Lutheran Worship Reforms of the 1500s that We Can Still Use Today

The 16th century Reformation of the church, wherever it went, carried with it a wave of significant changes in the way God's people worshiped. The assignment given this essayist asks that he identify such changes and evaluate what they may mean for Lutheran worship today. Among worship reforms that came out of the 16th century Reformation we would note:

- The historic liturgy of the church was not abandoned but purified of error, setting the conservative reformation of Luther and the Lutheran reformers apart from the radical reformation of Carlstadt, Muentzer[1], and others.

- The entire service was scrutinized from the standpoint of the doctrine of justification, and that which conflicted with this cardinal doctrine of the Christian religion was deleted or altered.

- Active congregational participation in worship was promoted through the use of the vernacular.

- The divine service (liturgy) was viewed primarily as a work of God—God's service to his people—and only secondarily as a work of man. Thus the presentation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments became the principal thing in the service, and our praise and petitions secondary as the response of faith.

- The sermon was given a new prominence in the service.

- Frequency of communion was increased.[2]

- The role of music in worship was understood not first to evoke feeling and sentiment, but to accompany and reinforce the words of the text (the powerful Word of God).

- Hymns as catechesis played an important role in the spread and nurture of Lutheran faith and life. New hymns were written and multiplied.

- Hymns were viewed as first proclamation and only secondarily as our sacrifice to God (as was the reverse tendency in both Calvinism and Catholicism).

- Luther's insistence on excellence in the music of worship ushered in a whole new era of musicians and musicianship that produced the likes of Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), Heinrich Schuetz (1585-1672), Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707), and the incomparable Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750).

- A balance between freedom and love helped the 16th century Reformation steer a middle course between the extremes of legalism and license in their worship practices.

God give us the wisdom of the reformers today as we carry the standards of the 16th century Reformation into the 21st century.

The above list does not claim to be complete. Nor will a paper of this nature permit treatment of everything on the list, nor will it treat equally those areas it does treat. We will start with what must be regarded as the first principle, and in some respects the easiest to deal with because it is one on which we will all agree.

1. The principle of justification.

Of the multiple worship reforms introduced in the 16th century Reformation, none stands higher in importance. The principle of justification in worship, simply stated, is that nothing is to be admitted to our worship that conflicts in any way with the chief article of the Christian faith, namely, that we are justified freely by God's grace through faith without our works or merits. You will not go anywhere in confessional Lutheranism, in history or to the present day, and find argument with application of the principle of justification to worship. Everywhere that the Reformation went, this principle led the way.

Typical is the advice Luther sent to the church leaders in Lübeck, Germany, in early 1530 on how they should proceed with the reform of worship in their city.

> We …. both beg and urge you most earnestly not to deal first with changes in the ritual, which changes are dangerous, but to deal with them later. You should deal first with the center of our teaching and fix in the people's minds what they must know about our justification: that is, that it is an extrinsic righteousness—indeed it is Christ's—given to us through faith which comes by grace to those who are first terrified by the Law and who, struck by the consciousness of their sins, ardently seek redemption …. Adequate reform of ungodly rites will come of itself, however, as soon as the fundamentals of our teaching, having been successfully communicated, have taken root in devout hearts. These devout people will at once recognize what a great abomination and blasphemy that papistic idol is, namely, the Mass and the other abuses of the sacrament, so that it is not necessary to fish in front of the net, that is, first to tear down the ritual before the righteousness of faith in understood.[3]

Thus the canon of the Mass which turned sacrament into sacrifice and into a work that we do for God, instead of God's work for us in Christ, had to go. Prayers were altered, or substitutions made where alterations would not suffice, to uphold and advance the central truth of justification.

By the grace of God you will find no argument in confessional Lutheranism anywhere to this day, that I am aware of, with the insistence that the truth that we are justified by grace alone through faith be clearly and unambiguously presented in the divine service.

2. The principle of Christian freedom balanced by the principle of Christian love.

This one is not so easy. Luther and the 16th century Lutheran reformers did a remarkable job upholding Christian liberty in matters of worship while at the same time maintaining a measure of liturgical uniformity among the churches. How confessional Lutherans today are to handle Christian freedom in their approach to worship is the subject of discussion and dispute.

Early in the Reformation, Luther stated the seemingly contradictory dictum that was to become the theme of the young reform movement in dealing with matters of Christian freedom when he wrote in his *The Freedom of a Christian Man (1520):*

> A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
> A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.[4]

That is to say, to the reformers it was axiomatic that out of love for the brotherhood Christians will freely yield some of their individual freedoms in the interest of promoting the unity of the body of Christ. This was nothing but a paraphrasing of the biblical principle set down by the Apostle Paul: *"Everything is permissible"— but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"— but not everything is constructive* (1 Corinthians 6:23).

We will preface this discussion on Christian freedom by noting one limit the reformers set on how far they were prepared to go in yielding freedom. When *forced* to yield—even in matters that may otherwise be indifferent—the reformers felt they had no choice but to stand their ground lest the freedom of the gospel be impaired. Shortly after the death of Luther, when the armies of the Emperor Charles V overran Saxony and other Lutheran lands, and Charles attempted to require the Lutheran churches to reinstate certain Catholic liturgical forms and ceremonies, the confessional stance adopted by the Lutherans was that under that kind of duress, not an inch could be yielded without sin, even in indifferent matters, because it would compromise the truth of the gospel. The Lutheran Confessions acknowledge that, when under threat or coercion, it may be sin to yield even in the least.[5]

Actually, Luther himself was not fully comfortable with the term "indifferent." He wrote in a letter to Melanchthon on August 26, 1530, while he was at Coburg and Melanchthon was engaged in formulating the Augsburg Confession to be presented before the Emperor Charles V, "I am very much disturbed by this sacrilegious word *indifferens* (indifferent)." Luther did not mean to eliminate the category of *adiaphora* (things neither commanded nor forbidden by God) from worship, but to establish that everything we do in worship affects the brotherhood, and therefore is never purely an indifferent matter.

