

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 63:2

April 1999

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Official and Nonofficial Piety and Ritual in Early Lutheranism

A. G. Roeber

In recent years, both secular historians and historical theologians have turned their attention to the complex question: How and to what extent were the confessional principles of the Lutheran Church received and understood by both lay and clerical adherents? This essay is intended to serve both pastors and lay readers who may not have time and opportunity to keep abreast of the literature which has sought to probe this question. The issue of "official" and "nonofficial" understandings of a faith is, of course, one of more than historical or antiquarian interest.¹

In the context of Lutheran theology today, if confessional and liturgical renewal is to flourish, an informed perspective on the complex relationship between written confession and the public ritual of worship, and what a broader segment of a population makes of these markers of the faith seems particularly urgent. Both anthropologists and historians have noted that those responsible for articulating doctrine or maintaining discipline in the faith may well find that "lesser participants in what are intended to be rites of power exert themselves through consent, resistance, and misinterpretation; they appropriate rituals and make them their own."²

Few observers of American Lutheran churches today should fail to see that the crisis of Lutheran confessionalism stems from

¹For a useful overview of the interplay between "official" and "nonofficial" religious views in early modern Europe, see Robert W. Scribner, "Elements of Popular Belief" (1: 231-262) and Heinz Schilling, "Confessional Europe" (2:641-681), in Thomas A. Brady Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, editors, *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600*, 2 volumes (Leiden/New York: E. J. Brill, 1994; Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

²Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: an Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 3. Karant-Nunn here summarizes the perspective of Catherine Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York and Oxford, 1992).

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precisely this disjuncture – that is, misinterpretation or highly selective appropriation by a largely uninformed participant group of what they *think* “Lutheranism” is all about. A good deal of the selective appropriation has tended to evolve from difficulties with the pastoral office and how those called to it were perceived. This essay argues that a critical component of this disjunction actually occurred prior to the emergence of the culprits conventionally named in surveys of doctrine or historical theology, the unhappy twins of Enlightenment Rationalism and Pietism. Historians of the late sixteenth century now suggest that the Lutheran clergy had already come to be identified in the minds of many ordinary people with a process of “social discipline.” That is, the pastors’ rightful concern for order, discipline, and serious recollection that should surround the sacraments of absolution and the Lord’s Supper unfortunately became inevitably mixed with the clergy’s role as public servants of princes who were seeking a more ordered society, and more economically productive subjects. By the end of the sixteenth century, one can dimly discern a serious consequence of this development. While the evidence is uneven and highly region-specific, a certain distance separates even literate popular expressions of piety and ritual observance from the desired connection that should have bound everyday life and households to the public piety and ritual of the liturgy presided over by the holders of the pastoral office.

Rather than attempt to trace the story of piety and ritual from the Reformation to the first arrival of Danish Lutherans on the shores of North America in 1619, this essay confines itself to events within the German-speaking populations of the Holy Roman Empire. We will not attempt to assess the profound impact of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) upon this critical question, for that seminal event leads to a consideration of the history of Pietism and early Enlightenment thought as well. Last, due to space limitations, we cannot consider the complete array of ritual events surrounding birth, marriage, death, elections of officials, and the like. Rather, the focus here is restricted to piety and ritual as it affected and was refracted through the pastoral office and the connection to—or

disaffection from—absolution and the Lord's Supper as identifying marks of specifically Lutheran confessional piety.

I.

Piety and ritual practice in Lutheranism should flow from the confessional focus of these churches within the western, catholic tradition. The question Jesus put to His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" produced the confession of faith by St. Peter, which Jesus revealed as the free gift of the Holy Spirit, the faith that saves. The ministry built upon that confession of faith becomes the rock upon which the church is built.

