

5-1-1952

The Relation of the Liturgy to the Word

H. Richard Klann

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Klann, H. Richard (1952) "The Relation of the Liturgy to the Word," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 23, Article 25.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol23/iss1/25>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXIII

MAY 1952

No. 5

The Relation of the Liturgy to the Word

By H. Richard Klann

THE essential aim of this investigation is not merely the historical delineation of liturgical practices, nor the consideration of liturgical minutiae in their historical setting and development, nor the establishment of a theological basis against liturgical innovations, but rather to state the Lutheran principles by which a pastor will be able to judge the relation of the liturgy to the proclamation of the Word in the worship of a congregation.

The term *liturgy* was taken over from the French *liturgie*, which is derived, respectively, from the medieval Latin term *liturgia* and the Greek *leitourgia*. Originally it denoted any rite or body of rites prescribed for public worship. In the modern sense it refers generally to the public rites and services of the Christian Church. Specifically, it means (a) the Eucharistic rite, called the Liturgy (also *Divine Liturgy*) in the Eastern Church, and the Mass in the Western Church; (b) the Eucharistic rite in any of its historical forms, the Roman, the Lutheran, or the Anglican liturgy.

For the purpose of this investigation the term *Word* shall refer to the revelation of God to man, whether it be read or proclaimed in a sermon, discourse, or lecture, with the understanding that Lutherans recognize no other "Word" than that which the Scriptures exhibit. The Word is, of course, a part of the formal worship of the Church, and, in this respect, its relationship to the liturgy can be traced historically in the usage of the Church. However, since the proclaimed Word antecedes the liturgy and, in fact, determines the latter, it must be allowed to determine the form and method in which it is to be employed in public worship.

I

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE LITURGY TO THE WORD
IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH

In the primitive Jewish-Christian Church we find no evidence of the rejection of Jewish liturgical customs. Obviously, this becomes intelligible only on the supposition that the community arising from Judaism regarded Christianity as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Nor did Jesus forbid His disciples, according to the Gospels, to remain externally in the Jewish community. Jewish Christians were indeed unwilling, except for urgent reasons, to abandon their traditional rites and traditional liturgy. Accordingly, the Jewish conception and form of the liturgy exercised a strong influence on early Christianity. The fact that Jesus commanded nothing in particular regarding worship and its development, but always emphasized the inwardness and spirituality of worship, makes it clear that for others who followed Him the road was open to accept such existing liturgical forms as proved adaptable to the inward disposition of the believers. Thus it became possible for early Christianity to take over Jewish customs and liturgical traditions. The Gentile Christians, in consequence of this, considered themselves legitimate liturgical heirs of Judaism and accepted the history of Israel as their own "pre-history."¹ This can be confirmed without the aid of other contemporary Jewish and Christian writings, by the evidence of New Testament sources alone.

It would be inconceivable that in consequence of the preaching of the Gospel (which in the beginning was directed almost exclusively to the Jews) the first communities which were formed in Jerusalem and in Judea, (Gal. 1:22; 1 Thess. 2:14), in Galilee, Samaria, and the neighboring seacoasts (Acts 1:8; 8:9; 13:13f.; 15:3) had no relationship to the existing centers of worship, whether temple or synagog. The record of Paul's missionary journeys shows abundantly that he always began with the synagog and their Sabbath service in order to win his fellow Jews.²

From the synagog came the Christian liturgical practice of reading and interpreting the Scriptures. Jewish sources were responsible for some of the Christian customs.³ The intimate dependence of the early Jewish Christians upon the rite of circumcision is well known

from the controversy which Paul carried on against those zealots (Judaizers) who insisted upon having the Gentile Christians accept this Jewish inheritance as a necessary mark of their Christianity.

In summary, we have certain Christian practices which find a parallel in late Judaism. (1) The custom of table prayers. (2) The singing of psalms and hymns. (3) The Lord's Supper. A number of others have been deduced by various scholars.

Steinmann's judgment concerning Christianity's liturgical indebtedness to Judaism may have value: "Of this there can be no doubt: before Paul, invited thereto by Barnabas, transferred the scene of his activity from Tarsus to Antioch, whence he set out upon his first missionary journey, Christianity has almost an exclusively Jewish form. The Jew became and remained a Christian in order to be thereby a more perfect Jew. That was the conception prevalent in wide circles."⁴

After the conquest of the Eastern world by Alexander the Great, the influence of Greek culture proved irresistible to virtually every nation which came in contact with it, especially so since some of the successors of Alexander sought to Hellenize their lands by force. The Jews alone were able to resist this cultural imperialism effectively because they possessed the Scriptures of the Old Testament, whose essential message was regularly reviewed in their liturgy. The later Talmud has the significant admonition: "Go not near the Grecian wisdom — it has no fruits but only blossoms." This situation is comparable to the period of the Enlightenment in Europe during the 18th century, when the masses remained Christian largely because of the liturgy and the hymns which continued to be used and the rich catechetical instruction received by the children of the parishes in their schools.

