



Confessional Perspectives on Worship

Insights from Early Lutheran Practice

By Bryan Gerlach

It baffles some that the reformers would revel in gospel freedom but then maintain continuity with historic worship forms. Some of our analysis of this tension may be conditioned by our personal experience with historic forms. Of 1445 active pastors in WELS today, 665 began service after *Christian Worship* (CW) was published in 1993. That means a sizeable percentage of our ministerium once experienced *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) as the norm for liturgical worship.

TLH offered 1.5 ways to present worship following the Western Rite (p5/15) and a fairly narrow musical expression for its liturgies, mostly Anglican chant. CW and other resources since 1993 have provided more variety, but a consistent use of “adequate variety” is still a challenge for many parishes.¹

What insights can we gain from early Lutheran practice? Previous articles in this series have touched on forms. This article expands on that briefly, but the stronger focus is on musical variety and richness. Some applications are made to our day; others can be drawn from the historic details provided. Since future articles will explore ceremonies, sacraments, and adiaphora in more depth, those topics are not covered.

Forms: continuity and commonality

We can gain insights into early Lutheran worship by researching the *Kirchenordnungen* (KOO).² These church orders give many details about church life, including worship. Luther provided both Latin and German services. As the Reformation spread, it is noteworthy that the most common orders of service combined elements from both. Frank Senn cites the enormous influence of Johannes Bugenhagen. His 1528 Brunswick order is “a conflation of the two styles of worship provided by Luther in his *Formula Missae* and German Mass.”³ This conflation continued the use of Latin texts sung by choirs (Gloria, Preface-Sanctus, propers) along with German hymns. The use of Latin texts indicated appreciation for resources from the past and a place for challenging music. Another influential church order, Brandenburg-Nuremberg 1533, was drafted principally by Andreas Osiander and Johann Brenz.

Reflecting Bugenhagen’s conflation, one order is mostly in Latin, another mostly in German for use where there was no choir.

The structure of early Lutheran worship is noteworthy more for commonality than diversity.

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No fewer than 135 church orders appeared between 1523 (*Formula Missae*) and 1555 (*Peace of Augsburg*). They differ considerably in minor details, and yet their liturgical provisions show a remarkable similarity. This was due to the far-reaching influence of Luther and to the fact that many of the church orders were prepared by the same authors (Bugenhagen seven, Brenz five, Jonas four, Melancthon four, Bucer three or four, etc.).⁴

The reformers clearly confessed that worship forms are adiaphora. The choices they made about adiaphora are revealing, descriptive of their practices but not prescriptive for ours. We also benefit from considering their attitude when wrestling with potential disagreement. In 1567 Martin Chemnitz became the superintendent of Braunschweig. Concerning the relationships of pastors, congregations, and government, he wrote:

Likewise, we must all stick together, as we have in the past, and retain the practice that each does not build up himself or act as

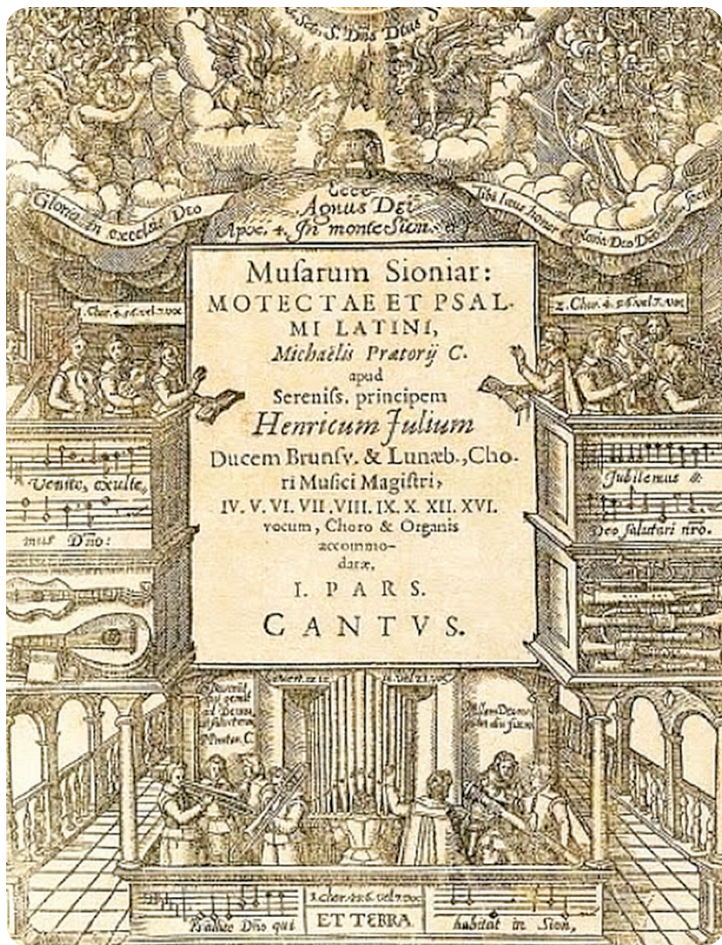
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lord in his congregation and do what he pleases in preaching, administration of the sacraments, liturgical practices, discipline and the other aspects of his office, acting only according to his own ideas, but rather all these things shall be and remain the business of the entire ministerium. And because the conference meets regularly every two weeks, matters of this kind should be brought there and discussed, matters which are problems of the whole church which require our mutual concern or consideration.⁵

