

Insights from Early Lutheran Worship

WELS National Worship Conference
July 22–23, 2002

Presented by Joseph Herl

I would like to thank Pastor Gerlach and the Commission on Worship for the opportunity to speak to you today. I come to you from Seward, Nebraska, where I teach at Concordia University. Being from the Missouri Synod, I cannot presume to instruct you on what should be done in Wisconsin. All I can do is share a little of what I have discovered about early Lutheran worship and present a few questions for discussion, and perhaps it will give you an idea or two about how to proceed in your own churches.

Thanks to the generous support of the U.S. and German governments, I was privileged to spend 1991 to 1993 in Germany conducting research for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Illinois on congregational singing in German Lutheran churches from 1520 to 1780. I arrived in August 1991, and for the next fourteen months I was in a scholar's paradise, arriving at the library at 8:00 in the morning and spending the day reading liturgical and ecclesiastical documents, sermons, musical treatises, polemical works, town chronicles and other sources dating from the 16th to 18th century.

The best information we have about early Lutheran worship comes from official liturgies, called *agendas*. To understand these, it is helpful to know something about how early Lutheran churches were organized. As Catholic bishops lost their authority in the territories adopting the Reformation, a new system of church government was needed. The system that evolved placed the ruler of each duchy, county, independent city or other territory at the head of the church for the territory. Regulations governing the churches appeared in documents called church orders (*Kirchenordnungen*). A better term might be "church ordinance." These church orders, or ordinances, frequently contained "agendas" (literally, "things to be done"), which prescribed the liturgy to be followed, often in some detail. Agendas were the 16th-century equivalents of the liturgies in the front of our hymnals. Now Germany did not become a united country until the nineteenth century. Before then there were well over a hundred more

I apologize to the reader for the lack of source references in this paper. I had not originally envisioned that it would be published on the Internet, so I did not include them. But the same ideas (and occasionally the same sentences) are contained in my Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Congregational Singing in the German Lutheran Church 1523–1780* (University of Illinois, 2000), and curious readers may want to consult that source or its revision *Worship wars in early Lutheranism: choir, congregation and three centuries of conflict*, to be published in 2004 by Oxford University Press. The dissertation should be available through interlibrary loan or from UMI Press. I can be reached at joseph.herl@cune.edu.

or less independent territories and cities existing at any given time, and they tended to supplement or replace their church orders from time to time, which means that anyone researching this topic has to look at quite a few agendas. I've read somewhere between 250 and 300.

Your handout contains a schedule of services in German Lutheran churches. This schedule was fairly uniform throughout Germany. The weekend began with Vespers on Saturday afternoon, at which a sermon was preached. After Vespers private confession was held for anyone planning to commune the next day. The vast majority of Lutheran territories, especially in northern Germany, required private confession before each reception of communion. The requirement was relaxed over the years as confession turned into "registration for communion," but most Lutheran churches still required it at least theoretically until the end of the eighteenth century. Confession benefited the priest as well as the penitent, by the way; he was paid a small amount (the so-called *Beichtpfennig*) for each confession. This pre-Reformation tradition was continued in most parts of Germany until almost 1800. A city councillor in Cologne told an amusing story about his sister's first confession at about age seven (this would have been around the year 1534). When she went to confession she placed her coin on top of her head. When she stood up after being absolved the coin fell to the floor. The priest asked her about it. It turns out that she had seen priests extending their hands over penitents' heads but didn't realize it was for the absolution. She had assumed they were doing it to take the money.

Early on Sunday, Matins was held in the cities. In larger cities a shortened mass with sermon might be held prior to Matins for the sake of domestic servants who would not be able to attend the main service. Matins was not held in small villages. The main service, called "Messe" (mass) or "Tagamt" (a later term) began around 7:00. Communion was offered on all Sundays and holy days nearly everywhere as long as there were people desiring to commune, and larger cities held it on weekdays as well. (A few areas in southern Germany that had been influenced by Calvin and the Swiss Reformation offered it less frequently.) When there were no communicants, a truncated mass was held, skipping everything from the Preface through the Thanksgiving collect. After lunch either Vespers or a catechism service took place, or a combination of both. The high point of the catechism service was the examination, at which children from the parish stood up in front of the congregation and recited a part of Luther's *Small Catechism* with its explanation. This was not a popular way to learn, and church records from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are full of complaints from pastors that few people, if any, attended the catechism service. Pastors also had an annoying way of testing their parishioners' catechism knowledge at awkward times; Justus Jonas, a close associate of Luther, reports that farmers in Saxony would hide when the pastor came around to see them so they wouldn't have to recite the catechism.