Luther's approach to balancing Christian freedom and Christian love in matters of worship is set forth clearly and concisely in his *A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians concerning the Public Worship and Concord (1525),* an approach he followed consistently throughout his career. The Reformation had come early (1521) to the Baltic city of Dorpat in Livonia. In 1524 a furrier from Swabia in southern Germany, Melchior Hoffmann, came to Dorpat convinced that he had the call to preach the gospel. Late in 1524 and in January 1525, Hoffmann's followers went on a rampage in Dorpat, destroying religious pictures and statues in the churches, claiming these were idolatrous, akin to the radical activity incited by Carlstadt in Wittenberg three years earlier.

Ulrich Leupold, in his introduction to Luther's *Exhortation to the Livonians* in the American Edition of Luther's Works, comments: "In this exhortation we see Luther applying the basic insights of his treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian* to the field of worship. He tries to show how the church may tread the narrow path of liberty without falling prey either to license or to legalism."[6] We will see how well he does in this.

Luther begins by observing:

> I have heard from reliable witnesses that faction and disunion have arisen among you, because some of your preachers do not teach and act in accord, but each follows his own sense and judgment. And I almost believe this; for we must remember that it will not be any better with us than it was with the Corinthians and other Christians at the time of St. Paul, when divisions and dissension arose among God's people.[7]

Luther does not see a solution to the problem of excessive individualism in worship in reverting back to a legalistic system that imposes rules and regulations from above. Christian freedom is at stake.

> In times gone by, councils were held for this purpose and all sorts of rulings and canons made in order to hold all the people to a common order. But in the end these rulings and canons became snares for the soul and pitfalls for the faith. So there is a great danger on either side. And we need good spiritual teachers who will know how to lead the people with wisdom and discretion.[8]

A middle way must be found between the two extremes of license on the one hand, that is, everyone doing their own thing in worship, and legalism on the other, thinking that we may bind consciences where God has not spoken.

> For those who devise and ordain universal customs and orders get so wrapped up in them that they make them into dictatorial laws opposed to the freedom of faith. But those who ordain and

> establish nothing only succeed in creating as many factions as there are heads, to the detriment of that Christian harmony and unity of which St. Paul and St. Peter so frequently write.[9]

Luther's approach was not to impose uniform worship forms by law and regulation, nor was it simply to do nothing, but to follow the tack of godly exhortation.

> Therefore, we will deal with factions in our time as St. Paul dealt with them in his. He could not check them by force. Nor did he want to compel them by means of commands. Rather, he entreated them with friendly exhortations, for people who will not give in willingly when exhorted will comply far less when commanded.[10]

Decisions on the outward forms of worship, in which we are free, ought not be based on personal preference and choice.

> Now even though external rites and orders—such as masses, singing, reading, baptizing—add nothing to salvation, yet it is unchristian to quarrel over such things and thereby to confuse the common people. We should consider the edification of the lay folk more important than our own ideas and opinions.[11]

To Luther, the solution lay in the direction of the free yielding of personal whims and opinions in favor of working through to a common consensus in worship.

> Therefore, I pray all of you, my dear sirs, let each one surrender his own opinion and get together in a friendly way and come to a common decision about these external matters, so that there will be one uniform practice throughout your district instead of disorder—one thing being done here and another there—lest the common people get confused and discouraged.[12]

The little phrase, "throughout your district," in the preceding quote is significant and came to be a concept widely adopted by the churches of the Reformation. We will come back to this at a later point.

The exercise of Christian freedom must always be within the framework of Christian love, even when one is technically "right" as far as the faith is concerned. We cannot stand on our rights without considering how exercising our rights affect those around us.

> For even though from the viewpoint of faith, the external orders are free and can without scruples be changed by anyone at any time, yet from the viewpoint of love, you are not free to use this liberty, but bound to consider the edification of the common people, as St. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 14, "All things should be done to edify," and 1 Corinthians 6, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful," and 1 Corinthians 8, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Think also of what he says there about those who have a knowledge of faith and of freedom, but who do not know how to use it; for they use it not for the edification of the people but for their own vainglory.[13]

Careful instruction must accompany any consensus in externals lest the people misconstrue the forms of worship they are given and come to cherish as binding law to be observed upon pain of loss of eternal life and salvation.

> But at the same time a preacher must watch and diligently instruct the people lest they take such uniform practices as divinely appointed and absolutely binding laws. He must explain that this is done for their own good so that the unity of Christian people may also find expression in externals which in themselves are irrelevant. Since the ceremonies or rites are not needed for the conscience or for salvation and yet are useful and necessary to govern the people externally, one must not enforce or have them accepted for any other reason except to maintain peace and unity between men.[14]

Holding on too long to any particular set of external forms can create the aura of their having been "divinely appointed and absolutely binding laws," as Luther perceptively saw and cautioned against at the time of the Reformation. Changing too frequently and too abruptly can unsettle and confuse.