Christianity could not ignore the contemporary Hellenism, especially after the Gentiles became the object of vigorous missionary endeavor. Just as the Jews who became Christians could not easily forget their background, so the Gentile Christians did not by their Baptism immediately forget their traditions. They retained many of their old thought-forms and their interest in their literary heritage.⁵

Early Christian art adopted some of the elements of pagan symbolism, philosophical Hellenism helped in the formulation and

defense of Christian doctrine, and the forms of pagan literature influenced Christian literature. However, we have no evidence, on the basis of the New Testament, that the Hellenistic mysteries had any influence upon primitive Christianity and its liturgy. It can be said that the primitive Christian liturgy has its essential roots only in the new life of faith of the early Christians.⁶

Scholars speak generally of a twofold form in early Christian liturgy: the service of the Word and the main service, later called the Anaphora, or the community of the table. Other designations were the Mass of the Catechumens and the Mass of the Faithful.⁷ St. Paul, in his condemnation of the abuses in Corinth, incidentally furnishes us with some information about the Christian liturgy in Gentile communities. The four parts are prayer, reading of Scripture, preaching, and the celebration of the Sacred Supper.⁸

Nielsen remarks: "A striking trait of the liturgy at Corinth is their dramatic way of celebrating the life and death of their Lord and Savior Jesus. The heavenly 'King of the universe,' appearing in the circle of His own people, to whom He is both priest and food, is an idea that is found magnificently developed in the later Christian Oriental liturgy. But the outlines of this idea can be found in the New Testament, especially in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. (Chaps. 10, 11, 14)."⁹

It is Kretzmann's conclusion¹⁰ that the liturgy remained essentially in balance until the end of the fourth century. "The services consisted in the transmission of the grace of God in Word and Sacrament to the congregation, which received these assurances of the mercy of God in and through Christ with prayers of supplication, praise, and thanksgiving. After the Council of Nicaea, however, the sacramental element receded more and more into a hazy background, while the sacrificial character of the liturgy became more and more prominent . . ."¹¹ It should be added that this is a lenient judgment of the situation.

II

THE MEDIEVAL DISTORTION

By the seventh century, at the time of Pope Gregory the Great, the Roman canon of the liturgy had changed radically. The former balance in the liturgy between Word and Sacrament was lost. The

instructional part was subordinated to the ceremonial, and the Lord's Supper became less a means of grace and more of a dramatic representation of the sufferings and death of our Lord. In later times it became the sacrifice of the priest. The congregational character of the liturgy was irrevocably changed; it became sacerdotal.¹²

There were contributory factors. Paul's emphasis upon decency and order in public worship was gradually interpreted as necessitating the establishment of legal ecclesiastical authorities, and the external needs of the Church during those early centuries powerfully supported the trend. The increasing emphasis upon the importance of bishops and the eventual metamorphosis of the ministers of the communion of saints into priests, who alone mediated God's grace to men, can be seen as the result of the dilution of the Gospel of the Apostles.

Beginning with the second century after Christ, the direction was toward the development of an increasingly elaborate liturgy.¹³ The concomitant, though gradual, change of emphasis upon, and the meaning of, the Lord's Supper, to the disadvantage of the sermon and other forms of doctrinal instruction, enhanced the importance of the clergy, so that instead of being brethren and ministers they became, eventually, lords of their flocks. By a gradual process of attrition the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers also lost its original importance, which at the same time appeared to reduce the need for an intensive theological instruction of the laity, a trend which became pronounced during the fourth century.

The relation of the Word, that is, the message of reconciliation of God and man in Christ, to the liturgy, that is, the form in which it is presented in public worship, is one of cause and effect. The result of a misinterpretation or neglect of the Word is reflected in due course by changing emphases in the liturgy. This can be illustrated by the medieval distortion of the cardinal doctrines of Scripture and the consequent changes in the liturgy.

The message of Jesus, repeated and amplified by His Apostles, contains the duality of Law and Gospel.¹⁴ The ethical demand of the Creator that the creature be as holy as He is, asserting the validity of only those ethical standards which are derived from God's nature and conduct, and demonstrating by incident¹⁵ and parable that the ethical demand is always total — this message Jesus at once

gave both immediate and transcendent meaning by His announcement of certain and final judgment upon each human life. A life on earth is therefore something unique, hence irreversible. It is like the stewardship of a talent of which the steward must render account at the end of his term of office. The Lord of Life will insist that the steward "should pay all his debt" (Matt. 18:34), for He is an emphatically strict Judge, who will hold the individual accountable for the "last penny" (Matt. 5:26).

While Jesus pictured God as retributive justice to those who changed and reduced the ethical content of the Law, so that it became manageable for them and they might claim divine recognition for its fulfillment on their terms, He presented another picture of God to those who recognized and acknowledged the totality of the ethical demand and despaired of ever meeting it. Far from being only an impartial and just Judge, God is genuinely concerned that guilty man should escape this absolutely rigorous judgment. Like the father of the Prodigal Son, He is able to forgive even the worst offense. The acceptance of this divine forgiveness for Christ's sake is the seed of a new and fruitful life, all of which — forgiveness, acceptance, and the new life — are gifts of God.

Both content and logical boundaries of Law and Gospel in this restricted sense changed rapidly — in some areas of Christendom — to the point of subverting the entire message. It is the estimate of Seeberg, based upon a detailed analysis of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers of the second century, that their understanding of the meaning of the sacrificial death of Jesus had begun to become obscured, and that they had introduced moralism as the ethical imperative.¹⁶

The original idea of "reward" bestowed upon the Christian, not for anything earned, but because God is "superabundantly gracious," at a relatively early date begins to appear as "merit," or pay, for good works performed. The thought of a contractual relationship becomes apparent. God as Lord may indeed in His sovereign freedom determine the conditions of the relationship between Himself and man. This He does in His revelation, which is therefore viewed as essentially law. If he fulfills this law, man may properly make his demand for payment. Practically another step is taken: the Christian community interprets the conditions of this contractual

relationship between God and man in terms of its own interests and capacity. As a result, Christianity gradually imitated in its own way the inclinations of other religions to reduce, manage, and compel in any manner possible the Deity which it proclaimed and worshiped as sovereign, unconditioned, and infinite.

