

9-1-1948

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Recommended Citation

Buzin, Walter E. (1948) "The Integration of the Lutheran Service of Worship," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 19, Article 58.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol19/iss1/58>

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The Integration of the Lutheran Service of Worship*

WALTER E. BUSZIN

Among the many activities and developments which engage the attention of the Lutheran Church today the liturgical are by no means the most insignificant. Liturgical principles and practices, policies and activities, have been a matter of great concern to the Lutheran Church throughout the four centuries of her existence, and the various modes and procedures adopted within the Church in dealing with these problems often portray to us most vividly why we at times refer to the Bride of Christ as the Church Militant. It is quite likely that the Church always will be confronted and at times even be troubled by liturgical problems and activities; the very nature of the Church, the very nature of her work and of the types of people she must deal with, fairly force us to this conclusion. After all, the militant character of the Church is not only a clear indication of the natural depravity and sinfulness of her members, but also a living symbol of her insistence upon due regard for the inviolability of the Word of God and the eternal salvation of the immortal human soul.

We realize, of course, that our troubles are caused largely by liturgical extremists, be they High-Churchmen or Low-Churchmen. We know not only how much easier, but also how much more consistent it is to "shoot out" to extremes than to follow the so-called golden middle path. The extremist is rarely cautious, farsighted, considerate, compatible, and circumspect; he plunges headlong into the sea of his personal convictions and preferences, he inflicts upon the *Una Sancta* and upon his own congregation his pet indulgences and excesses, and he very often becomes quite proud, opinionated, and non-co-operative in his dealings with simple Christian folk, with church musicians, with members of the clergy, and with others who seek to serve the Lord with gladness. The extremist will look either too much to the

* The original draft of this paper was read to the Pastoral Conference of Greater St. Louis on March 29, 1948. It is published by request.

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right or to the left, to the front or to the back, or he will not cast his glances in any direction, thinking only of the present and caring not about the past and future.

There are some within the pale of the Christian Church who go so far as to say that doctrine is of little moment, that the preaching of the Word is of little avail, and that both, doctrine and preaching, interfere with worship, contemplation, and adoration. All we need do, they claim, is conduct purely liturgical services and administer the Sacraments, notably the Eucharist. Doctrine, they claim, too easily injects the polemic element into the service and, hence, disturbs the spirit and atmosphere of worship; the sermon, so they say, too easily inflicts the personality of the preacher upon those who would derive more benefit from a purely objective service of worship in which the opinions and interpretations, the reproofing and the reprimanding of the clergy, are bound to be only a disturbing factor.

On the other hand, there are also those who insist that all that matters is the sermon; attending Holy Communion four times a year is quite sufficient and an indication of sobriety. They insist that the nature and character of the music and hymns used in the service of worship is quite immaterial as long as the texts are doctrinally pure and correct; anything is satisfactory church music to them as long as the text is sacred. There is also much agitation in some circles for a general adoption of the highly subjective, sentimental, revivalistic, and informal type of service with gospel hymns and the revivalistic type of sermon. The Lutheran tradition and the Lutheran heritage mean nothing to some; they go their own way liturgically and insist upon their rights to do so. "We are interested in saving souls," they say quite warmly and, undoubtedly, in a spirit of utter sincerity. There are some in the Lutheran Church today whose philosophy of worship has a very pronounced Roman Catholic bias, others are impressed by almost everything that is Anglican, and there are still others whose attitude in much that pertains to liturgy and worship is outright Calvinistic and Reformed; finally, there are likewise those who believe, from a liturgical (really non-liturgical) point of view, that the salvation of the Lutheran Church in America lies in the adoption of the Moody and Sankey type of worship.