Some see the former as having happened with our beloved *The Lutheran Hymnal,* the hymnal this writer grew up with, memorized, loved, and worked with the first half of his ministry. *The Lutheran Hymnal* was published in 1941 and not replaced in WELS circles until the publication of *Christian Worship* in 1993. Historically, wisdom has been found in producing a new hymnal per each generation. The Wisconsin Synod produced its first English hymnal in 1911, Missouri in 1912. The Wisconsin Synod added a book of hymns in 1916. Thus for both Wisconsin and Missouri about 30 years passed, one generation, before their hymnals were replaced by *The Lutheran Hymnal.* We applaud the work of our synod's worship commission in putting out the *Supplement to Christian Worship* and helping already to get us thinking about new forms in which the timeless gospel and ageless liturgy of the church may be presented.

3. *Gemein(d)e* in Formula of Concord, Art. X.

Matthew Harrison has noted in several places[15] that the 1917 Concordia Triglotta, the three-language (Latin, German, English) book of our Lutheran Confessions, updated the German *Gemeine* to *Gemeinde* in Article X of the Formula of Concord. This has given the impression that the Formula authorizes each congregation to determine its own worship forms independent of the larger church. FC, Thorough Declaration, Art. X, para. 9, in the Triglotta reads:

> Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that the *congregation of God* of every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, the good right, power, and authority [in matters truly adiaphora] to change, to diminish, and to increase them, without thoughtlessness and offense, in an orderly and becoming way, as at any time it may be regarded most profitable, most beneficial, and best for [preserving] good order, [maintaining] Christian discipline, [and for ευταξια worthy of the profession of the Gospel], and the edification of the church. [emphasis mine][16]

This may be compared with the English translation of the same article in Tappert:

> We further believe, teach, and confess that the *community of God* in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church [emphasis mine].[17]

The Triglotta has the revised *Gemeinde Gottes* ("congregation of God") where Tappert (and Kolb) have the original *Gemeine Gottes* ("community of God"). Harrison points out that while the German *Gemeine* may mean a local congregation, it also may mean a larger entity such as the congregations in a certain municipality, region, or district. And, in point of fact, that wider meaning of *Gemeine* agrees perfectly with Luther's directives through the 1520's that each principality or district should work for liturgical unity for the sake of love and for the true unity of the church. There is no question but that *Gemeine* is the correct meaning here.

It does not appear to this writer that the editors of the Triglotta would have intentionally meant to give the local congregation excessive autonomy in worship matters, but that this was simply a substituting of a more current word *(Gemeinde)* for an archaic one *(Gemeine)*, and the implications of where this change would fall out did not register with them.

The upshot of all this is not that the word change determines for us how free, or limited, a local congregation is to determine its path of worship, but to set the matter straight, as far as our Confessions are concerned, that FC X does not make the individual congregation free to worship as it pleases, nor can

it be used to counter what we confess in the *Augustana* and provide a Lutheran congregation with the option of becoming non-liturgical as that word is commonly understood.[18]

The Lutheran church orders ("agendae" = "things that must be done") of the 16th century freely mandated liturgical directives that in some cases ran to several pages length. Typical was the Wittenberg Church Order of 1533 that gives detailed rubrics ("printed set of rules or regulations") on what the preacher was to preach on in the early service, on festivals, in the main service, at Sunday vespers, on weekdays. After the sermon in the early service the catechism was to be recited. The pastor was to preach through the Gospel of Matthew in the Wednesday morning service and the Gospel of John in the Saturday evening service. The details of how each service was to be conducted are specified. Eves of major festivals were to be observed. There was to be no partying on the four days of Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday of holy week.[19]

Some latitude was given to the pastor in worship ceremonies and forms in the Wittenberg Order.

> In all of this it shall be understood that such communion, hymns, lections, and preaching are under the responsibility of the pastor, and may be increased or reduced according to the circumstances of the day. For such ceremonies should not be necessary laws, but stand under the authority of the pastor, to deal therein as it serves best.[20]

But the limits of pastoral latitude are also clearly stated in the order where pastors are called to "maintain the Christian ceremonies in unity and uniformity …. in those previous to the mass, and in the mass itself …., also in all festivals …., as much as is possible."[21]

It is not as if the Lutheran reformers were unaware of the contradictory impulses of the exercise of Christian freedom and the desire for a measure of uniformity in worship, and that we today have been the first to discover this tension. But somehow, by the grace of God, they managed to steer a middle course through the potentially explosive and disruptive issues that surround Christian freedom in worship, a minefield that confessional Lutheranism is treading gingerly in our times.

4. The role of music.

Luther's keen interest in and love for music caught on in the movement that bears his name, and played an important role in the spread of the Reformation. In his preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae Iucundae* we find these oft-quoted words of Luther: "Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. For whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, or to appease those full of hate—what more effective means could you find than music? The Holy Ghost himself honors her as an instrument for his proper work when in his Holy Scriptures he asserts, that through her, his gifts were instilled in the prophets."[22]

Although Luther was not as competent a musician as Ulrich Zwingli (Zwingli sang, played the lute, harp, viol, flute, clarinet, and horn), Luther's insight into music in its many forms as God's gift led him accordingly to give it a place in worship that was denied the followers of Zwingli and John Calvin. The Reformed Churches that grew out of the reform movements of Zwingli and Calvin severely restricted the use of organs and instruments in worship, and permitted only the metricized versions of Psalms for congregational hymns. John Calvin had a theological problem with the use of instruments in the church because he associated this practice with the Old Testament cultus of the Temple which was fulfilled with the coming of Christ.[23] Both Zwingli and his co-humanist Erasmus rejected the new polyphony for use in the church while Luther and the Lutheran Reformation embraced it. [24] Conservatives in the Catholic Church also came within a hair's breadth of getting the Council of Trent to reject the use of polyphony in the church. [25]