The development reached its apex during the 13th and the 14th century. Although Duns Scotus and the nominalists asserted the sovereignty of God both as Creator and Redeemer, so that God was to be understood as Sovereign Will to the point that His activity flows from a sovereign caprice, the inherent contradiction of medieval theology which proclaimed a God both unconditioned and yet manageable by man was never overcome. The development of forms and degrees of value of ethical conduct, a work in which Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux pioneered,¹⁷ taught the medieval Christian to distinguish more sharply between the manifold motives which may comprise an intention and its primary motive, and the latter from the external action.¹⁸ The elaboration of law and evangelical counsels served only to promote the concept of ethical merits in the face of which God would be compelled to yield to the demand of the individual for recognition of his qualitative status.

Of course, the system depended upon the quality and quantity of merits God would be conceded rightfully to demand of the Christian. The idea of a "lesser righteousness corresponding to this life," suggested by Augustine,¹⁹ and especially the affirmation of egoism and eudaemonism as approved motives of conduct, permitted the development of a Christianity of personal inclination, convenience, and advantage. Spontaneous love and gratitude to God as the normal response of the Christian was indeed originally taught by Jesus and His Apostles, but the prudential mind of the Middle Ages thought this to be the desirable goal of the Christian hero.

According to Thomas Aquinas, sin begins at the point of transgressing the Natural Law, which even the heathen are able to observe.²⁰ From this neutral platform a stairway of good works leads to the very gates of perfection, and the faithful have the option of determining how high they wish to climb in this life. The degree of compulsion exerted upon God for a reward corresponded to the measure of the ascent on the stairway of merits.

To overcome the obvious contradictions of grace and merit, the

attempt was made to propose God as the source of all merit. An infusion of grace by means of the sacraments, so Thomas Aquinas taught, supplied the Christian with such supernatural equipment as to make his good deeds fit for an eternal reward.²¹ Indeed, he declared that no merit is possible without God's co-operation or the prior bestowal of power to acquire merit. But this view was not allowed to stand alone. Thomas Aquinas supplemented this with the statement: "In order to live righteously, a man needs a twofold help of God—first, a habitual gift whereby corrupted human nature is healed and after being healed is lifted up so as to work deeds meritorious of eternal life, which exceed the capacity of nature."²²

The attempt to enable man to manage God in some way was never renounced. For even though infused grace, conveying a habitual gift, was made the necessary basis for merits, man was nevertheless allowed to remain in the position of being able to demand payment of God for services presumably rendered.

This stupendous distortion of the Word was, and is, mirrored in the Roman Mass. Here God is visibly reduced to manageable proportions. The Mass does indeed emphasize the "immeasurable mercy of the Son of God, who allows Himself to be sacrificed daily upon a multitude of Christian altars,"²³ but at the same time it was felt to be necessary to boast about the awesome and magical power of the priest who "made God" (*conficere deum*) and disposed of Him. The priest can magically and at will change the "substance" of the bread and wine into the "substance" of the Son of God (although the "accidents" of form, taste, color, smell, remain), to be carried about, worshiped, and "reserved." Accordingly, the Roman Catholic Church becomes an actual shelter, or house, of God. And all this because the sacramentalistic theology of the Roman Church binds Christ both to the sacraments and to the priesthood, which is essential to their performance, for they become valid and living only when priests lend their magic for the purpose. In view of this, the following statement by one of the cardinals of the Roman Church is no exaggeration: "Where in heaven is such power as that of the Catholic priest? . . . One time only Mary brought the heavenly child into the world, but lo, the priest does this not once, but a hundred and a thousand times, as often as he celebrates

[the Mass]. . . . To the priest he transferred the right to dispose of his holy humanity, to them he gave, so to speak, power over his body. The Catholic priest is able . . . to make him present at the altar, to lock him up in the tabernacle and to take him out again in order to give him to the faithful for their nourishment . . . in all this, Christ, the only begotten Son of God the Father, is yielding to his [the priest's] will."²⁴

The medieval distortion of the picture of God clearly emerges. On the one hand, the age sought to glorify God to the uttermost. The awesome and incalculable power of a God who moved and was moved by nothing, who could freely dispose of His creation, was worshipfully admired. The songs of praise in the Mass, sacred drama, the stories of the saints, the phantasies of miracles, and the places of pilgrimage — all served to evoke an adoring mood. Indeed, it would appear that the greatness of God was praised in direct ratio to the incredibility of the miraculous. The other half of the religion of this age consisted of zealous efforts to obtain the necessary fund of merits for the acquisition of heaven through pilgrimages, confessions, indulgences, masses, endowments of the clergy, etc. The liturgical emphases of the period were a remarkably accurate reflection of its doctrinal concerns.

