE THIS DOWN”

Creativity is careful to serve the community

The letter which Luther received from Nicholas Hausmann early in 1525 was by no means the last time he was called on to provide specific pastoral advice for a fellow pastor or congregation. As the spring came on, Luther became aware of a troubling situation developing in far-off Livonia (present-day Estonia). This time, it had nothing to do with artistic integrity. A new fanatical preacher, Melchior Hoffmann, had arrived in the city of Dorpat and had begun the same kind of upheaval that Karlstadt had started in Wittenberg three years earlier. Hoffmann was soon toe-to-toe with the disgruntled church council, who sent him to Wittenberg to get advice from Luther. They also sent along a letter to Luther, asking, in effect, “tell us what we should do!”

We can only speculate as to the actual wording of their request. We would have to speculate even more to find out what they expected to receive in return. On the one hand, Luther could have provided a prescribed format of what exactly was appropriate and what was not appropriate.³² On the other hand, Luther could allow every congregation to determine its own way,³³ based on the consensus of the pastor, the council, and the people.

But Luther offered neither of those solutions. Instead, Luther wrote, “I pray all of you, my dear sirs, let each one surrender his own opinions and get together in a friendly way and come to a common decision about these external matters, so that there will be one uniform practice throughout your district instead of disorder—one thing being done here and another there—lest the common people get confused and discouraged.”³⁴ In other words, ‘do whatever seems best to you, but please, do it together with your fellow churches.’

This thread of locally-determined liturgical uniformity rather than congregationally-determined liturgical uniformity is also woven into the fabric of the *Deutsche Messe*. “I do not propose that all of Germany should uniformly follow our Wittenberg order...But it would be well if the service in every principality would be held in the same manner and if the order observed in a given city would also be followed by the surrounding towns and villages.”³⁵ Luther then also offered pastoral latitude within limits: “It shall be understood that such communion, hymns, readings, and preaching are under the responsibility of the pastor, and may be increased or reduced according to the circumstances of the day.”³⁶ Pastors were free to determine the ‘how’ of worship, while the ‘what’ of worship was shared among churches in the district.

Principally, Luther was defending pastoral and congregational freedom, while at the same time advocating that the freedom of a particular pastor or

congregation be limited by love which serves their neighbor. The freedom of the individual submits in love to the needs of the neighbor. In this way, congregations would avoid falling into the ditch of legalism and fear, while at the same time avoiding the ditch of faddism and creativity-run-amok.

So much for the principle. But how could such a balance of freedom and love be struck, especially among German people now appreciating and known for their streak of independence?³⁷

Luther’s practical solution was a peer review. Anything that was newly created for divine worship should, as a matter of course, undergo careful scrutiny. Luther then offered as first specimens his own paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer and his exhortation to the Lord’s Supper. “[how] this paraphrase should be read, I leave to everyone’s judgment...I would, however, like to ask that this paraphrase or admonition follow a prescribed wording or be formulated in a definite manner. For the sake of ordinary people. We cannot have it done one way today, and tomorrow another different way, letting everybody parade their talents and counsel people so that they can neither learn nor retain anything.”³⁸

Incidentally, neither of Luther’s specimens would survive. In Wittenberg’s first Church Order, published in 1533, neither of Luther’s ideas were included. Pastors and people simply returned to the patterns of the Lord’s Prayer and Preface with which they were familiar.

Nevertheless, Luther’s practical principle took hold. The ink of the *Deutsche Messe* was barely dry when a series of *Visitations* began throughout the districts in Germany. The patterns which were observed were soon codified in Church Orders, and the concept cemented in the language of the Lutheran Confessions.³⁹ It wasn’t until the early twentieth century that Lutheranism was taken up with the idea of “absolute congregational autonomy in all matters liturgical.”

It is neither the desire of this paper or of this conference to insist or even imagine that all the congregations of a 21st century synod would adopt a uniform and identical worship practice. Nevertheless, we also cannot ignore how important it was to Luther and the Lutheran confessors that congregations work together in adopting and adapting worship styles and patterns.