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The result of regular discussions? “An amazing unanimity was achieved in questions dealing with doctrine, ritual, worship, and discipline.”⁶ Orders of service may not be legalistically imposed or defended. But when consensus develops from the kind of discussion urged by Chemnitz, following that consensus is no more legalistic than following a constitution and bylaws today in a synod, district, or congregation.

Against this backdrop it is not surprising that the focus of Article X in the Formula of Concord is not the congregation but a larger “community,” a territory or district.



Prætorius title page: various instruments and antiphonal choirs join with the hosts of heaven. At the center: Behold the Lamb of God.

We believe, teach and confess that the community of God, in every locality and every age has authority to change such ceremonies according to circumstances, as it may be most profitable and edifying to the community of God.⁷

Matthew Harrison has provided an analysis of Article X, noting the connection between two of Chemnitz’s roles: dominant theological voice behind the Formula and superintendent guiding practical choices in Braunschweig.

Yes, there could be liturgical divergence from territory to territory, but to use statements of the Formula which allow freedom, to justify the current state of (non)liturgical disunity and individualism among American Lutherans is unjustified. The authors of the Formula simply did not in any way intend to sanction anything remotely like our current American congregationalistic worship situation.⁸

Rather than affirming each congregation’s independence, it is more accurate to say that the Formula espouses two key principles. Because the liturgy proclaims the gospel clearly and teaches and edifies the people, the Confessions affirm: 1) profound respect for the past and for continuity with the historic liturgy, and 2) the benefit of a degree of liturgical commonality from parish to parish.

“Ingenious syntheses of continuity and change”

Is the reformers’ perspective on worship forms restrictive of healthy variety and a compelling worship practice for 21st century Lutherans? As we learn from the forms they selected, we also gain insights from how they used those forms.

Variety: creativity within tradition

The *Kirchenordnungen* provide outlines of early Lutheran worship. We see liturgical consistency from region to region as well as minor variations. This is like viewing a drawing of an ancient instrument. We know what it looks like, but we don’t know what it sounded like.

So we look beyond the KOO to music publications and choir library inventories. We have not only outlines of early Lutheran worship; we also have detailed information from the actual music used, giving a picture at least in cities of a rich musical expression. Innovation and creativity develop within tradition, reflecting the “ingenious syntheses of continuity and change”⁹ begun by Luther.

A rich practice of worship (musical settings, instruments) presupposes having the necessary resources. Commentary about music by Michael Prætorius shows that early Lutherans wrestled with this issue just as we do.

It would have been impossible for Prætorius to perform these pieces in Wolfenbüttel in anything like an optimal way, as there were only a handful of singers – for some years no altos at all – and instrumentalists.... The composer wanted to make his music available in a wide variety of circumstances, which were seldom so ideal as in Dresden [at the duke’s Hofkapelle].¹⁰

Praetorius published detailed instructions on performing his music with fewer resources. Today's small church musicians, reviewing a SATB concertato with brass and timpani, will understand.

The concern for "enough musical variety" includes more frequent use of instruments other than the organ. Our common WELS culture makes this effort on festivals and occasionally when a choir selection calls for an instrument. Why not more often?

Strong myths?

To understand early Lutheran worship, we must deal with some strong myths—or at least overgeneralizations—about early Lutheran practice and history.¹¹

"The Reformation restored singing to the people." Does this mean *all* of the service? Far from it! The choir continued to have a major role, especially in cities. In villages the KOO often specify that the preacher should take along some musical students to sing the liturgical portions commonly sung by a choir. The people sang hymns. Compare our sparse role for choir. We know from extant records that during the 17th century alone, 151 Latin settings of the liturgy (mostly *missa brevis*: Kyrie, Gloria) were published for use by German Lutheran choirs. Latin was preferred for the Kyrie and Gloria in cities, but German settings were also used.¹² *Cantionales*, containing liturgical music for choirs, were published along with hymnals. Johann Spangenberg's encyclopedic collection (Magdeburg, 1545) was a large volume of 379 pages, prepared at Luther's urging. It contained a *de tempore* arrangement of parts of the liturgy in both Latin and German.¹³ Lucas Lossius' publication of 800 pages, as indicated by the title, provided liturgical plainsong from the old church for use in the new: *Psalmodia, hoc est Cantica sacra veteris ecclesiae selecta* (1553, 1561, 1569, 1579).¹⁴ Polyphonic settings of the Ordinary were also used. Georg Rhau, Luther's colleague and the most important publisher of early Lutheranism, provided ten settings of the Ordinary in *Opus decem missarum* (1541). In addition to their liturgical role, choirs participated in *alternatim* hymn singing through a vast repertoire of hymn settings.