III

THE CORRECTION OF THE MEDIEVAL DISTORTION BY THE REFORMATION

But the question was never answered: How is it possible to manage this unconditioned Being by means of merits? How many are needed? And if the number needed were completed, how can the faithful be certain they will be qualitatively acceptable? Luther asked those questions. And although he attended Mass daily and also celebrated Mass according to his obligations as a priest, the Mass created no love for God or Christ in his heart. According to his own words, he positively hated God²⁵ and felt compelled to doubt the value of the Mass for himself.²⁶ Conscious of his heavy burden as a monk, he was in the habit of praying: "Lord Jesus, I pray Thee, Thou would'st accept this burdensome service in my order as payment for my sins."²⁷

Liturgy, specifically the Mass, had nothing to do with Luther's

apprehension of the problem which confronted him as a monk. The solution came to him when he studied Paul's Epistle to the Romans and learned what "righteousness of God" meant. At this point Luther broke through the magic circle of the Middle Ages which, beginning with the second century, had developed the dimensions of an apparently unbreachable wall. The basic assumption of all magic, whether it expresses itself in primitive incantations, ceremonial or liturgical observances, or theological suppositions, is that God can be subjected to human purposes, that He can be bargained with on implicitly equal terms, and that He can be compelled to give recognition to human statistics of merit. Luther, on the contrary, came to the point where he felt himself compelled and overcome by God, not by liturgy and the Mass, but by the Word and the message itself, which first he had to apprehend intellectually and which the Holy Ghost used to bestow a new spiritual life upon him. According to Luther's Large Catechism²⁸ the relation of the Word to any other aspect of the Christian faith is pre-eminent.

A. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE WORD

The Word alone expresses the character and the will of God and, according to Luther, determines the relationship between God and the Christian.²⁹ The mystical union between Christ and the believer refers to the harmony, or congruity, of the will of the Christian with the will of Christ or with the will of the Trinity.³⁰ Luther states that "God becomes God in me when according to the will (disposition — *affectum*) I am borne into God."³¹ But this new will and reason is also a work of the Holy Spirit.³² The mystical union between Christ and the believer is therefore, according to Luther, a theological mysticism.³³ The Christian gives expression to this theological congruity both through his body and his soul, as is shown in Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:9 ff.; Phil. 2:2-13, and other passages.

For Luther the meeting place where all issues of theology converge is not the Sacrament of the Altar, but the person and work of Jesus Christ.³⁴ His theology is not sacramentalistic, as some contemporary Luther theologians appear to think, but pre-eminently Christological. What we call the "Words of Institution," or "consecration," were for him *nothing more* than the mere proclamation of the Gospel.³⁵ The Sacraments are a salutary exhibition of the

Word about the person and work of Christ. Contempt for them is damnable, but not their lack. To reject the assertion that Luther's theology is sacramentalistic in character is by no means an exhibition of having failed to understand the Reformation.³⁶ A study of Luther's *Large Exposition of Galatians* will make this abundantly clear. Nor is it likely that the 16th and 17th century dogmatists of the Lutheran Church misunderstood Luther as badly as that. For them Christology and soteriology belong to the very heart of Lutheran theology, not the Lord's Supper.

L. Fendt describes how the introduction of the Reformation in the various territories and cities followed Luther's principle of the pre-eminence of the Word.³⁷ In the "Landesordnung des Herzogthums Preussen" (1525)³⁸ the following quotation designates the main part of all liturgical life: ". . . dasz vor allen Dingen das teure Wort Gottes, uns zu diesen Zeiten gnaediglich und reichlich von Gott verliehen, seinen Gang habe und Frucht bringe." How they viewed the relation of the Word to the liturgy is seen by the fact that the Word was proclaimed in German, while much of the liturgy of the Mass remained in Latin.

The *Renovatio ecclesiae Nordlingiacensis* of 1525³⁹ places the emphasis upon the Word, which was to be diligently expounded, and clearly conveys the intention of giving the instructional part of the service a greater importance than the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This view of the place of Communion is expressed by the following: "Kommunion und Gedachtnis des Herrenleidens halten wir zur Naehrung des Glaubens an die Erloesung und zur Mehrung der unverletzlichen Liebe under den Bruedern und zum Lobe der Herrlichkeit der goettlichen Gnade." The Church Order of Stralsund (1525)⁴⁰ echoes Luther's primitive Christianity: "Zwei Stuecke sind, darin ein Christentum besteht: dasz man Gottes Wort hoere und dem glaube, und seinen Naechsten liebe." The *Instruction of the Visitors* (1528) for the territory of Electoral Saxony emphasizes the instruction and cure of souls as the chief duty of the pastors. There is no sign that they depended upon the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to do the work which only the Word can do. In the 1538 edition of the *Instruction* under the section "Vom Sacrament des Leibes und Blutes des Herrn" the pedagogical emphasis remains as expressing the chief interest.⁴¹ However, this did not

mean that the Reformers neglected the emphasis upon the Lord's Supper. It was celebrated every Sunday, and the pastors were urged to labor diligently to prepare the people for their regular participation.

They thought Christians to be *beati possidentes* (blessed possessors) of all heavenly riches which belong to all in common. The Lord's Supper was only one of these treasures.