Perhaps we can be encouraged that the Livonian problem did resolve. In 1530, only five years after their letter to Luther, their neighbors in Riga (modern-day Latvia) wrote: “So far as is possible and helpful to our people, we may agree not only with the people here in Livonia, but also with our neighbors and other states in the German lands in which the Gospel of Christ is also proclaimed clearly and richly—especially in the principal matters pertaining to outward divine service or ceremonies.”⁴⁰

Illustration:

The design of our service began with the assumption that we were not strictly bound by the pattern of Luther's 1526 document. He would have objected if we thought that we were. So we began by asking the question, when is it appropriate to stick to our guns, and when is it appropriate to import something that Luther wouldn't have done? (This question, in fact, served as the inspiration of this paper.) Of course, the question was settled through a process of peer review and editing from a number of conference planners.

We began by choosing the theme of the theme of the service, which might seem like an anachronism. It is unlikely that Luther would have himself celebrated *All Saints Day* in Wittenberg after 1523. The relics and the veneration of the Saints in Wittenberg were so abused that Luther considered all the saints' festivals problematic. But other Districts in Germany retained the festival, and since a commemoration of the faithful departed allowed us to celebrate the living history of Lutheran worship, we chose to highlight All Saints Day.

Another question: "What should we do about the Gloria?" Our 21st century listeners are familiar with its placement in the service, but Luther's service omits the song completely. Again, Luther probably wouldn't accuse us of an anachronism. We concluded that including the German Gloria which appeared in most of the Church Orders by 1541 would certainly be appropriate. Including it would also allow us to commission a suite of organ intonations that highlighted the five German songs of the Ordinary. We chose to include a gospel motet which Luther wouldn't have used but which he likely would have welcomed had the music of Henrich Schütz been available. Sometimes, the ongoing story of the church gave us the reason to adjust the art of Luther's pattern.

Sometimes, it doesn't. We thought of including a responsive gathering rite to assist the congregation from opening hymn through kyrie to Gloria. We actually found one with a historical pedigree. In 1635, Heinrich Schütz composed *Musikalisches Exequien* for the funeral of Duke Heinrich von Reuss, who had selected texts for his own funeral. Here we had responses from Job, the Psalms, and the Epistles interwoven with 16th Century German Chorale tunes which commemorated the faithful departed. Alas, it would stretch the time budget of the service, and it probably wasn't something Luther would have imagined in 1526. The idea was sent to the cutting room floor, though I still wish it hadn't been. Peer review can be painful, but it is always important.

Discussion:

- A. Matthew Harrison's essay traces the development of how American Lutheranism began to favor "absolute congregational autonomy in all matters liturgical" through a misunderstanding of the German words *Gemeine* and *Gemeinde*. How should each concept be understood? What are the motivations that you see within your own congregation which lead toward the "Gemeinde" concept? What are the benefits you see in moving toward a "Gemeine"?
- B. I'm going to assume that each of us plays a particular role in worship in which we could benefit from peer review. What might that look like in your given role as a preacher, presider, planner, choir director, accompanist, or board member?
- C. Can you imagine any grassroots efforts of "liturgical uniformity" in your circuit, conference, or district? What are the kinds or resources or activities from 'the top down' that would be most beneficial to you?

IV. “GET THE WHOLE CHURCH SINGING”

Creativity is careful to serve the congregation

As the busy year of 1525 came to a close, Luther had nearly brought his project to completion. The gospel had been carefully taught and translated in words and actions. The tunes had been professionally assessed and critiqued. But would the Wittenbergers be able to sing any of it? Luther, ever the pragmatist, had already put in the time and energy to ensure that it could be done.

It is a well-established fact that Martin Luther was a musical theologian. It was a talent that had been trained in him even from a young age, long before he entered the monastery. At the same time that he was learning the Latin chants in school, Luther was learning German folk tunes from his copper-mining father Hans and his dutiful wife Grete. He reports that during his early years, “his father would relax with a beer and break out into song.”⁴¹

This was a pattern that carried over into Luther’s own family life. In a famous scene by Gustav Adolf Spangenberg, we see Luther strumming away on his favorite instrument, teaching songs to his children from a printed manuscript. “Luther Making Music in the Circle of his Family” Seeing as Spangenberg’s painting is from 1875, some would want to dismiss its content as unrealistically idyllic. But this activity, or something very like it, would have been a common occurrence in the Luther household.



