

## Table of Contents

SHAPING CONFSSIONAL LUTHERANISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY:  
 THE IMPACT OF THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION ON MISSION, WORSHIP, AND WORLDVIEW  
 BY WERNER KLÄN..... 2

HERMENEUTICS IN THE INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL  
 BY ROLAND ZIEGLER ..... 12

THE IMPACT OF THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION ON WORSHIP  
 BY ANDREW PFEIFFER..... 25

RESPONSE TO ANDREW PFEIFFER: THE IMPACT OF THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION  
 ON WORSHIP – GERMAN PERSPECTIVE  
 BY ARMIN WENZ..... 36

THE LUTHERAN IMPACT ON MISSION  
 BY BERHANU OFGAA ..... 40

SHAPING CONFSSIONAL LUTHERAN WORLDVIEW IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
 BY MAKITO MASAKI..... 46

THE ACT OF MAKING A KNOWLEDGEABLE CONFESSION: A RESPONSE TO MAKITO MASAKI  
 BY LAWRENCE RAST..... 54

CLOSING REMARKS  
 BY AL COLLVER..... 59

**BOOK REVIEW: *BRAND LUTHER: 1517, PRINTING, AND THE MAKING OF THE REFORMATION***  
 BY ADAM KOONTZ ..... 61

**BOOK REVIEW: *PAULINE HERMENEUTICS: EXPLORING THE “POWER OF THE GOSPEL.”***  
 BY JOHN G. NORDLING..... 63

**BOOK REVIEW: *THE ENDURING AUTHORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES***  
 BY JOHN T. PLESS ..... 65

**BOOK REVIEW: *THE JOURNAL ARTICLES OF HERMANN SASSE***  
 BY JOHN T. PLESS ..... 67

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# RESPONSE TO ANDREW PFEIFFER: THE IMPACT OF THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION ON WORSHIP— THE GERMAN PERSPECTIVE

by Armin Wenz

**I**N HIS LECTURE ON GENESIS, Luther says that all reformation is in vain unless doctrine is purified first. Only if the church has certainty concerning the true God-given doctrine will she be ready for the reformation of her order and her liturgical life according to God's word.<sup>1</sup> This is how the reformer comments on the passage in Genesis 35 where God commands Jacob to go to Bethel in order to build an altar for him. Jacob responds by admonishing the members of his household to throw away their idols, to purify themselves, and to put on new clothes. Thus, it is the divine command and institution of the true worship that causes Jacob, in Luther's words, to reform doctrine first and then the liturgy or church order. The reformation of doctrine consists in the unaltered passing on of the divine command. The reformation of the liturgy consists in repentance from idolatry and the concrete implementation of the divine command in

<sup>1</sup> "Alle Reformation oder Besserung, so vorgenommen werden mag, ist vergeblich, wo nicht erst die Lehre gereinigt wird. Denn siehe an die Thorheit des Pabstes und aller nachfolgenden Concilien, welche zu allererst etliche äußerliche Ceremonien verordnen, als, daß sie den Priestern gebieten, lange Kleider zu tragen, ihre sieben Zeiten und Messe fleißig zu lesen, verbieten ihnen, zu spielen und Hurerei zu treiben. Dasselbe heißen sie eine Reformation der Kirche. . . . Denn die Bischöfe und Cardinäle sind grobe ungeschickte Leute, die keine Gedanken haben auf das Wort und auf die Lehre, verstehen es auch nicht und fragen gar nichts darnach. . . . Derhalben soll man sich vor allen Dingen befließen, daß wir die rechte und gewisse Lehre von Gott haben mögen. Da mag man dann eine rechte Reformation und Kirchenordnung anrichten;" (Johann Georg Walch, *Luther's Works, Volume 2*, II, 910). See also 914–15: "Das ist nun eine schöne Reformation, da man erstlich die Lehre reformirt und reinigt; darnach werden auch die Sünden ausgefegt . . . Zuletzt geschieht auch eine Ermahnung, daß sich das Volk und die Priester im Tempel fein ehrlich kleiden sollen.;" Also: "Die aber die äußeren Zeremonien verachten, "zeigen damit an, daß sie nichts glauben und daß sie Gott und seine Kirche verachten"