B. THE PRINCIPLE OF LIBERTY REGARDING THE FORM OF WORSHIP

Fendt comments upon the evangelical liturgical service that it indeed retained the familiar form of the Roman Catholic Mass, but that this form was preserved chiefly because it was a familiar artistic expression which the adherents of the Reformation could adapt for their own purposes.⁴² The constituent elements of the Mass were part of the furnishings with which they had lived, and they were careful to retain every usable item. But they determined their choices in the freedom of the Word and on the basis of suitability. Thus the Church Order of the city of Riga of 1530 reads: "As long as the true light of the Gospel shines and the Word of God prospers, Christians may use such ceremonies and external church service with a good conscience and truly to the glory of God and the benefit of the neighbor, just like any other thing in which there is freedom. But where the Light does not rightly shine, there nothing can be used rightly."⁴³ The Order adds (p. 15) that "the ceremonies are to serve us, not that we should again serve the ceremonies."

This spirit of freedom is entirely parallel with that of Luther. The ceremonies, the liturgy, were means to an end. The Reformation was willing "to retain the Mass," as Art. XXIV of the Augsburg Confession has it. But it did so in freedom. Furthermore, something of immense importance was added to the Mass by the Reformation: in the process of its reform the liturgy acquired a soul.⁴⁴

Luther's attitude of liberty toward liturgical form, but energetic insistence upon the primacy of the Word, was the inspiration for the liturgical expressions found in various territories of the Reformation.⁴⁵

In his *The German Mass and Order of Service* (1526) Luther writes:

In the first place, I want to make a request, in all kindness, and in God's name, too, that all who see this Order of Service or desire to adopt it shall not impose it as a law or cause anyone's conscience to be distressed or bound by it, but shall use it in Christian freedom as they may please, as, where, when, and as long as conditions warrant or call for it. For we do not publish this with the intent of correcting anyone or legislating for him. . . . Although the exercise of such freedom is a matter for everyone's conscience and no one should seek to forbid or limit it, yet *we must see to it that freedom is and shall ever be the servant of love and the neighbor*. And where men take offense or are led astray by the differences in usage we are bound, in truth, to forego our freedom and, as far as possible, to seek the improvement of the people and not cause offense by what we do or omit to do. Since this external order of service may serve the neighbor and there is nothing here affecting matters of conscience before God, we should seek to be of one mind in Christian love, as St. Paul teaches, and, so far as feasible, have like usages and ceremonies, even as all Christians have the one Baptism and the one Sacrament, nobody has received from God a special one of his own. . . . We do not introduce any Order for the sake of those who already are Christians. They do not need them, for one does not live for such things. But they live for our sake, who are not yet Christians, that they may make Christians out of us. Their worship is in the spirit. . . . For this is the damnable thing in the papal services, that they have been changed into laws, works and merits to the utter destruction of faith. Nor did they use them to educate the youth and the simple-minded, to drill them in the Scriptures and God's Word, but became so enmeshed in them as to regard them as themselves useful and necessary for salvation. The ancients did not institute nor order them with such intentions. . . . The chief and greatest aim of any Service is to preach and teach God's Word.⁴⁶

C. THE PRINCIPLE OF RESPONSIBILITY REGARDING USAGE

Till the very end of his life Luther remained loyal to the principle of liturgical freedom, but he consistently maintained that this freedom must be observed with a sense of responsibility toward God and the neighbor. At the dedication of the church of Torgau in 1544 his sermon reiterated the points that Christians have the liberty to determine the time, place, and manner of worshiping God. One thing only was needful: to know and to believe the Word.⁴⁷

With reference to this question Professor Caemmerer writes:⁴⁸

In one respect our twentieth-century problem is similar to Luther's. We are confronted, as our problem of evangelization of the world comes close home to us, with a vast number of people, a small minority of whom we imagine, for sure, to be Christians. But there is a great difference, which is of importance in the approach to the liturgical problem: the great mass is not liturgically habituated. Our problem is not one of retention of liturgical forms but of introducing them to the individual. Each new worshipper in our church is a liturgical problem. He has been, we trust, grounded in the elemental considerations of the faith. Shall he be launched into a complete worship technique? a traditionally complicated service? There is sense to that, Luther would say, if the newcomer has always known the technique and the service. Then, it would be a track for his wayward devotion. What would Luther say of a man without liturgical experience? That problem was not one of his.

Luther's emphasis upon the Christian's responsibility to use the Lord's Supper frequently in order to glorify God and to obtain His gifts and benefits is most plainly expressed in his *Vermahnung zum Sacrament des Leibes und Blutes unsers Herrn* (1530).⁴⁹ He wants to have it known that it is not his intention to give legal prescriptions as to definite times and days on which the Sacrament of the Altar is to be received.⁵⁰ God retains no one in His kingdom by compulsion. But it is certainly part of the function of the office of the ministry "to bring, tease, and draw" the people, so that they will come willingly and gladly to the Lord's Supper, indeed, "so that they will run to it, wrestle for it, and mightily insist upon it, as Christ says in Matt. 11:12: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." God has no use for satisfied, disgusted, and weary souls. He wants those who are hungry and thirsty, as He says, Matt. 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." It is the duty of the preachers to do their part that the Sacrament will not be neglected nor despised, and to help them Luther has written his *Admonition*.⁵¹

Neglect of the Lord's Supper plainly exhibits a lack of either Christian knowledge or faith or both. The preachers must take it

upon their consciences diligently to explain to the people that the Lord's Supper is God's gracious and fatherly institution. No one ought to be forced to believe, but everyone who wants to be a Christian is in conscience bound to learn the true content of his faith, so that he will be undeceived. The refusal to learn proves a person's contempt for God; "he that believeth not is condemned" (John 3:18). "It was neither a joke nor a vain design with God to have given and instituted this Sacrament for us. Therefore He will not have it despised or to be used lazily or not at all. Still less, that it should be esteemed a minor or unnecessary thing. Rather, it is His will that it be diligently used."⁵²