The same services as on Sunday were also held on other one-day festivals. Half-day festivals

were observed just with mass in the morning.

Services were also held during the week. In the largest cities masses took place daily at alternating churches. Most cities had sermons on several weekdays, generally in the morning; and village priests were encouraged to preach a sermon on at least one weekday. In places with Latin schools Matins and Vespers were generally sung six days a week (the boys were usually given one day off). A number of church orders specify that the Litany was to be sung once a week on Wednesday or Friday, but many priests didn't bother except during times of war or other danger.

Many agendas had separate sections for city and village liturgies. The cities—that is, places with more than a few hundred people—had a larger number of services, often with several weekday sermons divided among various churches. Matins and Vespers were sung by pupils in the Latin schools, who served as the church's choir. The services in the cities tended to be liturgically complex with a prominent place given to the choir. Because of this, city services had less congregational participation, and in some places the congregation seems to have been almost superfluous. Churches in larger villages with schools were expected to follow the city orders as closely as possible, but those in small villages and in the countryside did not have the resources needed to conduct choral services of any sort. In these churches, the parish clerk, a layman who assisted the pastor, took the place of the choir and led the singing in church (see the handout under "Titles of church and school officials").

On the back of the handout is a section "Terms for musical ensembles." Throughout Germany, the church choir was the school choir; that is, the boys of the school led the church's song. On average, pupils received four to five hours of music instruction per week; that is, instruction in singing, note reading and music theory. During the period immediately following the Reformation, most school choirs sang exclusively Latin chant and German hymns in unison. The average age of puberty was around 17 or 18 at the time, so teachers didn't have to worry about boys' voices changing before they graduated. But eventually they did graduate and their voices did change. Some didn't want to give up singing, so they formed societies called *Kantoreien*, a combination of choral society and social club, that sang with the schoolboys; this allowed polyphonic music to be sung in church. I should add that there were no women in choirs before the middle of the 18th century, although a couple of early orders refer to choirs from girls' schools that sang simple unison hymns in German.

Let's take a look at a typical Sunday morning service. The third page of the handout is entitled *Mass Orders from Representative Agendas*. Across the top are listed nine different agendas covering the years 1528 to 1710. Down the left column are listed the various parts of a Lutheran mass. A plus sign after a part of the mass means that it was said or sung by the pastor; the rest were sung by the choir or congregation. Let's look at the line "Latin Introit or German psalm." Reading across to the 1528 order

for the city of Braunschweig, we see the letter “G.” This means that the order specified that this part of the service be done in German. The next order, Wittenberg 1533, specified a choice of either Latin or German, or possibly alternating Latin one week and German the next. A letter in parentheses means that the language was not specified in the order, but it is fairly clear from the context. If it is less clear, I added a question mark. The most conservative of the orders was the 1540 order for Brandenburg. Much of the mass is in Latin, and even the Epistle and Gospel are sung twice, once in Latin and then again in German (the repetition is indicated by the hyphen between the “L” and the “G”). The most radical order is the 1592 order for the south German city of Strassburg. Under the leadership of reformer Martin Bucer, Strassburg took an independent path somewhere between that of Luther and the Swiss reformer John Calvin. Eventually the city settled on a compromise where they accepted Lutheran doctrine but used a Calvinist liturgy, which accounts for the sparseness of the mass order.