Martin Luther quickly realized, however, that while the task of those called to the pastoral office was to preach the Word that announced that message of salvation by faith alone, immediate attention had to be paid to the hearers and how they made sense of this "good news." Lutheran laity over many generations have come to know "the gospel in a nutshell," (John 3:16) as one of the simplest summaries of where their faith should be grounded. Lutherans have relied on this passage to state that something about the very nature of an otherwise hidden and mysterious God can be known. The unbounded love of God the Father for a fallen humanity and creation—hence the key characteristic of His fundamental nature—are revealed in the mystery and scandal of the cross and resurrection of His Son Jesus, the Christ. Those who believe this remain sinners, even after hearing the gospel, having been baptized, and continuing a life-long journey of "repentance," the theme Luther announced at the beginning of the Ninety-Five Theses. But the believers are also, simultaneously, saved.

How ordinary people received these subtle theological dynamisms of "Law and Gospel;" "*simul justus et peccator*" and the odd-sounding "*three solas*"—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone—concerned Luther and the other reformers from the very outset. They bound these insights together by

insisting that "Christ alone" summed up what all believers should understand as the center of the confessing church.³

Probing this issue of reception and response among men and women in a variety of conditions and occupations is more difficult than one might suspect. Part of that difficulty surrounds the personality of the Reformer himself. In popular reception and understanding of piety and ritual, the generation of "Lutherans" who lived in the last half of the sixteenth century began to develop a spiritual literature that focused on aspects of Luther's own life. Not surprisingly, much of that devotion centered around his domestic life and the stories collected by the students and guests in his house which came to be known as the *Table Talk*. That such veneration also included the belief in Luther as a saint, with stories of weeping images of the Reformer, and miraculous preservations of Luther's portraits from fire, warfare, and attempts at destruction may surprise some. Yet, herein lay a confirmation of Lutheran confessional belief: all baptized Christians are called by God to priestly dignity by virtue of Baptism in that state and occupation in life in which they find themselves. Yet, the confessional reforms constituted course correction, not radical break with the ancient and medieval church.⁴ While these later devotional materials and beliefs are important to understanding the trajectory of piety and ritual, initial Lutheran piety and practice emphasized other forms.⁵

³For an excellent presentation of this point, see James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 347-361. One may also see Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970).

⁴On the veneration of Luther's image and accounts of miraculous events surrounding it, one may see "Incombustible Luther: The Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany," Chapter 15 of Robert W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London and Ronceverte, West Virginia: Hambledon Press, 1987), 323-353.

⁵For an overview of differing historians' interpretations of Luther from the sixteenth century to the present, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). Similarly, for the North American context, see Hartmut Lehmann, *Martin Luther in the American Imagination* (München: W. Fink, 1988).

Although discerning “early” from “later” Lutheran piety and ritual is not simple, we should distinguish the emphases of the period 1520 to about 1545 from the later sixteenth century up to the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War in 1618. From the War of the Schmalkaldic League, therefore, to the cataclysmic event that devastated Europe and the German lands in particular, a rather different set of themes, emphases, and perceptions characterized “later” Lutheran rituals and piety from “earlier” expressions.

II.

Early Lutheran piety, allowing always for considerable regional and local variation, tended to emphasize continuity with the rituals and practices of the past, albeit stripped of accretions the Reformers believed had compromised or obscured the central theology of the cross. Piety and ritual for the first generation remained firmly fixed on the public preaching of the word, absolution, and the reception of the Lord’s Supper within the believing community. The confessional standpoint of this early Lutheran theology identified the true church as that believing community where “the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel,” to use the formula later adopted in the Augsburg Confession.⁶ Here was the proper context from whence all genuine piety flowed. Proper catechesis of the entire household within this context produced the work Luther believed to be the most important of all his voluminous writings, the Small Catechism of 1529.⁷

Luther had already identified the proper context for growth in piety by emphasizing the regularity of ritual in his sermon for the early Mass for Christmas Day in 1522:

⁶Quotations from the Lutheran Symbolical Books are from: *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert, and others (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), Augsburg Confession, Article VII, 32.

⁷The actual title was *Enchiridion: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther for Ordinary Pastors and Preachers*; the “handbook” or “manual” includes the prayers Luther himself said he used as a daily spiritual regimen; see his preface to the Large Catechism, 359.