The Lord's Supper was instituted for the purpose of His commemoration: "This do in remembrance of Me." Thereby God placed His divine honor and worship into this Sacrament. "To remember Him" means nothing else than to hear, preach, praise, and honor with thanksgiving His grace and mercy. Therefore when we celebrate the Lord's Supper in His remembrance, we worship God according to His will and design.⁵³

Do this, and you confess with heart and mouth, with ears and eyes, with body and soul, that you neither can nor have given anything to God, but that you have taken everything from Him that you possess, especially eternal life and infinite righteousness in Christ. When you do this, you have rightly worshiped Him and with such a confession preserved His divine honor. . . . Ought not your heart tell you this, therefore: Very well, even if I would otherwise have no benefit from it, I will nonetheless attend the Lord's Supper to His praise and honor. I will do my best to help Him preserve His glory and honor. . . . If I cannot preach, I will hear, for the hearer also helps to thank and honor God. . . . If I am unable to hear, I will nonetheless be among the hearers, so that I will by this action, by the presence of my body and members, honor and praise God. And if for no other reason, I will receive the Sacrament precisely in order to confess and witness thereby that I am also one of those who wants to praise and thank God. . . . This reception [of the Sacrament] shall be my remembrance of Him, whereby I gratefully think of His grace which He shows me in Christ.⁵⁴

The Christian who worships God in the reception of the Sacrament pays Him a double honor: (1) by his obedient and willing

use of the Sacrament he honors God's command and institution, which unquestionably pleases God; (2) by its observance he offers God praise, worship, and thanksgiving, which is another way of confessing Christ before the world. To pay such honor and thanksgiving to God is the highest type of worship and the most glorious work: it is a thankoffering.⁵⁵ Part of this thankoffering of praise and thanksgiving is to teach, confess, and believe in the power and fruit of His Passion. That, and not mourning for the suffering and death of Christ, is the meaning of the memorial.⁵⁶

The benefits of receiving the Lord's Supper ought to be very powerful incentives of its frequent reception. The first benefit is that faith and love will be renewed and strengthened. Let no one underestimate this benefit, for without such periodic renewal and strengthening of our faith in Christ and love for Him it is unlikely that we shall be able to resist the designs of Satan. If the daily labor of enlarging our knowledge and exercising our faith in Christ is difficult, what may we expect to happen when we withdraw from the remembrance of His death, underestimate it, or even depise it?⁵⁷

The second benefit is the consequence of such a renewal and strengthening of faith. It is bound to overflow into all sorts of works of love. The Holy Ghost is present, and He knows very well how to produce worthy and desirable fruits in us. To neglect such a great benefit is nothing less than an open invitation to Satan to attack us when we are without the armor of God. The Sacrament is powerful and rich in grace. Its benefits will come to the Christian according to his faith.⁵⁸

The manner of using the Sacraments is twofold: *Opinione laudis et precis* — *auf Dankweise und Betweise*,⁵⁹ and the consequences of the neglect of the Lord's Supper are separation from God and His grace, love, and peace, and all the evils of this life.⁶⁰

How often should Holy Communion be celebrated? It was Luther's recommendation to the city of Nuernberg that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated every Sunday once or twice, in accordance with the number of communicants, and on week days in accordance with the need and desire of the Christians, whom the pastors will thus offer sufficient opportunities to partake of it. But there is to be no compulsion.⁶¹

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion can be drawn from this that Luther maintained the Scriptural principles of freedom and responsibility in balance. No one is to force a liturgy of the Lord's Supper upon a Christian congregation. Good order, good usage, and God's honor and praise are the considerations in the adoption of a liturgy. The liturgy is never an end in itself. It promotes God-pleasing worship. Its precise form is unimportant as long as the Word is afforded a free course.⁶²

There is to be no legislation regarding the Lord's Supper. By the Word, Christian hearts are to be instructed of its opportunities and benefits. Luther is sure that if the treasure of the Sacrament is properly understood by Christians, they will insist upon having it often. In his considerations of the relation of the Word to the liturgy and to the Sacrament, Luther consistently assigns a pre-eminent place to the Word. These three principles the Lutheran pastor of the mid-twentieth century should maintain also.

The doctrine of the local impanation of the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper has been urged in our circles. "Bethlehem is brought down today at the altar." "We ask our catechumens where God is. They reply: 'Where the Word is.' How true. But is He not in some special place? Yes, at the Altar, for Christ says: 'This is My body.'" "Then wrapped in Mary's arms, now wrapped in bread and wine."⁶³ This teaching is a direct violation of the Lutheran principle, so well stated by the *Wittenberg Concord* (1536): *extra usum . . . sentiunt non adesse corpus Christi*.⁶⁴ The Lutheran pastor does not "make Christ" on the altar when he celebrates the Lord's Supper. The Lutheran pastor is a prophet of the Word, pre-eminently. There is no magic at the altar by which God becomes physically manageable and disposable by a Lutheran or any other celebrant. Whether it is with design or not, such doctrine must lead us back to the Roman Catholic position which the Reformation has so rigorously rejected. An emphasis upon the paraphernalia of worship, utterly out of proportion to their importance, as though vestments and liturgy possessed magical powers, any depreciation of the Word which is preached, as though God's promise comes to us outside the preached Word in a more perfect manner, these constitute a distortion of the heritage which the Reformation

has bestowed upon us. If this trend remains unchecked and becomes virulent, there can be little doubt that we must expect the emergence of a full-fledged Romanizing party in our midst, comparable to the Anglo-Catholic faction, which today with might and main attempts to return the Anglican Church to the fatal embrace of Rome.