Looking down the parts of the mass, you notice that the *Gloria* is followed by the *Et in terra*. The orders distinguished between the first line “Gloria in excelsis deo,” which was sung by the priest, and the remainder beginning “Et in terra pax hominibus,” which was sung by the choir. The same is true of the Nicene Creed, with the initial “Credo in unum deum” sung by the priest and the remainder beginning “Patrem omnipotentem” sung by the choir or the people. Often, by the way, it isn’t clear whether the choir or the congregation was to sing a particular part of the liturgy; but where an order does specify it, I have indicated it with a raised circle next to a letter. A circle to the left of a letter means that the choir was to sing, and one to the right of a letter means that the congregation was to sing. And so the Credo and Patrem in the 1533 order for Wittenberg is sung first by the choir in Latin, then by the congregation in German using Luther’s hymn *Wir glauben all an einen Gott*. Of course if an item is in Latin, then it was always sung by the choir even if that isn’t explicitly stated.

A letter in italics means either that the item was optional or that it was sung only on certain occasions. The sequence, for example, in many places was sung only on Christmas, Easter and Pentecost and perhaps the following few Sundays.

I should say a few words about the sermon. The mass lasted three hours everywhere in Germany, and the sermon occupied the middle hour. The sermon during mass was always on the day’s Gospel. The actual preaching took only forty-five minutes; the other fifteen minutes were given over to the reading or rereading of the Gospel, then after the sermon came the announcements, the common prayer with Lord’s Prayer, perhaps a public confession and absolution, and finally a hymn. (None of this was new in the Lutheran Church, by the way; it was all taken over from the pre-Reformation church.)

After the sermon most churches held an exhortation to communicants. This was a brief address explaining what the sacrament was about and how people should receive it. The Preface and Sanctus, so

important to our liturgy today, were frequently omitted in early Lutheran churches; in fact, they were normally done only when the mass was held in Latin. The Our Father, as the Lutherans called the Lord's Prayer, was hardly ever omitted, and the Words of Institution of course never were. Both were always sung rather than spoken. In fact, in most places the entire service was sung except for the sermon and its annexes. In the Roman Mass, after the host and cup were consecrated they were held aloft so the people could adore the Body and Blood of the Lord. This was called the Elevation, and there was disagreement among Lutherans about whether it should be retained. The check mark under Wittenberg 1533 and Brandenburg 1540 means that it was specifically required in those orders; the "X" under Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel 1615 means that it was specifically prohibited in that order. In many places the decision was left to individual priests. In the late 16th century the Elevation became a point of contention between Lutherans and Calvinists, who were making inroads into Lutheran Germany. Calvinists said the Elevation was idolatrous, while Lutherans claimed it was a matter of free choice whether or not to have it.

Besides agendas, *visitation reports* also tell us quite a bit about Lutheran church services. In Lutheran churches, it was the task of superintendents and other ecclesiastical authorities to ensure that the churches under their care were functioning properly, that pastors were teaching correctly, that church workers were living decent lives, that congregations were meeting their financial obligations, and so on. The principal tool in providing such supervision was the visitation, which was essentially an audit of local churches conducted by the authorities. The frequency of visitations varied from place to place. The Wittenberg visitation articles of 1542 required annual visitations, although it is unclear how often they were actually held. Some territories held visitations only when circumstances warranted. In some places visitations were formal affairs, with a committee led by the superintendent spending several days in a town attending services, meeting with church workers and members of the congregation, auditing the church's books, reviewing records of sacramental acts, and hearing complaints from those in the community. In other places they were quite informal, apparently with only a written report being submitted by the pastor. In many places, superintendents inquired about liturgical matters, and where written records of these inquiries survive, they provide useful information about church services.

Visitation records are valuable liturgical sources because they are a corrective to information gleaned from agendas. Agendas are prescriptive in nature: they tell us what was supposed to happen in the churches, but visitation records describe what actually happened (or at least what informants *said* happened). The two do not always agree in their depiction of the church's worship.

One thing we learn from visitation reports is that although churches held a lot of services, many of them were not well attended. Of the various services, Matins was generally attended only by

schoolboys; in fact, it was not really intended to be a public service. Saturday Vespers was generally attended only by those planning to commune the next day, and we have complaints from pastors that some communicants didn't even bother to attend the service, but just showed up afterwards for confession. Sunday Vespers was apparently better attended in the cities; but in the villages people attended to avoid this service, which was essentially a sermon on the catechism with a recitation by the children. The Sunday morning mass was by all accounts well attended, but there are nonetheless numerous reports from the entire period that people tended to come late to mass and leave early. It was not at all unusual for people to show up just before the sermon and leave immediately afterwards; in many places this was more the rule than the exception, and arriving earlier or staying later marked you as especially devout. Either that, or it meant that you wanted to catch up on the latest gossip, as several writers noted that people tended to talk during the parts of the service when music was being performed. Sleeping in church seems to have been a common problem as well, and several communities employed ushers to walk around and wake people during the sermon. The same ushers also had the task of chasing animals from the church that ran around disrupting the service.