Despite the radical action that Luther took on the canon of the mass, which he felt compelled to do to uphold the principle of justification, he was not a hack who approached matters musical and liturgical in worship wielding an unthinking ax. He was a capable and knowledgeable musician who communicated

and carried on correspondence with the leading composers of his day, both in the Lutheran and Catholic camps. Roland Bainton says of Luther's preface to his work on the German mass, done in collaboration with Johann Walther: "[Luther] gathered into a single passage all of his praises of music together with the most apt description ever penned of the Netherlandish polyphonic choral."[26] Robin Leaver, perhaps the most knowledgeable and respected writer on Luther and music today, sums up a chapter on "Luther as Musician" with the words:

> Earlier twentieth-century writers on Luther's musicianship tended to classify him as an enthusiastic amateur, a dilettante who pursued music as a hobby. But more recent scholarship suggests that such discussions of Luther's musicianship in terms of amateurism and professionalism are anachronistic, a reading back of later concerns into the period of the Renaissance-Reformation, resulting more in the nature of a caricature rather than a characterization.[27]

Johann Walther, court musician to Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, and an important contributor to the music of the Reformation, wrote of his relationship with Luther: "I spent many a pleasant hour singing with him and often found that he seemingly could not weary of singing or even get enough of it; in addition he was always able to discuss music eloquently.[28]

Luther had several points of contact and carried on a mutually-respected correspondence with the Bavarian court composer Ludwig Senfl. He showed an early awareness of the importance of the polyphony of Josquin des Prez (1450-1521) before that Flemish Renaissance composer came into widespread prominence in the 1530s, and made a significant contribution to Josquin's reputation.

Michael Praetorius, who began the shift of musical supremacy from Renaissance Italy to Reformation Germany, was the son of a Lutheran pastor who had studied under Luther at Wittenberg. The Luther-connection in Praetorius is unmistakable. The seven generations of the musical Bach family that included more than fifty musicians, culminating in Johann Sebastian Back, are a direct legacy of Luther and the Reformation.

5. Hymns and hymn-singing.

This writer grew up in a simpler era when the Lutheran Church was widely known as "the singing church." And, in point of fact, the church in which I was raised, Hope Lutheran Church of Detroit, Michigan, was a singing church. The men sang. In my grandfather's church, First German Lutheran in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, they still had a men's chorus in my growing up years.

That was then. This is now. Today, in a day when it is culturally challenging in America to get any boy to sing beyond the age of puberty when he sits beside his dad in church who in many cases does not sing either, many congregations struggle with congregational song. This has spawned a plethora of experimental worship forms in Lutheranism in an attempt to inspire or foster a hearty congregational participation in worship and song.

The vigor and strength of congregational song is no less important today than it was at the time of the Reformation. Iron strengthens iron. When the church gathers, believers strengthen each other with the strength of their confessional song. Those who gather for a worship that is tepid and lukewarm at best, go away damaged imperceptibly in the strength of their convictions. Visitors to services are encouraged by a church that is alive and strong in its confessional song to return a second time to learn what is the source of the confessional strength.

The reputation of our Lutheran church as "the singing church" is not of recent vintage, but goes back to the early days of the Reformation. One Jesuit bemoaned the fact that "the hymns of Luther killed more souls than his sermons."[29] A 16th century Roman Catholic publisher who tried to offset the influence of Lutheran hymns by publishing his own less than popular Catholic hymnbooks, lamented the pervasiveness of Lutheran hymnody in Reformation Germany.

> How these slanderous, abusive, and shameless little ditties have been spread everywhere in so few years, how they have become so familiar and very well known, how there have come to be nearly as many of them as there are people in these lands, it is not easy for me to say, nor for one who has not experienced it to believe or imagine.[30]

Johann Gerhard, in his preface to Mauritius Moltzer's 1619 *Christlich Gesangbuch* ("Christian Songbook") noted:

> [Luther] gathered the principal and most necessary points of doctrine and comfort in beautiful German psalms and hymns, so that the simple too might make continual use of them—as has manifestly (praise God) come to pass, and no one can truthfully deny.[31]

Hymns and hymn-singing, not just in church, but at home and as the hummed tunes of the people as they went about their daily activities, were a powerful instrument in the spread of Reformation doctrine.

In recent times challenges have arisen to this traditional idyllic picture of the Reformation sweeping across Europe on the wave of inspired song. Based largely on his reading of the church visitation records of 16th and 17th century Lutheran parishes, Gerald Strauss, in his 1978 book, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation,* questions whether all the hymns and catechetical teaching had made a mark at all on the general populace of Germany, and created anything that even remotely resembled a Lutheran culture.

> The evidence of the visitations speaks for itself; no comments are needed. Lutheranism had not succeeded in making an impact on the population at large. Early hopes for a renewal of religious and moral life in society were not fulfilled. Experiments in mass indoctrination were stillborn or turned out not to work. The Gospel had not been implanted in the hearts and minds of men. An attitude of utter indifference prevailed toward the established religion, its teachings, its sacraments, and its ministers.[32]

Also basing his conclusions largely on the church visitations, Joseph Herl argues in his 2004 book, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism,* that hymns and hymn-singing played a minimal role in the spread of the Reformation, and that worship in Lutheran churches, remained largely the domain of the trained choirs. Christian congregations, Herl says, sang very little until the rise of Pietism 250 years after the Reformation.