While some of the thinking done along liturgical lines is hopelessly confused and scattered, the liturgical thinking done by others is deeply anchored and securely bound. Some are very much at home in liturgical history; some live too much in the past, are impressed by almost anything that has happened in the past, and not a few try too hard to fit the past into the present or, vice versa, the present into the past. Some too often fail to distinguish between heterogeneous European and American backgrounds, and some have had so much contact with Roman Catholics and with Anglicans, or have worked so much with Roman Catholic or Anglican literature and music that their philosophy of worship has definitely become very Roman Catholic or Anglican in character. Some have worked a great deal with the literature and liturgies of the East and have exposed themselves to much mysticism, and the results are in keeping with their preoccupation. On the other hand, there are those who wish to ignore history and tradition altogether, whose thinking along liturgical and musical lines has been perverted and effeminized by the effusive and saccharine tastes and products of decadent 19th-century Anglican and Reformed Victorianism. Many of these in particular are afflicted with an acute case of catholophobia.

It has been said that our present generation has no historical sense; the statement is true and may be applied to the clergy, to educators, to church musicians, and to the laity. There are no fields in which the truthfulness of this fact is more clearly recognized than in the fields of theology, liturgics, hymnology, and church music, all of which are so closely interrelated that it is often hard to divorce one from the other. This comes out very forcibly in the attitude many within our own Lutheran circles take toward Martin Luther, a most important figure in the fields just mentioned. Some proudly delight in disagreeing with Luther whenever possible, also in theological matters. Not a few disagree violently with his wonderfully sound liturgical principles and practices. Very many are altogether out of alignment with his understanding of and sympathetic attitude toward music in general and church music in particular. It is difficult to determine whether all this is the result of having been exposed at one time to too indulgent and credulous an attitude toward Luther or

to a certain egotistical satisfaction they derive from opposing their own ideas to those of a man as great and pre-eminent as Luther. At any rate, we detect right here an important cause for the lack of proper integration which is so clearly evident in matters liturgical within American Lutheranism. We must return to Luther and the great things he stood for; we need also his courage and insight, his concern for the souls of men, his interest in doctrine and theological scholarship, his love for good liturgies and good church music, and his philosophy of life and worship.

There is evident today a profound regard for Luther in non-Lutheran circles. These people do not have the Lutheran background we have, and yet we so often find that their approach to this great man and all he stood for is very sympathetic and understanding; this applies not only when Luther speaks of theology and liturgics, but also when Luther makes those rather sweeping and provoking statements which are so characteristic of him and which may easily be misconstrued and misinterpreted. Several years ago the writer took several courses during the summer at a very well-known non-denominational theological seminary in the East which is known for its scholarship. Two things impressed themselves on him most forcibly that summer: 1. Hardly a day passed by on which Luther was not referred to and quoted respectfully in the classroom by various instructors and lecturers. 2. The chapel exercises never militated against good taste and were almost invariably opened with a Lutheran chorale prelude. A little more than a year ago the writer took a course in *The Cultural Influence of the Reformation* at a divinity school of the Midwest; the course was offered by a Congregationalist whom many consider the foremost authority on Luther in America. The learned doctor remarked to the class, which included several Lutherans, that he could not understand the Lutherans of America and their attitude toward Martin Luther; he went so far as to state that some are actually ashamed to be called Lutherans because they do not want, it seems, to be identified in any way with Luther. He then added that of all Protestant denominations none should be better equipped and qualified to grow, prosper, and exert a salutary influence in America than the Lutheran Church with its Christ-centered theology, its high regard for the

Gospel, its heritage from Luther, its possession of the precious and democratic doctrine of the universal priesthood stressed by Luther, its vast and wonderful cultural heritage, its hymnody (the chorale), and its sound liturgical heritage and philosophy. He then added that the confused and heterogeneous liturgical thinking found in American Lutheranism today will certainly not help to make of the Lutheran Church the really great Church it could be in the United States of America. He insisted that certain High-Church tendencies are the result of hopelessly confused thinking among Lutherans who ignore the voice of history. He might have added that the same applies to much agitation for so-called Low-Church developments and to the attitude of many to church music and hymnody, which are part and parcel of our liturgical heritage and which have contributed substantially to shape its character.