Perhaps the most surprising thing we learn from visitation records is that in many places the singing of the congregation was quite poor. Most of us have been taught that Luther opened the floodgates of song to the people, and that suddenly churches were filled with eager singers belting out *A mighty fortress is our God* at the tops of their lungs. One can almost imagine Luther on his white horse, waving a banner reading "Here I stand" and riding off into the sunset as throngs of newly vocal Christians followed. It is an inspiring picture, but even allowing for a bit of Hollywood excess, it isn't at all close to reality. Witness this 1577 report from the village of Clöden in Saxony: The pastor uses Luther's hymnal, but the congregation remains mute and cannot be moved to sing even by the landowner's example. Or this from Züllsdorf in 1577: The pastor reports that he is unable to say the words of distribution 'Take the precious body. . .' to each communicant; because he has no clerk to sing hymns he has to sing instead while distributing communion. In this case the visitors directed the pastor to inquire whether some goodhearted people might be found to sing during the communion; otherwise, he should leave the hymns until after the communion. In Elster in 1602:

The people do not sing along even on familiar hymns, such as the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Our Father. In the daughter church at Rulssdorf the pastor has to sing alone during the communion, and so he says the words of distribution "Take and eat, this is the body. . ." and "Take and drink, this is the blood. . ." only to the first and last communicants. The visitors found this unacceptable and directed that henceforth the pastor was to say the words to each communicant, and if the people refused to sing then the communion should be held in silence. A request by the clerk at Elster to accompany

the pastor to Rulssdorf and handle the singing was turned down even though he wanted from each farmer only one peck of grain per year (as salary). The congregation explained that they did not want to have anything new imposed on them, and with that they got up and walked out of the visitation meeting.

In 1628 in Wetter, one of the most important parishes in the territory of Hesse, the pastor complained that the people simply would not accustom themselves to singing Luther's psalms: they said that if they wanted to sing they would go to a tavern! Note that this was more than fifty years after the Reformation had been introduced into the territory.

There are, to be sure, other examples of places where the people did sing well; but they seem to be in the minority. This isn't all that surprising, as congregations did not use hymnals until the end of the seventeenth century, so anyone who wanted to sing along had to have the hymns memorized. There was also no organ to support the singing; organ accompaniment of hymns was introduced gradually between 1600 and 1800. The situation in Lutheranism was in stark contrast to that in Calvinist areas, where by all accounts the singing of the people was excellent. Both Calvin in Geneva and Martin Bucer in Strassburg strongly advocated congregational singing and encouraged people to purchase hymnals and bring them to church; Luther, although he wrote many hymns, never succeeded in getting the people in Wittenberg to sing in church, and for the next two hundred years Lutherans continued to see the choral mass as the ideal to strive for. I consider the most significant development in Lutheran worship before 1800 to be the gradual transition from a liturgy that was essentially choral to one that was essentially congregational.

Let's look at how this transition occurred. Early in the Reformation, German singing in church was done mostly by the boys' choir or, in rural areas, by the parish clerk substituting for the choir. Congregations were encouraged to learn the most common hymns, too, so they could "assist" with the singing. Whether they actually did so varied from place to place, but by the mid-16th century they were generally becoming accustomed to the idea that they should be singing in church. But then something happened: as boys graduated from school and continued to sing in *Kantoreien*, these choral societies began to assist the boys' choir in singing polyphonic music in church. Previously the choir had sung only in unison. But now they could sing more complex music, and this was music on which the congregation could not easily sing along. Even if a choral piece was based on a familiar hymn, the tune tended to be hidden away in the tenor part with all sorts of complex counterpoint going on around it. [Play example] And so there began to be a separation between music for the congregation and music for the choir. The more the choir sang, the less the people were able to.