> … the visitation records show us that around the end of the sixteenth century …. that—despite the differences in detail and the incomplete and inconsistent evidence—there was not yet any conception among Lutherans that the liturgy proper belonged to the people; rather, the people were expected to sing because the practice, as the edict from Hohenlohe noted, was "useful" in teaching the faith and because the entire congregation was needed to take the choir's role when there was no choir." [33]

What are the church visitation records? The idea of the visitation of churches arose early in the Reformation. Late in October 1525 (October 31) Luther wrote a letter to Elector John imploring that an inspection (visitation) be done both of the parishes and temporal institutions of his territories. Although at first Luther had been cool to the idea of a state-governed visitation, the deplorable conditions he found in the churches led him to accept it as the lesser evil. "Churches are everywhere in a state of dereliction," Luther wrote. No one pays for their upkeep or fulfills his obligations, and "the common man pays so little attention and respect to preachers and pastors that unless your Electoral Grace will agree to undertake a great housecleaning …. God's Word and divine service will soon have vanished from the earth."[34]

The practice of church visitation continued, in some instances, into the 19th century, and provides us with a wealth of materials on congregational faith and life in the early days of the Lutheran church. The clergy here at our conference are familiar with the Saxon Visitation Articles of 1592 that are included in the Concordia Triglotta (pp. 1150-1157), though they are not formally a part of the Book of Concord and our

Lutheran confessions since they postdate the completion of the Confessions.[35] In addition to the Saxon Visitation Articles, there is a vast store of visitation reports from 16th and 17th century Germany, many of which are as yet unexplored.[36]

Much of modern scholarship has followed Strauss' lead in concluding that the Lutheran Reformation betrayed its own original promise to the laity and failed "to create a new kind of devout Christian among the popular masses."[37]

At the same time, this revisionist history that calls into question the success of the Reformation has spurred a number of excellent studies in rebuttal that confessional Lutherans will want to familiarize themselves with. James Kittleson has written two articles about the Reformation in Strassbourg in southern Germany, in which he demonstrates a widespread understanding of the Lutheran faith among the common people, and directly challenges Strauss' conclusions for Lutheran Germany as a whole.[38] Stephen Ozment, in his book *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution,* questions whether visitation records actually can tell us that much about personal faith, and so calls Strauss' whole methodology into question.[39]

I bring you into this scholarly debate as a thinly disguised excuse to introduce you to a wonderful little book on what it was like when Lutheran faith and life (culture) took over in a community in 16th century Germany. The book, which some of the pastors may be familiar with, is Christopher Boyd Brown's *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation,* a study of the Reformation in Joachimsthal in Bavaria.[40]

Joachimsthal was founded in 1516, so its most famous pastor, Johann Mathesius (1504-65), who studied theology under Martin Luther, liked to quip that "Joachimsthal had sprung up along with the Lutheran gospel." The silver mines discovered in Joachimsthal made this a prosperous center that gave its name to the German *thaler* (English="dollar"). Brown shows how deeply Reformation faith worked its way into the hearts and lives of the people of Joachimsthal, due, in large part, to the pervasive presence and power of Lutheran hymns in church and home. A conservative estimate is that "more than two million hymnals, songsheets, and other hymn-related materials circulated in sixteenth century Germany."[41]

So resilient was the faith of the people of Joachimsthal that when the Counter -Reformation grew increasingly aggressive during the Thirty Years War (1618-48) and the Lutheran clergy and teachers were removed from Joachimsthal and replaced by Catholic priests, and the Latin school, the town's pride and joy, was shut down, the sturdy Lutheran faith went underground and persisted in private piety and devotional life in the home, particularly in music and Lutheran hymns, for a generation until the beleaguered people finally emigrated from Joachimsthal to Lutheran Saxony.

This in direct answer to Strauss' contention that the visitation records prove that no definable Lutheran faith and culture ever took shape in Germany, and also partly to answer Herl's argument that the role of Lutheran hymns and popular hymn-singing in the spread of the Reformation is overstated and a somewhat romanticized notion not in agreement with the facts.

The success of the gospel in Joachimsthal is largely the story of the conjunction of two remarkable luminaries in Joachimsthal in the middle third of the sixteenth century, Johann Mathesius (1504-64), first as school rector and then pastor, and Nicolaus Herman (c. 1500-61), cantor of the church and school. Both Mathesius and Herman were evangelical and genial in their personality and outlook, and prodigious in their output. They stood shoulder to shoulder, in an age of harsh discipline, in their pedagogical approach to the students of Joachimsthal's schools which were at the center of the success of the reforms. Herman stressed that "good discipline" was not the product of beatings, but of proper diligence on the part of the teacher. The goal of the teacher is "to attract and excite" his students to learning so that the rod was unnecessary. Mathesius forbade Joachimsthal's teachers from overtaxing their students with excessively long or numerous lessons, and instead they endeavored to introduce variety into the curriculum.[42]

Both were living embodiments of the spirit of Luther whose passion for music led him to opine that "no one should be allowed to become a pastor or teacher if he could not sing."[43] Herman wrote over 200 hymns, many of which were published in his two immensely popular hymnbooks.[44] Mathesius was no slacker himself with fifty-six catalogued works, including 1500 published sermons and an important early biography of Luther.[45] Against a broad array of critics—including not only Karlstadt and the Swiss reformers, but also conservative Roman Catholics—Mathesius ably defended the use of instrumental music and polyphony in the church.

Herman came to Joachimsthal as a schoolteacher around 1520, shortly after the founding of the town. He early embraced Luther's reforms and, as cantor, introduced Lutheran music into the services and into the curricula of the Latin school and the girls' school. But he was frustrated by the succession of radical reformers and conservative Catholics who came and went as pastors of the church and rectors of the school in the 1520s and opposed his work. At one point Herman even wrote Luther wondering if the case was hopeless and he should just go elsewhere. Luther encouraged him to stay.