This brings us to the very core and center of the problem before us, the integration of the Lutheran service of worship. As matters stand at present, our services of worship, by and large, are not well integrated. In many cases they, like those of most Protestant denominations today, are so hodgepodge, so hybrid, and so emasculated that they can hardly be called *Lutheran* services of worship. If the liturgy has been so dissected, deleted, and rearranged that it hardly resembles the Common Service with its rich historical Lutheran background (I refer at present to its structure and textual content, not to its music), if the sermon is either cold and indifferent or sentimental, startling, and revivalistic, if the hymns sung are largely by Barnby, Dykes, and others of the lush and Victorian era of the 19th century, if the selections played by the organist are not at all related to worship and Lutheran hymnody, and if the choir selection is insipid, banal, irreverent, and poor either from the textual or musical point of view, or both, pray, what is there about such a service that is Lutheran? What distinguishes such a service from the tragic type of services conducted in many sectarian churches today? There are actually hundreds of services of this very type being conducted in Lutheran churches every Sunday. Does this help make of the Lutheran Church a great Church, a Church whose very aims, ideals, history, heritage, and character demand that it be different from others? Should

not the Lutheran Church, because of its very nature and character, be in a class by itself, a peculiar Church whose members are a peculiar, a different people? We ask this not in a spirit of arrogance, of contempt, or of vindictive and self-righteous pharisaism, but rather in a spirit of utter humility, a spirit which has been shamed and humiliated by our own refusal to make more diligent and faithful use of those wonderful gifts God has given us in our distinctive Lutheran heritage. Here lies the chief cause for the lack of integration in our services of worship; by seeking to copy others we have copied also their mistakes and have neglected the great heritage God has entrusted to our stewardship. We too often identify stewardship with material blessings only; however, we are stewards also of a spiritual and cultural heritage.

We maintain that ours is a glorious Church. But what makes it glorious? Is it not the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the implements we use (including liturgies, sermons, music, hymns, etc.) to proclaim this Gospel worthily and effectually? Our services of worship are neutralized and weakened to a great extent through lack of integration and unity; they suffer from lack of unity because we give too little thought to integrating the entire service and its various individual component parts. Taken as a whole, the world is more cautious; concert programs by artists are, as a rule, very carefully planned, for almost every artist knows that poorly planned programs invariably lead to failure and downfall. Similarly, if the service is to impress the worshiper and fill his heart with reverence, awe, consecration, and devotion, it must be a well-integrated unit and not merely a piece of patchwork or liturgical and musical surrealism. We have all attended services where we heard an excellent and well-prepared sermon, but where the liturgy was a conglomerate of liturgical caprice and individualism, the hymns were definitely of an inferior quality (perhaps musically more so than textually), and the music played by the organist was purely secular and even irreverent. Who will deny that even an excellent sermon will suffer under such circumstances? On the other hand, I am sure we have all attended services which were edifying from a liturgical point of view, in which excellent worship music was played by a good church organist and sung by a good choir, but where careful attention was not

paid to the choice of hymn tunes; in fact, the hymns seemed to have been selected because their inferior and sentimental character appealed strongly to the badly developed musical tastes of certain people. In other words, the standards which should prevail in the Lutheran Church were brushed aside and abandoned in favor of individuals whose standards were low, naive, even vulgar.