Of course in some places this didn't make much difference, as the people were not inclined to

sing anyway. But in others there was resentment: the people had gotten used to singing in church and they did not want to be denied the opportunity. It wasn't long before someone came up with a way to combine choral and congregational music. In 1586, Lucas Osiander published his *Fifty spiritual songs and psalms in four voices, set in contrapuntal style for the schools and churches in the honorable principality of Württemberg, so that an entire Christian congregation is able to sing along throughout*. Osiander's innovation was to move the melody from the tenor to the soprano voice. The lower parts were still set in contrapuntal style, but now the congregation could hear the melody more clearly in the top voice. [Play example] This style of simple counterpoint with the melody in the top voice came to be called the *cantional style*, and more than seventy books containing music in this style were printed in the next hundred years.

Another solution to the problem of choral versus congregational performance was to have the choir sing only certain stanzas of a hymn in counterpoint, with the other stanzas sung in unison by or with the congregation. This was practiced in some places even when the choir itself sang in unison; it was a continuation of the ancient tradition of alternating between choirs in the singing of psalms, hymns and various parts of the liturgy. The practice was brought to its height in the early seventeenth century court chapel at Wolfenbüttel, where Michael Praetorius was music director. Praetorius employed several groups of vocal soloists, instrumentalists and choirs of both. [Play example]

Praetorius was in part responsible for importing into Germany a new style of music that had made its appearance in Italy around 1600. In the last decades of the sixteenth century, Italian composers such as Giovanni Gabrieli and Carlo Gesualdo experimented with new techniques of harmony, rhythm and texture that resulted in music expressing emotion that was novel in its intensity. Voices and instruments combined to produce music that could be alternately wonderfully sweet or overwhelming in its effect. The more expressive devices used in secular music to highlight individual words of the text, such as sudden and extreme harmonic shifts, were mostly avoided in sacred music; but composers of the latter did not scorn the use of less intrusive devices, such as descending chromatic lines to express sadness, quick melismas to express joy, and so on. Besides Praetorius, other 17th-century German composers writing in this style include the three S-C-H's: Johann Hermann Schein at Leipzig, Samuel Scheidt at Halle and Heinrich Schütz at Dresden.

Learned reaction against music in this style arose in the second half of the seventeenth century. At issue was the question of whether music in the Italian style with soloists and chorus accompanied by orchestra was capable of directing the listener's attention to God rather than to the impressive music itself. A secondary issue was whether the performing musicians themselves were devout Christians.

In 1661 an enormously influential and controversial book appeared: Theophilus Grossgebauer's

Warning cries from ravaged Zion; that is, a frank and necessary disclosure of why evangelical congregations bear little fruit of conversion and blessedness, and why evangelical congregations at today's sermons from the holy Word of God become more unspiritual and godless. The book treated all sorts of abuses in the church; Chapter 11 concerned the divine service. In it the 33-year-old theologian from Rostock advanced the idea that the introduction of organs, instrumental music and choral polyphony into the church had been a deliberate plot by the papacy to silence the Word of God by distracting the people from it with music that sounded impressive but which had no spiritual effect. Then, showing this to have been a rhetorical exaggeration, he said that no matter who had really introduced these things, their effect had in fact been exactly as described. In a passage that was to be widely quoted, he depicted the result of importing the new style from Italy:

Hence organists, cantors, trained brass players and [other] musicians, for the most part unspiritual people, unfortunately rule the city churches. They play, sing, fiddle and make sounds according to their own wishes. You hear the whistling, ringing and roaring but do not know what it is, whether you should prepare yourself for battle or retreat; one is chasing the other with concerto-style playing and several of them are fighting each other over who plays most artistically and who can most subtly resemble the nightingale.