What’s more interesting is the presence of the person glancing over Katie’s shoulder. We realize that Philip Melancthon was a frequent guest in the Luther house, but why is he featured in the portrait? In my estimation, what Spangenberg was actually portraying was an idyll of Lutheran music pedagogy. Melancthon, the *praeceptor Germaniae*, represents the idea of Christian education. If the Reformation would endure, it would require musically trained theologians and theologically trained musicians.⁴²

How Luther actually implemented this musical training in the Wittenberg congregation isn’t as clear as we might like it to be. The clearest picture we have is provided in another allegorical portrait, this time painted by Luther’s college Lucas Cranach the Younger in 1547:



What do we see? The gospel of Jesus at the center, Luther in the pulpit, and the people gathered to listen, pray, and presumably, sing. We notice that men and women are separated into groups (as Luther advised they be for the distribution of communion) but we also notice a congregation of several generations worshipping together. We don’t see a choir, even though we know that made use of one. We also don’t see a choir director, especially because we’re not sure who it would have been.

How much did the congregation sing? How much did the choir sing? What did a service in 1527 actually sound like? These are questions that will have to remain under debate.⁴³ But if we were to step back and listen, some key notes would emerge.

Luther oversaw the publication of a congregational hymnal for the Wittenberg congregation. Though the earliest known copy is dated to 1526, there is good evidence to show that the laity had a hymnal of their own in their own hands – *An Enchiridion* – by as early as 1524.⁴⁴

Luther also invited Johann Walther to compose four- and five-part concerted settings of the same hymns listed in the *Enchiridion*. It was published simultaneously, as the first edition also appeared late in 1524.

Luther relied heavily on the *scholia*, or school choir in modeling the new texts and tunes to the congregation. Students could be trained in singing throughout the week, and were then placed centrally among the members of the congregation when the hymn was sung.

With this information, we realize that the two scenes above actually compliment one another while providing a clear picture of how pastor and people worked together in the instruction of hymnody, liturgy, and song. “For this, one must read, sing, preach, write, and compose. And if it would help matters along, I would have all the bells pealing, and all the organs playing, and have everything ring that can make a sound.”⁴⁵

Illustration:

On one hand, it is a great thrill to be able to design a worship service for the attendees of this conference. For one week every three years, we become members of a 'congregation' that can sing better than any other in the synod. Almost every church in WELS can sing along to the old German *Kyrie* and *Agnus*, but are only a few which can launch directly into *Wir Glauben All* or a festival setting of *Jesaja, Dem Propheten*. The 'congregation' gathered at this conference just so happens to be one of the latter. What do we need to worry whether or not they can sing it?

We probably do. And *Isaiah, Mighty Seer* provides a reason. We originally planned to simply sing *Christian Worship #267* right from the book. But we wanted to get the whole church singing. What we requested was a brand-new setting for choirs and organ. But it kept growing. We thought it would be unfair to leave the congregation out. So they would be invited to sing during the song of the angels. Then we realized that more than one choir was available. So it became a setting for three choirs, organ, congregation, and instruments.

The conversations between the worship planners, the composer, the choir directors, and the organist began back on January 30, and they often circled around the question, "How are we going to pull this piece off?"

First, we saw an opportunity to recreate the role of the *scholia* by getting the children to set the pace of the chant. We were further assisted by an organist who has diligently learned what it means to support congregational singing. When we realized that the congregation's musical entrance might seem abrupt to the unrehearsed, we requested the composer redraft to piece to include supporting brass. We then discussed how best to best render the music in the service folder. What did our efforts produce? Did we pull it off? You'll need to be the judge.

But what did our efforts require? That I can tell you: a partnership between ministers and musicians who are both able to think pastorally and practically.

Discussion:

- A. Luther understood that Worship Catechesis would likely fall flat unless it was supported by Musical Catechesis and Pedagogy. As the saying goes, 'well begun is half done.' When a creative design for worship finally runs the gauntlet of "right intentions," "well-crafted," and "peer-reviewed," what are your strategies for ensuring that it is well-taught?