He who wants to find Christ, must first find the church. How would one know Christ and faith in Him if one did not know where they are who believe in Him? He who would know something concerning Christ, must neither trust in himself nor build his bridge into heaven by means of his own reason, but he should go to the church; he should attend it and ask his questions there.

The church is not wood and stone but the assembly of people who believe in Christ. With this church one should be connected and see how the people believe, live, and teach. They certainly have Christ in their midst, for outside the Christian church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation.⁸

How Lutherans believed, taught, and acted in worship depended in a critical fashion upon those called to the preaching office of the church. The structure of the Augsburg Confession made this clear. After setting out the articles on the nature of God, original sin, and Christ the Word of God, the confessors wrote the article on which the church stands or falls, on justification. Immediately thereafter what one might properly describe as the "linkage" article appears, entitled the "Office of the Ministry" as instituted by God in order to provide the gospel and the sacraments, the means of saving grace.⁹ Piety, therefore, depended upon the quality of the "teaching shepherd" in each parish. Early descriptions of Lutheran pastors—indeed well into the eighteenth century—continue to use interchangeably the words "the Pastor" and "the Priest." Lutherans regularly described the teaching and shepherding stewards of word and sacrament as "priests" and addressed them as either "Father" or *Pfarrer* in many parts of German-speaking Europe well into the eighteenth century.

⁸"Sermon on the Gospel for the Early Christmas Service, Luke 2:15-20," in *Luther's Works, Sermons II*, Helmut T. Lehmann and Hans J. Hillerbrand, editors, volume 52 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 39-40. References to this series will be abbreviated *LW*.

⁹Augsburg Confession V, 31.

The link between piety in everyday life to word and sacrament, however, depended upon a renewed and greatly expanded role for fathers of households. Luther's 1524 essay to the town councillors of Germany that they take care to erect and staff Christian schools reflected both the Reformation's origins in the universities, and the Reformers' determination to restore to the baptized heads of households their responsibility and calling to be expositors of a biblical spiritual life.¹⁰ This insistence explains early Lutheranism's enthusiastic reception among the small town and urban burghers from Uppsala in Sweden to Ljubljana in Slovenia; from Strassburg in the west of the Holy Roman Empire to Königsberg in East Prussia.¹¹ The emphasis on proper catechesis presupposed a deep linkage between what was taught in the home, what was learned in the schools, to that which what was first properly heard and received in word and sacrament in the churches. Luther's description of the catechism as the "layman's Bible" illustrated the conviction that this collection of questions and answers, properly used, would bring ordinary literate persons to review repeatedly the proper focus and purpose of the history of God's acts revealed in Scripture, properly proclaimed and sacramentally received.

At the center of everything, Luther insisted, must be the cross; all piety and ritual, including principles of hearing, reading and interpreting Scripture, preaching, and liturgy depended on asking whether the passage, the sermon, the service, the popular devotion held up the crucified one, or as he put it, "advanced Christ" (*Was Christum treibet*). Luther's stubborn defense of the doctrine that Christ was truly present in the Lord's Supper definitively shaped public ritual and piety; the Sacrament of the

¹⁰"To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," *LW*, 45: 347-78.

¹¹For insights on the European borderlands of Lutheran theology and spirituality, one may see Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Pier Paolo Vergerio, the Making of an Italian Reformer* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), and Trygve R. Skarsten, "The Reception of the Augsburg Confession in Scandinavia," and David P. Daniel, "The Influence of the Augsburg Confession in South-East Central Europe," both in *Sixteenth Century Journal* 11 (1980): 87-114.