And just as the world is not now serious, but rather shallow, having lost the old, quiet devotion, so songs have been sent out of the south and west to us in Germany in which the biblical texts are torn apart and chopped up into little pieces through quick runs in the throat: these are “the improvisations” [referred to in] Amos 6:5 which, as with birds, can pull and break the voice. Then an ambitious collective howling commences [to determine] who can sing best and most like the birds. Now it's Latin, now it's German; very few can understand the words, and if they do understand it, it still doesn't stick. There sits the organist, playing and displaying his artistry—so that the artistry of one man might be displayed, the entire congregation of Jesus Christ is supposed to sit there and hear the sound of the pipes, on account of which the congregation becomes sleepy and lethargic. Many sleep, many chatter, many look about where they should not, many would like to read but cannot because they have not learned how, although they could be well instructed through the spiritual songs of the congregation, as Paul demands. Many would like to pray, but are so occupied with and bewildered by the howling and din that they cannot. Occasionally it goes right to the edge, so if an unbeliever were to come into our assembly would he not say we were putting on a spectacle and were to some extent crazy?

Nearly thirty years later a young pastor from Lockwitz, near Dresden named Christian Gerber published a little book entitled *The unrecognized sins of the world*, which detailed seventeen sins that are widely ignored as such: sleeping in church, hypocrisy, parents complaining when they have more children than they would like, dealing unfairly with the poor in making purchases, complaining about unfavorable weather, slandering foreign or heathen governments, dwelling on sadness, disregarding God's love out of

coldness of heart, remaining silent in the face of evil, speaking jokingly of shameful things, calling one another names, being superstitious, dressing up as Christ at Christmas for the sake of the children, being too curious about the mysteries of God and nature, youth reading romance novels and seeking to emulate them, a superior offending an inferior and refusing to apologize, and not taking sins of youth seriously. The book was so popular that Gerber produced a sequel in 1699 listing eighty more unrecognized sins (two more volumes later appeared, bringing the total number of sins to 257). In the 1699 book he graphically described the current state of music in the larger churches. Here is a summary (see also page 2 of the handout):

1. Music is the gift of God, but it is commonly abused in church.
2. Italians often serve as musicians in Lutheran churches; and many musicians, whether Italian or German, are unspiritual people.
3. The music currently performed in churches entertains the ear but does not benefit the soul.
4. Current church music is just so much noise, and often the text cannot be understood clearly.
5. The music of the Old Testament and the early church was truly spiritual.
6. Congregational hymns are to be preferred to performed music.
7. Some performed music is appropriate in the service, but large sums should not be spent on it.

Gerber's ideal is a liturgy that is mainly congregational, with choral performance relegated to a minor role. This view was roundly criticized by many musicians. Gottfried Ephraim Scheibel argued in 1721 that performed music was superior even to hymns because it could better move the emotions; in fact, he believed that church music would be better if it were more theatrical. Heinrich Bokemeyer, cantor at Wolfenbüttel, wrote around 1725 that the purpose of the performed music in church was to "instruct the audience in a genteel and agreeable manner." Johann Mattheson, who by day was assistant to the English ambassador and by night was the most influential German writer on music of the century, took issue with Bokemeyer's opinion, saying that church music's purpose was not merely to instruct the listeners, but to move them emotionally. In 1728 Mattheson published *Der musicalische Patriot*, a defense of the theatrical style of church music. In it he stated outright that the purpose of church music was the same as that of theatrical music: to move the emotions of the listeners. Johann Adolf Scheibe, Kappellmeister to the King of Denmark, wrote in 1745 that "the chief purpose of church music is mainly to edify the audience, to arouse them to devotion, in order to awaken in them a quiet and holy fear toward the Divine Essence."

By the mid-eighteenth century church music was decidedly compartmentalized, with distinct parts for the congregation (the hymns) and the choir (the performed music). The service was now seen as the activity principally of the congregation, and the choir's main function was no longer one of singing

the liturgy, but of performing sacred music for an audience. The entire debate reflected a change toward a more anthropocentric view of church music. In the sixteenth century the effect of music on its hearers was a peripheral concern at best. Sixteenth-century Lutherans had no need for a theology of church music; they never addressed the question of the purpose of music in the church, as its purpose was obvious: it either conveyed a liturgical text or substituted for one. A more philosophical observer might have said that its purpose was to glorify God. But by the eighteenth century writers saw the purpose of music as being the arousing of emotion; and the more emotion the music produced in the listener, the better it was considered to be. Of course, the emotions produced had to be the right ones, ones that would direct the minds of the people to God.