We are often prone to think that we must by all means accommodate ourselves to the standards of those whose tastes are very undeveloped and primitive, and forget that the Church in her greatest eras has maintained high standards and has resorted to low and poor standards largely in her eras of decline. Luther was obliged to deal chiefly with an uncultured and uneducated class of people; he also insisted that the people be taken into serious consideration while preparing services of worship (cf. his *Deutsche Messe*). This was an outgrowth of his high regard for the Scriptural doctrine of the royal priesthood, which was the very foundation of his liturgical, hymnological, and church-musical thinking. As a result, Luther insisted that hymn texts be simple and *volkstuemlich*. But if you will examine the hymnals of the early Lutheran Church, you will not find a single inferior or poor hymn tune, not even among those which were originally associated with secular texts. Hymn texts quite readily found their way into Lutheran hymnals by the scores and hundreds, but hymn tunes were few and scarce, so scarce, in fact, that the practice soon developed of singing several hymn texts to the same tune, a practice which is followed by Lutherans throughout the world to this day, but which is quite unknown in practically all other Protestant denominations. Luther and others realized from the very outset that not only the text, but also the tune is important and that a poor and inferior hymn tune will not fit well into a good liturgical service. Luther and others never argued, as do some today, that only the text is important and that the quality of music is unimportant and irrelevant. Hymn tunes were to be *volkstuemlich*, but they, too, had to fit into a good service of worship if they were to be used at all. We here have one of the most serious defects of our services of worship today; it is due to the strange reasoning of those who insist that only the text is important and who are ready to throw out our Lutheran

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chorales. We must begin to realize more seriously than ever before that an inferior hymn tune, regardless of how popular it may be among certain people, militates against an edifying and good liturgical service of worship. The story is told that on one occasion a number of pastors visited Luther and complained because their choirmasters used rather difficult and involved music which the people failed to grasp and enjoy. Luther replied: "What of it? Do the people understand everything the Holy Spirit has recorded in Holy Scriptures? Do they understand everything you say in your sermons? Indeed not. And yet, does that mean that people should quit reading the Bible and that you should quit preaching?" Here Luther showed a bit of understanding which many of his day and of ours fail to show. There was much common sense and much understanding in Luther's well-known remark: "I am not of the opinion, as are the *fanatics*, that because of the Gospel all the arts should be cast aside and destroyed, but I am rather of the opinion that the arts should be employed in the service of Him who has given them."

I am fully aware of the fact that the problem which confronts us is not a simple one and that many difficulties must be taken into serious consideration. We can all, I am sure, be very sympathetic towards a missionary who ventures into a field where Lutheranism and Lutheran standards are altogether unknown and where years of tactful and judicious training are required to lead the people to higher and to genuine Lutheran standards. We should be very sympathetic towards a pastor who must work largely with people whose background is profoundly Reformed, revivalistic, or puritanical, who will object not only to the chorale, but also to any good hymn, any good music, also to the use of the crucifix, the organ, vestments, and the like. However, it is very difficult to sympathize with one who is utterly indifferent to good standards and yet serves as a pastor, who lacks the idealism we all, as servants of the Church, should have, and whose big concern is to be earthy and common. It is likewise difficult to approve of what is done by a pastor who serves a congregation which has been affiliated with the Lutheran Church for two, three, four, and more generations, which through all these years has maintained a well-conducted parochial school, and which has been made acquainted with the

Lutheran heritage, particularly the chorale, but whose pastor has no love, no appreciation, and no understanding for our great liturgical, musical, and hymnological heritage and who, so to speak, throws it out of the window like a filthy garment because he personally does not care for it or approve of it. This may well be considered an act of effrontery, particularly when it is accompanied by the evasive remark: "I am interested in saving souls, not in maintaining musical and liturgical standards." We might mention in this connection that Luther, Walther, Bach, and others who were interested in music were interested, too, in the salvation of souls, as was also the Apostle Paul at the time he exhorted the Church that everything done by the Church be done not only decently and in order, but also unto edifying. We have known pastors, teachers, church musicians, and laymen who have gone into parishes which were known to be hostile to liturgical services of worship and to good church music, and who have won over these congregations to the cultural heritage of the Lutheran Church and for better church music and hymns, not only through their love for good liturgical usages and services of worship, but also through their tactful approach and through the application of wisdom, discretion, and understanding. It is well to remember that everything is in the pastor's favor when a well-integrated service of worship is conducted, a service in which all parts fit together as they should, also in spirit, and a service in which, of course, due recognition and emphasis are given to the preaching of the Word of God and to the administration of the Sacraments.