But then in 1532 Herman was joined in Joachimsthal by Mathesius, a staunch fellow Luther supporter and graduate of Wittenberg, who first served as rector of the Latin school, and then after two years' further theological study at Wittenberg as preacher in 1542, and finally senior pastor from 1545 to his death. The two formed an exceptional bond and worked together as one with common mind and purpose. Mathesius gave his full support to Herman's approach to introduce the Reformation through the use of music and hymns, and personally wrote a number of hymns himself.

By the middle of the sixteenth century Joachimsthal was renowned in Lutheran Germany not only for its loyalty to the faith, but for its music. Music pervaded every area of life in the town. The miners sang their songs in part harmony. When the Joachimsthalers called Mathesius back to the mining town as a preacher, the Joachimsthal delegation sang part songs at Luther's table to satisfy the reformer's curiosity over what sort of musicians Joachimsthal produced.[46] The participation of women in music was widespread. Mathesius mentions lutenists, lyre players, and singers among them, sometimes with cautions against impropriety. He used his sermons to raise up Miriam as the preeminent example of a woman who put her musical gifts to good use.[47] The town council enthusiastically supported music in the schools and in the public life of Joachimsthal, and was particularly proud of their school and its music.

Many of the town's prominent families followed the advice of Mathesius and encouraged their sons to be trained as church musicians. Joachimsthal produced organists, organ builders, composers, and hymn-writers in addition to Herman, and supplied many of the neighboring towns with their organists. Isaak Hassler (c. 1530-1519), the father of Han Leo Hassler, was born and educated in Joachismthal's schools before moving to Nürnberg in 1554.

The schools were the center of the musical life of the town, the German schoolgirls' choir joining the Latin boys' choir in singing in the church services. Mathesius likened the Joachimsthal schoolmistress' leading of the schoolgirls in singing to the role of Miriam's leading the Israelite women in singing and dancing.[48] Though the schoolgirls' choir was more limited in their activities than the Latin school boys' choir, the girls took the Lutheran hymns back to their homes "where the women of Joachimsthal preserved Lutheranism and its music for a generation after the preachers and choristers had fallen silent"[49]

The boys of the Latin school provided the core of the Sunday and weekday services in church, and led the parishioners in their worship. But the musical activities of Joachimthal's schoolchildren were not limited to church and school, but were prominently on display at public events and festivals of the town. They not only sang, but as Herman tells us, they engaged in regular public prayer for the welfare of the city, mines, and school.[50] Twice a week the students would go singing through the streets of the town — not that they had to sing for alms as Luther, Herman, and Mathesius had done in their school days; the Joachimsthalers were proud that they supported their students — but in order to collect money for charitable work to help the poor.

Perhaps the most important activity of the students was the participation of the school choir in funerals. The body of the deceased was carried from the parish church on the one end of town to the Spitalkirche next to the graveyard on the other, accompanied by the school choir "singing the old German and Latin hymns," as Mathesius tells us.[51] So important did this activity become that the school choir's participation was denied to those who died estranged from the church or in impenitence for some public sin. When a weaver died in 1596, who had shunned the church for years, but repented before his death, twelve choirboys — as a sign of reconciliation — accompanied his remains to the grave. This practice was severely tested in the year 1568 when 900 townspeople died of plague. The town council passed a special resolution that those who died even under those trying circumstances should not be denied the school choir's accompanying them to the grave.

If anyone would still deny the totality of the transformation of Joachimthal's culture from top to bottom by the coming of the Lutheran gospel, and the central role that music and Lutheran hymns played in that transformation, let him go then to the tragic aftermath of the story of Joachimsthal when the Counter-Reformation strengthened in the early 17th century. When the Joachimsthalers could no longer worship in their church, it was particularly the women of Joachimsthal whose great-great-grandmothers had learned their faith from the hymns of Herman and the teaching of Mathesius who through their piety and devotion in the home successfully resisted every attempt to force them back into the Catholic camp.

Although Joachimsthal had always been under Catholic imperial jurisdiction, assurances of religious tolerance had been given as recently as 1609 to guarantee the Joachimthalers freedom to practice their Lutheran faith.[52] But these promises were broken or forgotten under growing Hapsburg domination. After the last Lutheran pastor was banished from Joachimsthal in 1624, Catholic priests were sent in to convert the people back to Catholicism. The first, Dr. Georg Landherr, conducted his first (and last) mass on September 9, 1624, when he was driven out of church under a hail of pebbles by the schoolboys. An inquiry was held and the three adult men deemed responsible for instigating the incident were banished into exile. A woman, the wife of the sexton, was also implicated, but not prosecuted.

The Catholic officials charged with reintroducing Catholicism into Joachimsthal recognized where the strength of the faith lay. The school was shut down in 1625, and the keys to the town library confiscated and given to the Roman Catholic priest to limit access to reading Lutheran literature. Statutes were enacted against "holding secret conventicles, reading, and preaching."[53] Evidences of Joachimsthal's proud Lutheran history were suppressed: in 1628 Mathesius' tombstone was removed from the church. In 1629, the order was given that all books privately owned were to be handed over to the Jesuits for inspection. But at this the Lutherans stood their ground and refused.