While 18th-century clergy and musicians were distracted by these arguments over musical style, a darker threat took shape. The idea of “natural religion” with its claim that divine revelation must be evaluated by the dictates of reason was being promoted by writers such as John Locke (1632–1704) in England and Christian Wolff (1679–1754) in Germany. By the second half of the century the whole idea of revealed religion was rejected by some, while others sought to preserve what they could of Christianity through compromise: the essential history and basic moral truths could stay, but any hint of the miraculous or supernatural would have to go. Both these views, as well as those of Locke and Wolff, may be considered Rationalist; but it was understandably those theologians that did not reject Christianity entirely who still cared about the church’s worship and who took it upon themselves to adapt it to Rationalist principles.

Calls for liturgical reform written from a Rationalist perspective began to appear in the 1780s. They called for drastic modifications to the traditional liturgy or even wholesale abandonment of it. Wilhelm Crichton wrote in 1782 that as the earliest Christianity was the purest, the church of his own day should be compared with that one. Since the early days various people (such as those in Rome, Dordrecht and Wittenberg) had introduced so many additions to doctrine that unity was no longer possible. But each Christian must be allowed his own beliefs. “The divine service, or public devotions, is a fitting means. . .to keep, continue and enlarge religion in thought and deed. . . .If it is established for any other purpose, a correction is necessary.” A formal liturgy was not necessary for the efficacy of the sacraments, and it should be revised or eliminated.

Johann Wilhelm Rau argued in 1786 that the old formulas were no longer usable because the expressions in them were in part no longer understandable and in part objectionable. Fixed forms in general were not good, and even the Lord’s Prayer was meant only as an example to follow and not as a prayer to be repeated. Some said that liturgical formulas served to ease the task of the pastor and preserve

order in the service. But the advantages were specious: very few pastors had no time left over from other duties to prepare a service, and in Dortmund (for example) no liturgical formulas were prescribed, without disruption to the service. Each pastor used his own, self-written order, or spoke extemporaneously. According to Rau, the most important abuses to curb were the too-frequent use of the Lord's Prayer, the making of the sign of the cross, the Aaronic benediction, chanting by the pastor, the use of candles on the altar, private confession, the use of the appointed lectionary texts for sermons, and various superstitious practices surrounding communion, such as carrying the houseling cloth to catch crumbs that might fall and referring to the "true" body and blood of Christ.

Peter Burdorf, writing in 1795, argued that repetition in the liturgy weakened the attention of the listener and the impact of the form. The current liturgy did not hold people's attention, nor did the sermon. The sermon (now called the "Vortrag," or lecture) would be more tolerable if hymn stanzas were interspersed during it. The author would prefer to return to the communion observance as Jesus celebrated it, without ceremony, consecration or singing of the Words of Institution. The formula "This is the true Body; this is the true Blood" led inevitably to the superstition that the communicants were actually receiving the body and blood of Christ! The teaching that the communion imparts the forgiveness of sins was especially harmful to public morality. Some liturgy was necessary for public services to be held, but it should be as simple as possible in order to meet the needs of contemporary Christians.

The result of these criticisms was the widespread adoption of new, simpler liturgies and the rewriting of hymns with a view to removing "superstition" and outdated theology. One of the most notorious hymnals in this regard was the Prussian hymnal of 1780, entitled *Gesangbuch zum gottesdienstlichen Gebrauch in den Königlich-Preußischen Landen*. Its Christmas hymns, according to one anonymous contemporary commentator, contained no mention of the deity of Christ; and the idea of eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ was completely absent from the communion hymns. References to hell and the devil had been carefully pruned. Many traditional Lutheran hymns had been omitted, their place taken by a large crop of moralistic hymns, especially those of Christian Furchtegott Gellert. It remained for Lutherans of succeeding generations, including those of our ancestors who emigrated to America, to undo the damage these liturgies and hymns caused. In 1817, the three hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, Claus Harms published his anti-Rationalistic *Ninety-Five Theses*, which sparked the beginning of a revival of Lutheran theology and liturgy that has resulted in, among other things, *Christian Worship*, one of the best-edited hymnals of any church body today. The presence of so many at this conference is a further testimony to the importance of the liturgy in our lives. May it continue and so glorify our Lord Jesus Christ.