"Lutherans used music by Lutheran composers." Not even close. "The manuscript repertory of courts and churches in Lutheran Germany contains, in addition to original works by Protestant composers, a large number of masses by Catholic masters. These Catholic works remained acceptable to the Lutheran Church through the strength of tradition and because the Latin ordinary of the mass remained the common property of both confessions."¹⁵

From published collections and inventories of music held by various churches, we gain an impression of vigorous and dynamic variety. Certainly an unrelenting use of TLH pp5/15 for two or three decades was not a 20th century application of historic Lutheran variety. Nor is a "hymnal-and-organ-only" approach with our current resources.

Four observations

First, historic Lutheran worship included variation in at least two ways. 1) City and campus worship was richer because of access to greater resources and because of continued use of the vast Latin repertoire. Village worship was simpler and less likely to use Latin. 2) Festivals

tended to be richer than other Sundays. Applying these points today will lead to a variety of expressions based on the varying resources found in congregations. And if a 16th century preacher could bring musical students to assist with village worship, can we find more ways for large churches to assist small churches?

Second, should WELS be united by use of a common liturgy? Most will answer yes, with two applications: 1) a common liturgical *structure*, so that the flow of worship makes sense to those who transfer membership and so that this flow reinforces our theology of worship; and 2) a common liturgical *repertoire* that gives expression to our unity

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and that, again, is beneficial in a mobile society. But these values need not lead to a 21st century parallel to decades of TLH page 5/15, a rut that never should have held us for so long. Too often talk about a common liturgy is understood to mean a rigidly exclusive structure and repertoire. That's not surprising, since that's part of our history.

Third, applying historic Lutheran principles prevents liturgical worship from appearing to limit creativity and variety. Note historic use of both existing plainsong and newly composed repertoire. One application of this approach concerns the settings we use for the Psalm and Verse of the Day. Singing the psalms has met with wide approval in WELS, but a musical rut could develop if we use only the psalms from the hymnal. Similarly, the NPH Verse settings provide simple and accessible music that works with almost any resource: choir of adults or children, soloist, cantor (or presiding minister). But a steady diet of only these settings might also lead to a rut. Other possibilities are available from various publishers.¹⁶

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Fourth, when liturgical worship demonstrates variety and vitality, it will be judged more satisfying by more people. This satisfaction level might well remove some of the pressure for worship approaches that are less ideal. A strategy for variety and creativity within Lutheran parameters—which broadens and diversifies our current range of practice—also promotes a creative unity *within* that range of practice. Increased worship satisfaction, God willing, will have a positive impact on outreach and member retention.

Now, with a vast horizon of possibilities before us, what do we do? What does a parish do? It cultivates a core repertoire (mostly hymnal) and then a wider repertoire appropriate to its setting and resources. Some choirs might learn more challenging choral settings for festive use. Historically this was not an elitist approach only for cities and court chapels. In 1663 Andreas Hammerschmidt published 16 mostly *breve* mass settings (Kyrie, Gloria). His preface for a 1655 publication defends his more accessible music as "directed toward the usual style of the

common city singers, who have thereby glorified and praised their and our God no less than the most artistic singers of the present time.”¹⁷

An accurate picture of 17th century worship variety is useful both as a model to inspire our efforts and as a corrective to the impression some may have that liturgical worship is “hymnal-only,” with little variation. Some generalizations about historical WELS worship patterns are fair: pietistic roots, pioneer beginnings, becoming liturgical, unwavering use of TLH for decades (sometimes without Matins or Vespers). Imagine worship in the mother churches of our Midwestern cities formed not by our actual history from 1940-1980 but by something reflecting historic Lutheran principles *circa* 1640-1680.

Of course, this approach to variety is not necessary for the *efficacy* of worship, which depends only on the centrality of the gospel in Word and sacraments.¹⁸ Pursuing variety (or any aspect of excellence) is a *stewardship* matter. When, for example, God has blessed a parish with a variety of instrumentalists, why wouldn't we want to use them more frequently?

We have enriched worship far beyond TLH traditions and also beyond early CW years. Even small congregations with limited resources are working for a richer worship life, as indicated by a recent email from a pastor serving 50 people each Sunday. While already far beyond TLH's 1.5 and CW/CWS's four communion services, they want to do more.