Altar is the gospel, its frequent reception a key component of the piety he hoped for in a renewed church.¹²

Historians of the Lutheran attempt at renewal have, however, until very recently, neglected this insight and the importance of studying ritual practice. Instead, the history of catechetics, visitations, and education have in the hands of some, revealed a ponderous didacticism. Popular resistance to obligatory catechetics remained; stubborn refusal to give up old peasant magic practices and beliefs in wise men and women healers continued to be lamented by Lutheran pastors and princes. Yet concentrating solely upon these indices of piety (or its absence) misses the import of Luther's Christmas sermon in 1522. How the church believed, and taught, and lived had to be heard not merely in the pastoral sermon. Rather, the entire community's response was also critical. Even before early Lutherans learned to understand the faith from a new catechism, they rushed to embrace what encapsulated in more vibrant form what the Reformer only later put down in the questions and answers of the Catechism: his hymnody.

By listening to what ordinary people said and sang in the church, Luther knew, one received back some indication of what was confessed, taught, and believed. If, as one scholar has said, the Lutheran confessional symbols are the dialogue of the church, answering back in faithful language the primary speech of God revealed in His word, then the hymns of the church in the mouths of believers spoke back confessional belief from the realm of deeply personal piety. Luther's own experience of the church at prayer in the monastic Hours now received renewed expression in congregational hymnody. Not without reason have some of the most insightful commentators noted that Lutheran piety is centered on the Pauline teaching that faith comes from hearing (*fides ex auditu*).¹³

¹²"Preface to the Epistles of Saint James and Saint Jude," LW 35: 396.

¹³For the classic exposition of this insight, see Ernst Bizer, *Fides ex auditu: eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verhandlung der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1958).

Within a few months of the Christmas Mass Sermon, Luther began working on his first vernacular hymns for inclusion in the Latin Mass. By 1524 the first collection of hymns appeared, the *Etlich christlich lieder*, containing eight texts that relied on earlier broadsheet versions. This concern to provide participants in liturgy with oral expressions of faith reflected Luther's wish that the church building be known as a *Mundhaus*—literally a house of the mouth where the gospel was proclaimed, commented upon, sung in praises, and received orally in the Lord's Supper.¹⁴

Luther's so-called "Catechism Chorales" were composed in such a way that they illustrated the "Chief Six Parts" of the Small Catechism—the Ten Commandments, the Creed, Baptism, the Lord's Prayer, confession and absolution, and the Lord's Supper. Although Johann Sebastian Bach probably first identified these compositions with the various divisions of the catechism at a much later date, their early composition testifies to the Reformer's concerns that day-to-day piety and ritual be re-channeled from "private" devotions said during the Mass (as had been true before the Reformation). Partly because of his own love of music, but in part because of his own obligation as professor of Scripture, Luther's life-long concentration on the Book of Psalms led him to urge that communal singing be encouraged as the key link between private piety and the public liturgy of the church.

By 1575, more than 200 hymn collections gave expression to the tradition of congregational singing which became one of the most enduring characteristics of Lutheran worship. Nor were the songs meant to be sung only within the liturgy. Rather, the hymns were issued both in broadside or in small collected and bound sheets and later actual bound books for use in the home. Of all these collections, the 1545 collection, Valentin Babst's *Geistliche Lieder* earned a special pride of place since Luther wrote the preface to it before his death a year later. Moreover, within a relatively short time, as Lutheran pastors married, the

¹⁴For citations and a fuller reflection on this key aspect of Lutheran piety, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 60-66.

parsonage became the focus of music, where both the pastor's wife and children as well as other members of the congregation both practiced and sang for recreation, following the example of the Reformer and his own family.¹⁵

The early popular reception of hymnody seems to have been matched by a selective buying and (we assume) reading or listening to, Luther's pastoral works. Despite Luther's reputation as a polemicist, scholars now believe from the evidence on printing and sales that it was through his sermons and pastoral advice that he "got through" to a vast audience spread throughout most of northern, central, and southeastern Europe.¹⁶ The temptation—seldom resisted by later commentators—to concentrate on the "written" dimensions of piety never overcame Luther and the first generation of reformers. It is no accident that, just as he turned his attention to song, Luther also drastically modified his early attack on what was *seen* as proper expressions or foci of piety and ritual.