liturgical practice and prayer.<sup>2</sup>

This brings us to a specific understanding of the relationship between the *lex credendi* and the *lex orandi*. In the preface of the Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche (SELK) agenda, we read: "According to an early church principle, the order of prayer determines the order of doctrine (*lex supplicandi statuat legem credendi*) and vice versa. Everything in this agenda claims to be in accordance with the church's confession. Therefore, it is mandatory for the divine service of the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Armin Wenz, "Die Begründung des Kirchenrechts (lex orandi und lex credendi)," *Lutherische Beiträge* 13 (2008): 176, "So kommentiert D. Martin Luther in seiner Genesisvorlesung eine Stelle, in der davon berichtet wird, wie Gott dem Erzvater Jakob befiehlt, nach Bethel zu ziehen, um dort einen Altar für ihn zu bauen (Gen 35). Jakob antwortet auf diesen Befehl, indem er die Seinen dazu aufruft, die fremden Götter abzulegen, sich zu reinigen und die Kleider zu wechseln. Es ist also die göttliche Einsetzung des Gottesdienstes, die Jakob, in Luthers Worten, dazu bewegt, zuerst die Lehre und dann auch die Ordnung zu reformieren. Die Reformation der Lehre besteht aus der unverkürzten Weitergabe des göttlichen Befehls. Die Reformation des Gottesdienstes besteht aus der Umkehr von Abgötterei und aus der Umsetzung des göttlichen Befehls ins Tun und Beten. Beides vollzieht Jakob vorbildlich als bischöflicher Visitator der ihm anvertrauten Seelen."

<sup>3</sup> "Nach altkirchlichem Grundsatz bestimmt die Ordnung des Betens auch die Ordnung der Lehre: 'lex supplicandi statuat legem credendi' – und das gilt umgekehrt genauso. Alles in dieser Agende will dem Bekenntnis der Kirche gemäß sein. Darum ist sie auch verbindlich für den Gottesdienst der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche." See Hermann Sasse, "Liturgie und Bekenntnis," *Lutherische Blätter* 11, no. 62 (1959): 93, "Die Liturgie bestimmt die Lehre nur, wenn die Lehre die Liturgie bestimmt." For an English translation of this essay see Hermann Sasse, *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters—Volume II (1941-1976)* trans. Matthew C. Harrison, et al. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 301. See Leif Norrgård, "Liturgische Theologie," in *Ich will hintreten zum Altar Gottes: Festschrift für Propst em. Hans-Heinrich Salzmann*, ed. Johannes Junker and Michael Salzmann (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 2003), 139–54.

The catechisms are useful tools to teach that doctrinal and liturgical formulations are intertwined; the Scriptures effect what they promise in the confession of the Church gathered in worship.

Andrew Pfeiffer has shown how this principle is applied in the Lutheran Reformation when the whole liturgical and catechetical life of the church, that is, both doctrine and worship, is bound to and founded upon Christ's institutions. These institutions comprise both commandments and promises and thus they aim at both the church's obedience in relation to Christ as her head and the believers' trust in Christ as their Savior and Shepherd. Thus the Lutheran Reformation presupposes not a dichotomy, but an indissoluble unity of doctrine and worship, theology and liturgy, as indispensable aspects of the very essence of the church. The fundamental dichotomy in reformation theology is not the modern distinction between theory and practice, but the biblical distinction between true and false doctrine, true and false worship.

This is also in accordance with the Augsburg Confession, which expounds the doctrine of justification as not only including the Trinitarian, anthropological, and christological foundation of this chief article of faith, but also as including the liturgical execution or distribution of justification which, according to AC V, takes place in the proclamation of the gospel and in the administration of the sacraments through the divinely ordained office of the ministry. The church's confession of justification thus takes the form of such a concept of faith and worship that is inseparably connected to specific liturgical forms.<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Scheidhauer, with his groundbreaking work on the *ius liturgicum*, has shown that the Lutheran Confessions put forth not only doctrinal principles<sup>5</sup> (*dogmatische Lehrprinzipien*), but also complementary liturgical principles and orders (*liturgische Gestalt- und Ordnungsprinzipien*) that echo the doctrinal principles. For the office of the ministry is the divinely ordained form without which justification cannot be realized and experienced.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Scheidhauer, *Das Recht der Liturgie: Zum Liturgie- und Rechtsbegriff des evangelischen ius liturgicum*, THEOS 49 (Hamburg: Francke-Verlag, 2001), 93, "in der Form eines liturgie- und damit gestaltgebundenen Glaubens- und Gottesdienstbegriffs."

<sup>5</sup> See Scheidhauer, *Recht*, 92–94.