I was wondering about new musical settings. We use CWS and New Service Settings, as well as a number of Haas and Haugen settings for the Gloria. We use the Celebration Series “Psalms for the Church Year.” We have an organist who can play once per month, but we primarily use a MIDI system for our music. What else is out there that is good? Anything new?

Plenty! Practical pointers and lists are for future articles and other media.

¹ One of the lowest scores in School of Worship Enrichment surveys, in congregations of all sizes, concerns “enough musical variety for the psalms, hymns, and liturgical songs.”

² *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Aemilius Richter; Weimer, 1846; Leipzig, 1871. *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, Emil Sehling. Vol 1-5: Leipzig, 1902-13. Vol 6-15, Tübingen, 1955-70. See also Joseph Herl. *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism*, especially chapters 3-4. Oxford, 2004.

³ Senn, Frank. *Christian Liturgy*, Fortress: 1997, 333. See also Divine Service, Setting 5 in *Lutheran Service Book* (CPH 2006) which draws on both FM and DM “as did most of the sixteenth-century regional Kirchenordnungen,” *The History and Practice of Lutheran Service Book*, Good Shepherd Institute: 2007, 78. See also Robin Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, chapter 18 “The *Deutsche Messe* from Luther to Bach,” Lutheran Quarterly Books/Eerdmans, 2007.

⁴ Senn, 332.

⁵ Cited in Matthew Harrison, “Martin Chemnitz and the Origin, Content and Meaning of the Tenth Article of the Formula of Concord,” in *Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart*. Concordia Theo. Sem.: 1999, 89. See also his “Lutheran Liturgical Uniformity...” Luther Academy, 2010; and in *Lutheran Theological Journal* 36/2 [Australia], 2002.

⁶ Jungkuntz, Theodore. *Formulators of the Formula of Concord*, CPH: 1977, 51.

⁷ FC, Ep X:4. Also FC, SD X:9. Of course, each congregation in New Testament freedom is free to make choices, but that is not the affirmation in Article X.

⁸ Harrison, 83.

⁹ Leaver, 236.

¹⁰ From the booklet for *Polyhymnia Caduceatrix & Panegyrica*, Sony: 1997, 18-19. Praetorius was the youngest son of a Lutheran pastor who studied in Wittenberg with Luther. He served in the region guided by Chemnitz's church order.

¹¹ This article borrows from “How High is Too High? How Low Can We Go?” which explores additional myths; available at <https://connect.wels.net/worship>. See also *Worship the Lord* #39. Herl's *Worship Wars...* is especially good at

dispelling myths, including pious idealization of early Lutheran worship.

¹² With Latin so common, a Praetorius title is significant: *Missa gantz Teudsch*, 1619. This “entirely German” service is found on the remarkable recording *Mass for Christmas Morning* (Archiv: 1994). See also a 2012 recording: *Ostermesse/Easter Mass*, a complete Proper and Ordinary according to the 1569 church order of Duke Julius of Braunschweig-Lüneburg; cpo 999 953-2. We gain insight into Reformation worship principles from experiencing the worship that grew out of the principles, not only from studying texts about worship.

¹³ Leaver, chapter 14: “Liturgical Chant in Church and School.”

¹⁴ Senn, 348. “56 Intros, 14 Alleluias, 31 sequences, 206 antiphons, 47 responsories, as well as settings of the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Proper Prefaces, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, the Litany, and full provision for Matins and Vespers.”

¹⁵ Howard, John Brooks. “The Latin Lutheran Mass of the Mid-Seventeenth Century: A Study of Andreas Hammerschmidt's Missae (1663) and Lutheran Traditions of Mass Composition.” Bryn Mawr College, 1983: 97-98.

¹⁶ Search for “gospel acclamation” to find Verses, e.g., *The Cantor's Book of Gospel Acclamations*, GIA G-4987. See also the accompaniment edition for Divine Service, Setting 3 in *Lutheran Service Book* (CPH 2006, 102-3) for options to use the familiar triple alleluia with the Verse of the Day.

¹⁷ Howard, 32. Cited also in “A Composer's Dilemma: Andreas Hammerschmidt and the Lutheran Theology of Music,” *Choral Journal*, 12-1999, 27. Two recent recordings: *Hammerschmidt: Sacred Vocal Music*, Ars Musici, 2010. Also *Hat Gott Die Welt Geliebt*, Carus, 2013.

¹⁸ This article has not addressed the purpose of music in Lutheran worship: to praise God by proclaiming the Word and preaching Christ. A valuable contribution to this theme, with analysis of Luther and Praetorius among others, is Daniel Zager's *The Gospel Preached Through Music...*, Good Shepherd Institute, 2013. See also Zager's “Concio et Cantio” (Sermon and Song), a presentation at the 2008 WELS national worship conference, at <https://connect.wels.net/worship>.