Nothing eventually set Lutheran houses of worship apart from Reformed or Free church Protestantism so much as the retention of statuary, paintings, and liturgical aids to devotion. Luther's return from the Wartburg to condemn the destruction of artwork in Wittenberg's churches is well-known. The endorsement of the Reformation by Lucas Cranach and the other composers of altarpieces graphically pointed the devout to the blood of the crucified Christ being caught in chalices; in

¹⁵For more details and citation of the literature, one may see Carl F. Schalk, *God's Song in a New Land: Lutheran Hymnals in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 21-29; Oskar Söhnngen, "Die Musik im evangelischen Pfarrhaus," in *Das evangelische Pfarrhaus: eine Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte*, edited by Martin Greiffenhagen (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1984), 295-310. I am deeply in debt to Christopher Brown for suggestions and help on this key—and neglected—dimension of Lutheran piety. His work promises to revitalize our understanding of how central the restoration of congregational singing was to the Lutheran theological reforms (Christopher Brown, "Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Reformation of the German People," dissertation in progress, Harvard University).

¹⁶Mark U. Edwards Jr., "First Impressions in the Strasbourg Press," in Andrew C. Fix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *Germania Illustrata: Essays on Early Modern Germany Presented to Gerald Struass* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 75-98.

neighboring panels, chalices are distributed to the faithful kneeling for the Lord's Supper received under both forms—the pictorial preaching of the gospel completely consonant with Lutheran confessional theology.¹⁷

The manner in which liturgical art was “received” and expropriated by Lutheran believers in the sixteenth century remains difficult to assess. Luther's own retention of artwork stemmed not from his own limited appreciation of it or conviction that it was necessary. Rather, he refused to countenance its destruction by radicals who insisted that God's law demanded it. His own emphasis remained on what was heard; to a degree, this monastic aesthetic was transferred to ordinary Lutheran believers, but it appears, only in part. Beyond the graphic representation of the central doctrine of the cross as the means of redemption and race, the role of the saints and martyrs received considerable attention from Luther and the reformers. Precisely because the Reformers insisted that they did not break with apostolic tradition in their reforms, they had to find a suitable way both to honor the memory of the saints and apostles and to eradicate the popular cult of worship and folk-magic which had grown up around the members of the Church Triumphant.

The saints and martyrs were not removed from Lutheran piety. Veneration of relics, pilgrimages, and praying to the saints were not considered appropriate because of such practices obscured the central mediating role of Christ. But early Lutherans did continue a cult of the saints and martyrs in a different understanding. The first hint of this reformed piety and its ritual expression occurs in Luther's first hymn: a commemoration of two Augustinian friars burned at the stake for preaching the evangelical message of church reform.¹⁸

¹⁷On Cranach, Elder and Younger, one may see Max J. Friedlander and Jakob Rosenberg, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach* (New York: Tabard Press, 1978); Werner Schade, *Die Malerfamilie Cranach* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1974).

¹⁸Robert Kolb, *For all the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987); on Luther's hymn composed after the death of the two friars in

This commemorative hymn illustrates the general thrust of how Lutheran piety handled the medieval cult of the saints. It reminds us again of the auricular emphasis of Lutheran piety and ritual. Lutheran piety re-historicized the saints as real persons, and this transformation of the martyrs and saints within Lutheranism won broad acceptance. In part, this was due to Luther's insistence on the dignity of the calling all Christians received in baptism, and from Lutheran theologians' refusal to concentrate on the heroic deeds of clerics and those in religious communities. This renewed cultus meshed with the rising tide of artisan and peasant resentment against novel tax schemes and abolition of ancient privileges on the part of the nobility, both lay and clerical. Initially, therefore, Lutheran piety seemed capable of maintaining continuity with the medieval past replete with saints and martyrs, but holding up these people as witnesses who had made a bold confession of the gospel. Properly understood in this light, the saints could still be honored and pointed to in the public prayer of the church. People were to venerate their memory, though not them, and see through them to the real focus, the crucified and risen Christ.¹⁹