In 1629, Dr. Franciscus Albanus, came to Joachimsthal. If ever anyone appeared to be equipped to convert German Lutherans, it was he. Trained in Rome at the *Collegium Germanicum,* one of the foremost schools of the Counter-Reformation where Jesuits trained men for missionary work in Germany, Albanus was considered to be a shining light with his theological erudition and musical training. Upon arrival in Joachimsthal, Albanus instituted draconian measures: No one was to be baptized, married, or buried in Joachimsthal unless they had declared themselves to be Catholic. Alternatively, he tried to woo the people to church by allowing singing of hymns that had been "expurgated" of error. But the people resisted both the carrot and the stick.

The spectacular failure of all these efforts is underscored by the fact that by 1636, there were only three declared Catholics in the town, and by 1650 the Roman Catholics had only nine converts to their credit. Only when in 1652, the Jesuits arrived in Joachimsthal in strength with threats of more severe punishment for those who did not convert, did the Joachimsthalers emigrate *en masse* to Saxony, where Elector John Georg gave them a home. This was not the faith of the intellectual elite that was speaking here, but the faith of the common, ordinary folk, embedded in their piety and devotion, and, above all, in the hymns in their hearts, which shows how deeply the faith had struck to the very roots of the culture. An interesting footnote to this story is that the unwavering faith of the people made such a mark on Albanus that on July

8, 1635, he preached his last sermon in Joachimsthal, in which he publicly announced his conversion to Lutheranism, just prior to his leaving for Wittenberg.

Joachimsthal was not perfect, as Brown's book indicates, but the message is clear that the Lutheran gospel was at work here transforming a culture thoroughly inside out, and that it was the music and hymnody of the Lutheran Reformation that played the single largest role.

6. Hymns as catechesis.

This is a subhead to the previous section, but important enough to be given its own space. Robin Leaver has written a great book, *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications,*[54] which, along with Brown's *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation,* also begs reading by every Lutheran pastor and musician.

One most noticeable feature of the hymns that shaped and sustained the faith of the Joachimsthalers is that the hymn contents were highly objective in nature. They presented and etched in people's hearts — in the way a good tune can do — the objective truths of our faith, law and gospel, our sin, and what God has done to save us in Christ. Herman notes in a little limerick the value he saw in music helping words stick in the memory:

> For Music has the special grace
> That whatso in her power is placed
> Is sooner learned than what is read
> Or that in church or school is said.
> Like a schoolmistress sweet and kind,
> She calls her lessons back to mind,
> And what she teaches, without pain,
> Is e'er remembered and retained.[55]

The churches of the Reformation used hymns *catechetically,* as a teaching tool for instructing, informing, and reinforcing biblical truth in the heart. To be sure, the reformers recognized that the hymns conveyed *Lehr und Trost* (teaching and comfort), but the comfort came not from exploring our inner feelings and emotions, but in appropriating to ourselves the blessed objective truths of our redemption in Christ.

Brown comments, "Given the mnemonic properties of the hymns, it is probable—despite the priorities of modern scholars—the lasting impression that German youth took away from catechetical training owed more to Luther's hymns than to the pastor's catechism sermons.[56] Brown quotes Cornelius Becker in his preface to his *Psalter Davids Gesangweis:*

> It is certain and true that from these hymns, many thousands have rightly learned the Catechism, and especially the article concerning the justification of the poor sinner before God, concerning which many would otherwise have been ignorant, since they can neither write nor read.[57]

The Sunday afternoon 1:00 p.m. service observed in many of the churches was catechetical (instructional) in nature. Church orders prescribed that the hymn appropriate to the part of the Catechism being preached on should be sung at the afternoon Catechism service. So much were the hymns of the Reformation viewed as objective statements of biblical truth that it gave rise to the phenomenon of *Liedpredigten* ("hymn-based sermons"). Luther's hymns might be heard from the pulpit as the text for the sermon itself. Cyriacus Spangenberg published four volumes of sermons on all of Luther's hymns under the title *Cithara Lutheri.*[58] But sermons based on the hymns were widespread. Mathesius himself in the publication of his sermons included hymns of his own, Herman, or Luther that echoed the substance of the sermon or, especially in the case of Luther's hymns, provided the basis for the exposition.

But a detailed look at all Leaver has to say about Luther's theological understanding of music and the catechetical use of hymns and how this played into making us what we are as confessional Lutherans today will have to wait another essay and essayist, but it promises a fruitful study.