Bayside, New York

FOOTNOTES

1. This view is elaborated by Duchesne in his *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution*, and by Wendland in his *Die hellenistisch-römische Kultur*, 1912, p. 225.
2. The following examples will serve: Damascus, Acts 9:20; Antioch, Acts 13:14; Iconium, Acts 14:1; Philippi, Acts 16:13. According to Acts 17:2 he preached in the synagogues of Thessalonica on three Sabbath days, likewise in Berea, Acts 17:10; every Sabbath in Corinth, Acts 18:4; Ephesus, both at his first and later visits, Acts 18:19 and 19:8; that the early Christians were zealous in observing the Law is shown in Acts 21:20. The early Christians did not withdraw from the synagogue, but were rejected by those who refused to accept the Gospel.
3. Nielsen, *Gebet und Gottesdienst im Neuen Testament*; Engl. transl., *The Earliest Christian Liturgy*, St. Louis, 1941, p. 110.
4. Steinmann, *Biblische Studien*, VI (1908), 31.
5. E. g., Paul's instructions to Titus regarding the Cretans.
6. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 130 f.
7. P. E. Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, pp. 245—247.
8. According to Schermann, "Das 'Brotbrechen' im Urchristentum" in *Biblische Zeitschrift* (1910), the "breaking of the bread" does not necessarily refer to the Lord's Supper. The accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, we must note, have such expressions as "breaking bread" and "giving thanks." However, the institution of the Sacrament rests not on those expressions, and its occurrence is not to be identified with them, but rests upon our Lord's own words: "This is My body, this is My blood." The account of the incident in the life of St. Paul before the shipwreck at Malta reads: "Having spoken thus, he took bread and gave thanks to God before them all and broke it and began to eat; so all were cheered and themselves partook of food." Acts 27:35 f. Evidently the expression "breaking of bread" is equivalent to eating a meal. Similarly, in Acts 20:7, in the account of St. Paul's departure from Troas, the expression is best interpreted as meaning that they had a meal in common. With reference to Acts 2:42, 46 the Latin and Greek fathers interpreted the phrase "breaking of bread" not in a Eucharistic sense but as signifying the partaking of food in common. The same interpretation applies also to Luke 24:30 f. (Road to Emmaus).
9. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 395.
10. Kretzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 247.
11. Percy Dearmer, *The Church at Prayer and the World Outside*, pp. 60—90, 103—120, is in essential agreement with the above, and he states that "the position then reached seems to be almost ideal," a judgment which reflects his own liturgical orientation.
12. Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 45.

13. Discussions of this development can be found in Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice, Evangelical and Catholic*; and in F. D. Brightman, *Liturgies, Eastern and Western*.
14. The remainder of this section has been adapted from a chapter of the author's doctoral dissertation.
15. E. g., The rich young man.
16. Reinhold Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, transl. by Charles E. Hay, Philadelphia, 1905, Vol. I, p. 78 f.: "The death of Christ arouses and moves religious feeling, but it is not understood nor pursued to its consequences." Also: Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7 vols., transl. from 3d German ed., Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1905.
17. Karl Mueller, *Der Umschwung in der Lehre von der Busze waehrend des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Theologische Abhandlungen, Festschrift fuer Carl von Weizsaecker, Freiburg i. B., 1892.
18. *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by Anton C. Pegis, New York, 1945, Vol. II, p. 569 ff. (On the distinction of sin.)
19. Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsaezte zur Kirchengeschichte*, Tuebingen, 1928, Vol. III, pp. 87 and 108.
20. *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Pegis, p. 777; also p. 1039.
21. Pegis, *op. cit.*, II, p. 1038, Q. 114, "On Merit, Which Is the Effect of Co-operative Grace."
22. *Ibid.*, II, p. 993.
23. Holl, *op. cit.*, I, p. 6.
24. Quoted by W. Pauck, *The Heritage of the Reformation*, p. 161; also Holl, *op. cit.*, I, p. 6. Taken from Pastoral Letter of Cardinal Katschthaler, Archbishop of Salzburg (Feb. 2, 1905). Cf. Karl Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Pabsttums*, 4th ed. Tübingen, Mohr, 1924, p. 498 f.
25. St. L. Ed., V: 487.
26. St. L. ed., XII: 904.
27. St. L. ed., IX: 209.
28. *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 607, "Third Commandment."
29. St. L. ed., III: 1477: "God cannot be conceived of or thought of except through His Word." III: 782: "He who has God's Word is a young god." III: 1667: "We are to be bound to the Word of God, that we are to hear, and no one is to teach anything out of his own head without the Word of God." III: 1720: "God has given us no other means than His divine Word; therein alone does one hear Christ." V: 281 f.: "Let no one have the effrontery to deal with God without the Word or to build for himself a special road to heaven."
30. E. g.: St. L. ed., VIII: 421: "Christ, the true and living God, is in God and God in Him; beyond that He is also in us and we in Him." St. L. ed., VII: 2258: "Christ says: 'There is no more wrath in heaven if you are agreed with Me, for the Father has brought Me to you, and His will agrees with Mine.'"
31. WA, XIV, 607, 19: "deus fit mihi deus, quando secundum affectum in deum feror."
32. St. L. ed., XXII: 386: "After the Holy Ghost has worked in the resisting will, He causes that will to co-operate and to be in harmony with Him."
33. *thelo*—I will; *thelema*—an act of will; plur., wishes, desires; *to thelema ton theou*—the will of God, sometimes a will to be recognized, sometimes as a will to be obeyed; *theleisis*—willing, will.