<sup>6</sup> Scheidhauer, *Recht*, 81, Denn das Predigtamt ist "die von Gott

Doctrinal and liturgical formation are thus inseparably intertwined. This is the reason why the reformers not only scrutinize their opponents' doctrine of justification, but also include the liturgical practice and church order into their criticism. Justification is applied as a critical norm of all doctrine and practice of the church only in connection with and as biblical exposition of the Trinitarian and christological dogma of the church catholic, and at the same time in connection with the very implementation of the divine institutions in the liturgy of the church. Thus when Heinrich Bornkamm says that the Augsburg Confession does not establish a church that is teaching according to the Scriptures, but that the Confession testifies to the very existence of such a church,<sup>7</sup> this includes the aspect that the Confession does not constitute a

new way of celebrating the liturgy, but testifies to the existence of a church that is living her liturgical life according to the Scriptures. The way the Confessions discuss liturgical aspects, therefore, is more descriptive than prescriptive. Thus the partners and opponents in dialogue are enabled to compare the way they worship with the worship life in the parishes of the Reformation.

Problems and conflicts necessarily arise whenever doctrine or worship is detached from the divine institutions found in the

Holy Scriptures and from the criteriological event of justification. This happens whenever doctrine or worship is designed in order to meet human purposes that are foreign to the Scriptures and go beyond the question of how the holy God and the sinful human being can have fellowship with each other. The approach taken by the Lutheran Confessions in these conflicts relates to human traditions or inventions not inimically, but critically. The criteria for discerning between good and false tradition is the question of whether a theological notion or liturgical practice serves the divine institutions or whether it

eingesetzte Vermittlungsform, ohne die Rechtfertigung nicht mitgeteilt werden kann."

<sup>7</sup> See Heinrich Bornkamm, *Das Jahrhundert der Reformation. Gestalten und Kräfte*, 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1966), 220, "Die Confessio Augustana konstituiert nicht eine schriftgemäß lehrende Kirche, sondern bezeugt ihr Vorhandensein."

The fundamental dichotomy in reformation theology is not the modern distinction between theory and practice, but the biblical distinction between true and false doctrine, true and false worship.

darkens, harms, or even destroys the divine institutions and thus takes away the very certainty of salvation.

I agree with Dr. Pfeiffer and want to stress the point that Luther's catechisms are to be considered as an excellent paradigm for the unity of worship and doctrine. This unity has two aspects and implications: It is established by focusing on what is divinely instituted over against all human additions, substitutes, and distortions, while at the same time expounding the totality of the church's worship life, including the divine worship in which God serves and keeps his church, and the daily worship in which God serves and sustains the world. Luther, in his catechisms, does not only display the fundamental elements of the divine liturgy in the respective words of institution, but also the fundamental elements of the divine orders of the three estates or the two kingdoms.

With the focus on the remission of sins, the doctrine of justification is the center of the catechism and, thus, of both doctrine and liturgy. Thus, the remission of sins, which takes place for the sake of Christ and his atoning sacrifice, and which is distributed through the means of grace and received by faith, is what distinguishes the church from any other institution on earth, while at the same time establishing a specific connection to these institutions or vocations. It is the sins committed in this life and world that are forgiven in the church.

Undoubtedly one very important impact of worship life shaped by the Lutheran Reformation is the liberation from any moralistic, pedagogic, or idealistic utopias. This pertains even to the hermeneutics of the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures do not display a theoretical mindset that is to be turned into real life by their interpreters. Rather, in the very setting of the divine worship they prove themselves to be effective and self-interpreting. It is the risen Christ who rules his church through the proclamation of the Scriptures and who gives the church's hermeneutic and preaching a specific structure not only by fulfilling the law and the promises in his proclamation and work of salvation, but also by focusing the whole biblical narrative on the institutions he commands to create faith and, thereby, his church. Thus, we do not only find Christ in the promises, figures, and shadows of the Old Testament;

we also find prefigured there baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper. And when Sunday after Sunday the preachers portray Christ (GAL 3:1) and his gifts before the eyes of their hearers, they do so by filling in the outlines with the colors and images of the whole biblical narrative.