- B. Carl Schalk's little booklet "The Pastor and the Church Musician: Thoughts on Aspects of a Common Ministry" highlights this critical relationship by listing 1) "what pastors need from their church musicians" and 2) "what church musicians need from their pastors." Choose option 1) or 2). What would you include on the list of things you need from them? What would you include on the list of things they need from you?

- C. It is obvious that training the Wittenberg congregation to sing required time and energy. It likely also required consistency and patience. How might the word like "conditioning" help us set a new strategy for teaching our congregation to sing? How might "mentoring" do it?

POSTLUDE: “ENJOYING OUR SUCCESS”

The enduring importance of careful creativity

Ten years after his famous late night walk to the castle door, the brilliant professor, no longer a bachelor, sat up late one night to compose another document. This one wouldn't be sent to an archbishop but to a good friend. Instead of venting on the trouble of indulgences, Luther takes to vent over all illness that his family and friends were dealing with at home.

“My dear Amsdorf: A hospital has started up in my house. I am very fearful for my Katy, who is close to delivering, for my little Hans has also been sick for three days now and is not eating anything and is doing poorly; they say he's teething, but they also believe that both are at very high risk.”

The letter to Amsdorf wouldn't cause the same stir that his 95 theses had. In fact, the letter's lasting significance can only be found in Luther's closing salutation:

“Written at Wittenberg on the Day of All Saints, in the tenth year after the indulgences had been trampled underfoot, in memory of which we are drinking [Wittenberg beer] at this hour.”⁴⁶

This time, the date just so happened to be a Tuesday November 1, 1527. It was the first time Reformation Day was formally celebrated by a Lutheran. Had it been a Sunday or a Wednesday, Luther would probably be leading a worship service. Had it been a Friday or a Saturday, he would probably have been preparing a sermon or hearing confession. But Luther was actually commemorating All Saints Day with *gemütlichkeit*.

How much had changed in the previous decade? One need look no further than the doorway of All Saints' Church. The thousands of meaningless private masses had been abolished by the end of 1521. The ten aisles of relics had been removed by 1522. By 1524, the people who had once only stopped to look were now starting to stay and sing, with forms and hymns that they could understand! The results of course, would be seen and heard far beyond the Wittenberg door. It's seen, heard, and understood 500 years later in a chapel 4,368 miles away.

Did the brilliant professor realize what he was doing? In 1523, Luther began by revising an old order of service for the sake of the gospel. In 1526, Luther advised a new order of service for the sake of the gospel. But far from a mere 'alternative service' what Luther left was a pastoral and practical manual for careful creativity still in use today.

We earnestly hope that the wisdom evident in his orders of service and offered in our adaptation of it might guide pastors and worship planners for many years to come.

SDG

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NOTES:

¹ Though Google tells us it fell on a Thursday, they are using the Gregorian Calendar. Prior to 1582, dates were determined according to the Julian Calendar. In that Calendar, January 1 fell on a Thursday, meaning that November 1 fell on a Sunday.

² To say that it was celebrated at the Castle Church 'alone' is tongue and cheek. The masses would not have been said constantly, but dozens would be offered privately and simultaneously by priests, often with no one else in attendance.

³ This is the scene described by Martin Brecht, *Road to Reformation*, 118.

⁴ LW 31:17-34

⁵ The date of this breakthrough is uncertain, but likely happened during the summer of 1518, while Luther was preparing his lectures on the Hebrews. Luther referred to it as a moment when "the gates of heaven were suddenly opened to me. Cf. Brecht, *Road*, 225.

⁶ LW 31:327ff.

⁷ The phrase is coined by Senn, 275.

⁸ Many can remember the scene from the 1953 film: "How dare you lay hands upon the crucifix!"

⁹ The phrase is from Luther's Preface to the *Formula Missae*. LW 53:19

¹⁰ AL 3:146, LW 53:68

¹¹ AL 3:142

¹² Dirk Lange provides this note on the above quotation in AL 3:142 n.19

¹³ Schalk, *Paradigms*, 55.

¹⁴ "Onward then in the name of God! First the German service needs a down-to-earth, plain, simple, and good catechism." (AL 142)

¹⁵ AL 3:141

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 140.