Yet we cannot accept uncritically the notion that there was only one, or an undifferentiated "reception" of Lutheran teaching and encouragement of a renewed piety. Rather, in the lay propaganda pamphlets, in the calendars, the broadsides, anniversary festivals of the Reformation, and other indices of what people bought and read and celebrated, one sees important variations. Within the first decade of the Reformation's course, and prior to the actual presentation of the Augsburg Confession in 1530, the explosion of printing and the different ways diverse social and economic groups seized the Reformation's message complicates considerably the task of assessing what people felt, believed, understood, and

July, 1523, see 20-21.

¹⁹One may see Günther Lottes, "Popular culture and the Early Modern State in 16th Century Germany," in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Steven L. Kaplan (Berlin and New York: Mouton, 1984), 147-188.

appropriated within the broad parameters of Lutheran piety and ritual practice.²⁰

In assessing the pamphlets, broadsides, and other forms of popular reading materials, for example, one scholar identifies urban leaders as those who tended to favor personal correspondence, avoided open conflicts, and may well have been among those most inclined to purchase Luther's pastoral sermons. Artisans, on the other hand, snatched up poetry and dialogues as well as the perennial popular songs. It was these latter town and urban artisans and teachers in the schools who perhaps gravitated initially to the fundamental message of Lutheran piety: all vocations in life are sacred and inherently dignified, not just those called to the nobility or clerical estates.

Yet even with such important distinctions, we may be looking more at propaganda techniques and rhetoric than penetrating to the heart of that piety we assume is reflected in such texts. With the outbreak of the Peasants' War in 1525 and Luther's denunciation of the peasants, the relationship of Lutheran theology and piety to the broadest forms of popular belief was permanently damaged. As the Reformation moved toward a theological statement of its program for reforming the entire western church, Luther systematized, via the catechism, the essential points of his hoped-for reforms. He intended this manual of devotion to penetrate household, parish church, the minds and hearts; the catechism was not meant simply to be "taught" but prayed.

²⁰The following paragraphs summarize Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform: German Lay Propaganda Pamphlets, 1519-1530* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1:303-450. For an introduction to the vast literature on the Peasant Revolt of 1525 and the various interpretations of the event in relation to Luther and the Lutheran Reformation, see Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Tom Scott, "The Peasants' War: A Historiographical Review," *The Historical Journal* 22 (1979): 693-720.

But did Luther's insights really come to be internalized by ordinary believers? In his classic study *Luther's House of Learning*, historian Gerald Strauss pronounces the didactic work of the Reformation largely to have failed. The persistence of folk magic beliefs, Strauss and others have argued, showed that while the Roman church quickly adjusted itself to find room for various forms of Christianized folk beliefs and visual rituals, the Lutheran reformers refused to do so. They settled instead for the dubious mechanism of the classroom and catechism for inculcating, rather than giving expression to, popular spiritual beliefs and needs.

Not everyone agrees, of course. Perhaps Strauss forgot that the catechism was sung and prayed, not merely recited. It is nearly impossible to untangle the personal perspective of historians and the times that shaped their assessments from this fundamental question about the popular piety of Lutherans. Lewis Spitz, Steven Ozment, James Kittelson, and Scott Hendrix have all raised doubts about Strauss's argument. But the controversy reveals something quite important: German-speaking society in particular was badly fragmented and full of hostile camps long before the Reformation occurred. That widely diverse forms of piety and arguments about its inculcation and practice should have come to be reflected in diverse ways ought not surprise us.²¹

III.

The emergence of a distinctly "Lutheran" piety and ritual practices that gave it expression cannot be dated precisely. Still, in the decades following the public reading of the Augsburg Confession, but particularly by the late 1540s, some hints appeared as to what that piety and the mechanisms for its nurture looked like.