Let us not forget our obligations to the youth of the Church. The educational world and the schools of our land are making much wider use of good music today than ever before. The children of today are learning more about music than their parents did, and the youth of our day often and rightly becomes very impatient with what it must hear in our services of worship. It is a mistake to cater to the perverted musical tastes of many parents of these children; let us rather think of the children and prepare for a better future. A good, well-conducted and well-integrated service of worship will not disappoint our youth, neither will good hymns, particularly our grand chorales, good choir music, good organ music, a good sermon, and all that goes into a good, edifying,

and impressive service of worship which is saturated with the spirit of wholesome and invigorating Lutheranism. Luther remarked repeatedly that his biggest concern was the youth of the Church; ought we not say the same and then act accordingly? This will mean that we raise our standards not merely for the sake of better liturgies, better hymnody, and better music, but for the sake of the Kingdom and its youth.

In order to bring about better integration in our services of worship, permit me, in closing to recommend the following:

1. That we study the liturgical writings of Luther. No better antidote can be found against liturgical extremes and against liturgical folly. The Lutheran Church has never followed Luther blindly in liturgical matters, not even in his own day; nevertheless, Luther is one of the great figures of liturgical history, and the Lutheran Church has fared well when following him; fundamentally, he is so very sound that there is no reason why we as Lutherans should not follow him. Since the crux of our liturgical problems is very often the type of music used to worship God, I would urge that the reading and study of Luther's liturgical writings be supplemented by a reading of his statements regarding the use, the purpose, and the enjoyment of music. The Lutheran Church is today facing the danger of losing its reputation as "the singing Church."

2. That we use the Common Service as it is in our *Hymnal*, bearing in mind its rich historical background and its effectiveness when done right. At least occasionally have the congregation sing *All Glory Be to God on High* (No. 237) or *All Glory Be to God Alone* (No. 238), the chorale versions of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, in place of the less worthy Scottish Chant setting (pp. 7 and 17). Instead of reciting the Creed Sunday after Sunday, let us sing it occasionally by singing a Trinity hymn, notably Nos. 251 and 252. This is in keeping with good Lutheran tradition and will not militate against having a desirable amount of uniformity.

3. No better means for integrating the Lutheran service can be found than the diligent use of our precious chorales. They are an integral part of the Lutheran service of worship. It is time that we cease arguing against the use of the chorale; it is a fallacy to maintain that our chorales are uninspiring, uninteresting, and tuneless. Our chorales are rapidly finding

their way into practically all the better hymnals of the 20th century. Musical standards are rising, and here particularly we should think of the youth of the Church.

4. Let us meet with our organists and choirmasters to discuss the service of worship with them occasionally, and let us encourage them to use more music at the organ and with the choir which is based on our chorales. This will help bring about better integration and help give the service of worship a real Lutheran stamp. It is surprising to observe how much music of this very type has been published by practically all reputable publishers of America during the past decade. This indicates that other denominations are using our music more and more because of its excellent worship qualities. It is for us Lutherans to be leaders in this direction.

5. Let us continue to make diligent use of our pericopic system and less use of Reformed sermons; these ignore the church year and tend to moralize rather than proclaim the Gospel. Since our liturgies are very doctrinal in character, the moralizing and legalistic type of sermon does not contribute very much towards integrating the service. The same applies to the revivalistic type of sermon.

6. Let us make more diligent use of the materials put out by our own Concordia Publishing House. I refer at present particularly to the liturgical and to the music publications of Concordia, since these materials are intended to help integrate and Lutheranize a service of worship.

7. Let us carefully avoid extremes, bearing in mind that one extreme not only leads to the opposite extreme, but also strengthens it. The Lutheran Church should not be a happy hunting ground for so-called High-Churchmen or for Low-Churchmen. The Lutheran Church is not a laboratory in which we experiment with the very things others have tried out and which they, for good reasons, have discarded (including poor church music). Our work as a Church is of so serious and important a nature that we simply cannot afford play and experimentation.