¹⁸ Even during Luther's lifetime, it was common for Latin and German settings of the same texts to be sung alongside one another.

¹⁹ Maschke, 155.

²⁰ "The congregation assembled around the Word and the sacraments needs other forms than an individual needs when reading the Word or praying by himself. Unity demands the individual's regard for the whole. Conversely, however, it also demands that the whole have regard for the individual. It demands regard for the 'weak' – a demand, which in accordance with what Luther requires, is emphasized by many church rituals." Elert, 328-329

²¹ "Sometimes we feel that we've moved a mountain if we can convince our people to wait until Christmas to sing Christmas hymns. Is it possible today to create the kind of liturgical awareness that existed in the sixteenth century?" (Herl, "Habits" 148)

²² Herl does a fine job of demonstrating the value of "The *De Tempore* Principle." We can often provide our people a number of powerful teaching moments by thoughtfully setting up our annual worship calendar to celebrate important events like Epiphany, Ascension, Morning Prayer, and Compline.

²³ "Deutsch Evangelisch Messze." Cf. Leaver, *Sings*, 84-88.

²⁴ The story is explained in Luther's "An Exhortation to the Communicants" LW 53:104.

²⁵ "To translate the Latin text and the Latin tone or notes has my sanction, though it does not sound polished or well done. Both text and notes, accent and melody, and manner of rendering ought to grow out of the true mother tongue and its inflection, otherwise all of it becomes an imitation in the manner of apes." *Against the Heavenly Prophets* LW 40:141.

²⁶ Leaver, "Deutsche Messe" 331.

²⁷ Incidentally, the professionals didn't feel Luther needed much help. Michael Praetorius records Rupsch and Walther's recollections of the visit. 'Herr Luther had composed the Sanctus in masterly fashion. Schalk, *Paradigms*, 27.

²⁸ Cf. LW 53:127ff. and LW 53:153ff.

²⁹ Cf. Luther's Letter to Spalatin (end of 1523) LW 49:68-69, cited in Schalk, *Paradigms*, 26.

³⁰ Schalk, *Paradigms*, 51.

³¹ This image is borrowed from Martin Franzmann and is described in Aaron Christie's article "Excellence for Christ in All Things."

³² Other reformers, such as John Calvin, would eventually advocate for this approach.

³³ This was the path being advocated by Johannes Brenz: "A lack of uniformity in the ceremonies cannot help but be profitable and there has been particularly useful because it leads to the realization that there is Christian freedom in unnecessary church customs." Cf. Elert, 333)

³⁴ LW 53:47

³⁵ AL 3:139, LW 53:63

³⁶ For a fuller discussion of Latitude and Limits, cf. Valleskey, 6.

³⁷ "We Germans are a rough, rude, and reckless people, with whom it is hard to do anything, except in cases of dire need." AL 3:142. I wonder what Luther would think of Americans.

³⁸ AL: 3:155

³⁹ By 1580, the pattern of uniform church practice had spread throughout Germany. "The confessors were willing to work out their issues of freedom and love for the sake of unity. They saw the exercise of "discretion" ...as completely in accord with the very confessions they penned and confessed. They went about exercising that discretion not only by defending it in the confessions, but through active efforts of visitation and through extensive publication of church orders." Harrison, xv-xvi.

⁴⁰ Leaver, "Deutsche Messe," 333-334

⁴¹ Leaver, *Sings*, 28.

⁴² Cf. Hoelty-Nickel "Philosophy" 149.

⁴³ As they currently are. Joseph Herl's *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism* asserts that the choir played the major role, almost to the exclusion of the congregation. Recent work from Robin Leaver seeks to balance the perspective by painting the picture of a very actively singing laity. Cf. *Luther's Liturgical Music, 209ff. and especially The Whole Church Sings, 102ff.*

⁴⁴ Robin Leaver provides an engaging narrative of its development. *Sings, 106ff.*

⁴⁵ AL 3:140

⁴⁶ The second quote is referenced in Leaver, *Church*, 2. The first can be found in WA 4:4, #1162. Thanks to Nathan Biebert on the translation.