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[1] Although Muentzer was a part of the radical reformation, the liturgies he produced (early on) were remarkably conservative.
[2] Reed, Luther, *The Lutheran Liturgy,* p. 80.
[3] Luther's Works, Am. Ed. 49:263, quoted in Leaver, Robin, *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (2007)*,* p. 175.
[4] LW31,344.
[5] Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article X, "Of Church Rites," Affirmativa para. 1 (*Concordia Triglotta, p. 829).*
[6] LW53,43.
[7] LW53:45.
[8] LW53,46.
[9] LW53,46.
[10] LW53,46.
[11] LW53,47.
[12] LW53,47.
[13] LW53,47-48.
[14] LW53,48.
[15] Harrison, Matthew, "Martin Chemnitz and FC X" in *Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart*, pp. 79ff. Also, Harrison, Matthew, "Lutheran Liturgical Uniformity in Relation to Church Polity in the Augustana and the Formula," pp. 13-4; and Harrison, Matthew. "Liturgical Uniformity and Church Polity in the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Formula of Concord:* the *Church Orders* as Hermeneutical Key," p. 8.
[16] Triglotta, p. 1055.
[17] Tappert, Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Art. X, para. 9.
[18] Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV, "Of the Mass," para. 1, in Concordia Triglotta, p. 65. Cf. also the many statements to this point in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Ap. XV,1,20,21,38,51, and Ap. XXIV,1.
[19] in Harrison, Matthew, *Lutheran Liturgical Uniformity in Relation to Church Polity in the Augustana and the Formula,* pp. 1-3.
[20] ibid., p. 5
[21] ibid. p. 5.
[22] LW53,323.
[23] Leaver, p. 92, quotes Calvin in his commentary on Psalm 92:4. "… the Levites who were appointed … singers … employ their instruments of music—not as if this were in itself necessary, only it was useful as an elementary aid to the people of God in these ancient times… Now that Christ has appeared … it were only to bury the light of the Gospel, should we introduce the shadows of a departed dispensation."
[24] Brown, Christopher Boyd, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation,* p. 59.
[25] ibid.
[26] Bainton, Roland, *Here I Stand,* p. 342.
[27] Leaver, p. 63.
[28] Quoted in Bainton, p. 342.
[29] Contzen, Adam (1620), quoted in Bainton, p. 346, and Brown, p. 1.
[30] Brown, p. 23.
[31] Cited in Brown, p. 1. Cf also Gerhard's remark in the same place, "The glorious, salutary, and useful practice of exercising oneself with German psalms and pious songs, and spreading the praise of God, had completely collapsed, until (as aforesaid) it was reestablished in the church of God by the faithful service of the sainted Luther," quoted in Brown, p. 207.
[32] This quote is from Strauss' *Success and Failure in the German Reformation* in "Past and Present 67 (1975): 30-63. But Strauss arrives at the same conclusion in his later book, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (1978): "This plaintive litany could continue almost indefinitely. But surely the cumulation of evidence has made its point. A century of Protestantism had brought about little or no change in the common religious conscience and in the ways in which ordinary men and women conducted their lives. Given people's nebulous grasp of the substance of their faith, no meaningful distinction could have existed between Protestants and Catholics—a distinction arising from articulated belief, conscious attachment, and self-perception" (p. 299.)
[33] Herl, Joseph, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism: Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict,* p. 86. Herl argues from the church visitation records that there never was a strong push, even by Luther, to give the

people a large role in the congregation's worship, that Luther felt this was better left to the choir, and that the congregation was only given occasional hymns that they could sing. The "worship wars" in early Lutheranism that Herl refers to in the title of his book were allegedly between the largely choir-led services inherited from the medieval church and the idea of congregation-led worship, which in Herl's opinion did not really take hold in Lutheranism until Pietism two centuries after the Reformation.

[34] LW49,135, quoted in Strauss, Gerald, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation,* p. 250.

[35] Bente, Friedrich, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (1921), p. 192.*

[36] A major publication project is underway in Germany, gathering the church visitation records of the 16th and 17th centuries. The first of ten planned volumes has been published, on the visitations in Hesse, under the title *Repertorium der Kirchenvisitationsakten aus dem 16. und 17. Jahrhundert in Archiven der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Volume 1, Hessen* by Ernst Walter Zeeden; Peter Thaddäus Lang; Christa Reinhardt; Helga Schrabel-Schüle. Herl, to his credit, spent a whole year in Germany reading the visitation records. Both Strauss and Herl argue that Reformation scholarship to this time has depended too much on the formal *Agendae,* or church orders, that specified how worship was to be conducted in Lutheran churches, and have created from these *Agendae* the prevailing picture of what Lutheran worship was like in the early days, while they (Strauss and others), through the study of the visitation records, are able to tell us not what was supposed to be done in worship, but what actually happened. Leaver and Brown counter that Strauss and his followers depend too much on an uncritical reading of the visitation reports.

[37] Scribner, Robert, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Revolution,* (1994), p. 249. See Brown, pp. 1-5. for a survey of recent scholarly opinions on the popular failure of the Lutheran Reformation.

[38] Kittleson, James, *Successes and Failures in the German Reformation: the Report from Strassbourg (1982),* and *Visitations and Popular Culture: Further Reports from Srassbourg (1985).*

[39] Ozment, Steven, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution (1992).*

[40] Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, England, 2005. Brown is a graduate of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, who did his doctoral work at Harvard University, and has produced just a fascinating study of the Reformation in Joachimsthal.

[41] Brown, p. 5.

[42] Brown, pp. 65-68.

[43] Brown, p. 80,

[44] Herman, Nicolaus, *Sonntags-Evangelia,* published in 1560, and *Historien von de Sindflut,* published in 1562, the years after Herman's death.

[45] Brown, p. 151.

[46] Brown, p. 49

[47] Brown, p. 47.

[48] Brown, p. 65.

[49] Brown, p. 58.

[50] Brown, p. 71.

[51] Brown, p. 73.

[52] Brown, p. 131. The Bohemian estates had extracted promises of religious freedom from Emperor Rudolph II.

[53] Brown, p. 139.

[54] Leaver, a British national, is internationally recognized as a hymnologist, musicologist, liturgical expert, Bach scholar, and Reformation specialist. He has authored numerous books and articles in the cross-disciplinary areas of liturgy, church music, theology, and hymnology. A primary area of his research is Lutheran church music. He has taught at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, Westminster Choir College, Princeton, Drew University, Madison, the Juilliard School, Yale, and Queen's University, Belfast. Leaver once studied under Martin Franzmann at Luther House in Cambridge University. Leaver's book, *Luther on Justification*, was published by CPH in 1975.

[55] Herman, Nicolaus, *Sonntags-Evangelia,* p. 238, quoted in Brown, p. 65.

[56] Brown, p. 11.

[57] quoted in Brown, p. 208.

[58] Brown, p. 11.

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Prepared for the Pastor Teacher Delegate Conference WELS
Meeting at Abiding Word, Houston, Texas
January 21-22, 2010