At the same time, if it is true that the Christians' and the church's deeds of mercy grow and flow forth from the reception of the forgiveness of sins, and especially from the Lord, who himself serves us in a holy feast at his table, there is no reason not to celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday. Gert Kelter, in a wonderful essay on the Lutheran understanding of divine worship that was first presented in the context of the ecumenical talks that took place between representatives of SELK and the Roman Catholic Church in Germany (2008–2013), points

out that the divine service in all its elements, including the reading of the Scriptures, baptism, the proclamation of absolution, the Lord's Supper, and the pastoral office, is about the presence of Christ in the midst of his people.<sup>8</sup> If this is true, if the divine service is nothing but the advent and coming of the Shepherd to his flock, the Groom to his bride, the Head to his body, there is no reason whatsoever not to give, enjoy, and administer Christ's presence in the instituted and commanded fullness of his gifts, including his very body and blood. I refer here

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to Kenneth Wieting's excellent book, *The Blessings of Weekly Communion*.<sup>9</sup> Thus I want to underscore Andrew Pfeiffer's comment on the question of how long one should wait to adjust the liturgical lives of our parishes to biblical and confessional principles. "Be careful of radical innovation even when it is a return to a better liturgical or pastoral practice. Teach, teach, teach. But at some point the liturgical change may need to be made for the sake of the best delivery and reception of God's gifts for hungry souls."<sup>10</sup> This is true not only for the question of weekly communion, but also for the topic of regaining an

<sup>8</sup> Gert Kelter, "Christ's Presence in Worship According to the Understanding of the Confessional Lutheran Church," *Lutheran Theological Review* 25 (2013): 22–37.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Wieting, *The Blessing of Weekly Communion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Pfeiffer, "The Impact of the Lutheran Reformation on Worship."

appropriate practice of confession and absolution, which takes seriously the specific gift of an individual distribution of the forgiveness of sins that at the same time must not be liturgically questioned by making forgiveness conditional. I here refer to the important research and practical conclusions elaborated by Gottfried Martens on the controversies concerning confession and absolution during the Reformation.<sup>11</sup>

Our churches, congregations, and the mindsets of many parishioners and pastors very often are not only shaped by the principles of the Reformation but also by later changes that have crept into the Lutheran church not only from rationalism but also, and probably even more so, from Pietism. The critical work of Valentin Ernst Löscher can serve as a paradigm here. Löscher laid open that the semi-pelagian tendencies in Pietism. Its striving for perfectionism and its distaste for forensic justification go hand in hand with the downgrading, and often even contempt, both of the office of the ministry and of the sacraments.<sup>12</sup> This, of course, necessarily brings about decisive aberrations from the Lutheran Reformation in the fields of biblical hermeneutics, ecclesiology, eschatology, and also in the methods and means applied in pastoral care and in preaching.

Pietistic notions often are effective in the way many in Lutheran churches deal with so-called contemporary worship elements or modern hymns. The problem with modern hymns and worship elements, at least in my observation, is not so much that they are modern, but that many of them have rhythms and tunes which might be singable for bands and choirs, but not for a cross-generational and cross-cultural congregation, and more importantly, many of them have their origin in theologies and mindsets that very often are not only not Lutheran but, even worse, are pelagian and enthusiastic in nature. In this context, then, it is also no surprise that some observers in Germany recently have deplored the spreading of a preaching style that is not determined to confront the hearer with the divine law and the divine gospel. Instead

the preacher, like a psychotherapist, here tries to enable the hearer to be reconciled with his own weaknesses and strengths and thus uses the gospel as a source of empowerment for one's personal self-fulfillment. This is nothing but another version of the enthusiastic and pelagian drive for self-perfection.

According to the Lutheran Reformation, the task of the sermon and the liturgy is to prepare the way of the Lord who comes to his lost and redeemed disciples. At the same time, the task of the liturgy and of the church's worship life is to prepare the communion of saints to meet their risen Lord and Savior and to receive his divine gifts in baptism, in the sermon, in the words of absolution, and in the sacrament of the altar. These gifts alone have the power to create and shape our faith, love, and hope according to God's biblical word. These gifts alone have the power to justify, to sanctify, and finally to consummate the believers and the church catholic. These gifts alone, taken as gifts that are to be received by faith, are the key to a sound interpretation of the Bible and the source of certainty concerning our salvation in God's eternal judgment.

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<sup>11</sup> Gottfried Martens, "Ein uberaus grosser unterschied": Der Kampf des Andreas Osiander gegen die Praxis der allgemeinen Absolution in Nürnberg," in *Festhalten am Bekenntnis der Hoffnung: Festgabe für Professor Dr. Reinhard Slenczka zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Christian Herrmann and Eberhard Hahn (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 2001), 145–64.

<sup>12</sup> See Paul T. McCain, "A Pious Response to Pietism: Valentin Löscher and the Timotheus Verinus," in *Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart*, ed. Paul T. McCain and John R. Stephenson (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 169–90.