34. It is for this reason that an examination of the more than 4,000 extant sermons of Luther will show relatively little emphasis upon the Sacraments. He certainly did not tie his sermons to the Sacrament of the Altar, even though he had many occasions to complain about lack of attendance at the Lord's Supper. "Sacramentalists" cannot claim him as their ally.
35. Brilioth, Yngve, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice, Evangelical and Catholic*, transl. by A. G. Hebert, SPCCK: London, 1930, p. 127: "There was an increasing tendency to speak of these words as the 'consecration.' Though Luther used this phrase in the *Deutsche Messe*, he regarded them rather as a proclamation of the Gospel. But in the Formula of Concord we meet what is in effect the Roman idea of words of consecration, which must be said over the elements. [?] In the seventeenth century the use of the sign of the cross over the elements was the regular practice throughout Germany. The sacring bell was used at the consecration right into the eighteenth century; and for a long time it was customary for the whole congregation to fall on their knees for the consecration. Reconsecration is ordered in many of the Church Orders if the quantity of bread or wine consecrated proved insufficient. In spite of the principle *extra usum nullum sacramentum*, pains were taken to secure that all the consecrated elements should be consumed."
36. This claim is made by Fred H. Lindemann, *Till He Come*, p. 7: "The theologian who does not recognize the Holy Sacrament as a meeting point on which all the issues of theology converge has failed to understand the history of the Church. He will never understand the Reformation." Cp. p. 11.
37. L. Fendt, *Der Lutherische Gottesdienst des 16. Jahrhunderts, Sein Werden und Wachsen*. Ernst Reinhardt, Muenchen, 1923, p. 132 ff. ED. NOTE: It must be borne in mind that Fendt is a convert from Romanism.
38. Schling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts*, IV, 32 ff.
39. Richter, *Ev. Kirchenordnungen*, I, 18 ff.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
41. Fendt, *op. cit.*, pp. 205—207.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
43. Schling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, Vol. V.
44. Fendt, *op. cit.*, p. 244: "Der Gottesdienst bekam eine Seele! Naemlich das Wort Gottes. Gott selbst redete! Er war gegenwaertig in seinem Worte. Da wurden freilich alle alten Formen gleich vor diesem Neuen: nur das Wort Gottes, ueberall das Wort Gottes galt und gab Glanz. Sogar im Abendmahl."
45. Smend, *Die evangelischen deutschen Messen bis zu Luthers Deutsche Messe*, p. 12 ff., refers to medieval expositions of the Mass which showed how Mass without Communion could serve to edification. In general, Smend does not appear to favor emphasis upon liturgical form.
46. Phil. ed., VI, 170f.
47. Fendt, *op. cit.*, p. 299.
48. Caemmerer, R. R., "On Liturgical Uniformity," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, 1938 (IX), p. 439.
49. St. Louis ed., X: 2170 ff.
50. *Ibid.*, 2174.
51. *Ibid.*, 2174—2175.
52. St. L. ed., X: 2177.
53. St. L. ed., X: 2178—2179.

54. *Ibid.*, 2181—2182.
 55. *St. L. ed.*, X: 2183—2184.
 56. *Ibid.*, 2188.
 57. *Ibid.*, 2197.
 58. *Ibid.*, 2198—2199.
 59. *Ibid.*, 2205.
 60. *Ibid.*, 2209.
 61. *St. L. ed.*, X: 2256—2261.

62. Enders, *Martin Luthers Briefwechsel*, Vol. XII, pp. 316 ff.

"As to the matter that worries you . . . this is my advise: If your lord, the Margrave and Elector, will allow the Gospel to be preached purely, clearly, and without admixture—and the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Blood of Jesus Christ to be administered and given, and will let the invocation of the saints fall away, so that they are not patrons, mediators, and intercessors, and the Sacrament be not carried about, and will let the daily Masses for the dead fall, and not have the water, salt, and herbs consecrated, and will sing pure responsories and songs in Latin or German during the march or procession; then in God's name, go along in the procession, and carry a silver or golden cross, and a cope or surplice of velvet, silk, or linen. And if one cope or surplice is not enough for your lord, the Elector put on three of them, as Aaron the high priest put on three, one over the other . . . and if his Electoral Grace is not satisfied with one circuit or procession, in which you go about and ring and sing, go around seven times, as Joshua and the Children of Israel went around Jericho shouting and blowing with trumpets. . . . For such matters, if free from abuses, take from and give to the Gospel nothing: only they must not be thought necessary to salvation, and the conscience dare not be bound to them. . . . And if the Pope would let these matters be free, and the Gospel be preached, and commanded me to hang my breeches about my neck, I'd do his pleasure."

63. v. Schenk, *The Presence*, p. 50 f.; 86; 53.

64. Quoted with approval in the Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl., VII, 15.