First, the appearance of the first distinctly "Lutheran" calendars emerged by the 1540s, including both those that

²¹For a summary of the literature and these disputes, see "Gerald Strauss, Historian," by the editors of *Germania Illustrata*, xi-xxiii; see also Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 190-201.

concentrated on salvation history as well as a chronicle of both biblical events and recent threats to the gospel. Since the medieval rhythm of the year turned with the agricultural seasons, the popularity of the Lutheran calendars among town and urban consumers reflected the biblical themes there that matched the complex financial and market arrangements of the Burghers. Agricultural markets themselves still counted for a great deal, and by 1575 Andreas Johndorf's popular *Historical Calendar* managed to pay some attention to the traditional saints' days associated with a major turning point in the year—St. John's Day at Midsummer for instance—with the newer emphasis on the confessing bravery of saints, both ancient and contemporary.

In the formal expressions of worship, too, the church orders of the period between 1536 and 1560 began to depart from the early practices of the Reformation. Public confession and absolution, unheard of in the pre-Reformation church, was introduced in Württemberg, Plauen, Mecklenburg, and Waldeck during this period, and the use of auricular confession also seems to have declined in some regions. Undoubtedly, part of this development reflected the insistence of the reformers that except in cases where the conscience was severely troubled, the approach to the Lord's Supper was deemed the sufficient sacramental means of forgiveness. As the Council of Trent met during this very period (1545-1563) and introduced more rigorous demands for auricular confession prior to obligatory communion at least once a year, expressions of piety in the two churches took on increasingly confessional and polemical meanings. Within this context of "confessionalization"—an admission that a general reform of the entire and still potentially unified western church was now impossible—forms of piety were also forced into new ritual postures and expressions.²²

²²One may see Paul Graff, *Geschichte und Auflösung der alten gottesdienstlichen Formen in den evangelischen Kirchen Deutschlands*, two volumes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1937 and 1939), 1:300-382; for a survey of the now-vast literature on "confessionalization" and its implications, see for example Richard van Dülmen, *Kultur und Alltag in der frühen Neuzeit: Religion, Magie, Aufklärung 16.-18. Jahrhundert* (München: C. H. Beck, 1994), 108-121; on auricular confession specifically in Lutheran and

Lutheran pastors were now offered a critically edited version of the traditional lives of the saints. Various works, including those of Hermann Bonnus and Georg Spalatin, appeared in Latin between the 1540s and the last decades of the century. These revised versions of the saints' lives again underscored not miraculous events, but God's love for the church manifested in raising up witnesses to the gospel in times of persecution and suffering. Although these works cannot be counted as "popular" markers of piety, since the Lutheran clergy bought them, they found their way indirectly via the sermon into the awareness of Lutheran parish listeners.

Besides what was seen and heard in the forms of hymnody, painting, calendars, broadsides and inexpensive print forms, however, one of the most powerful expressions of Lutheran piety and world-view crystallized as the conflict between the Lutheran Reformation and Rome spilled over into military conflict. The woodcuts of the period after hopes for conciliation were dashed reflected this disappointment, and hardened the popular expression of Lutheran piety and self-consciousness against Roman pious practices. Oddly enough, the vituperative and shocking quality of the popular woodcuts that focused on the evil of the papacy did not encompass the totality of Lutheran piety and identity. While one might have expected prayerbooks, hymnody, and tales of martyrs to the gospel to reflect exactly these graphic representations, such was not the case. Instead, the later sixteenth-century collections of martyrology, lives of the saints, and hymnody concentrate far less on an anti-Roman defense of the true gospel than on the cultivation of devout personal living and preparation for a holy death.²³

Almost simultaneously, the cult of Luther as the patron saint of the Reformation received its first formulation by about 1556. Even before his death, Luther was venerated by admirers, of course. But a decade later, Luther could no longer be regarded as a contemporary prophet, but as having joined the ranks of the

Catholic areas, see Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 91-137.

²³See "Demons, Defecation and Monsters: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation," Chapter 13 in Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements*, 277-299.

confessing fathers throughout the ages. With the first edition of his works that appeared in 1555 came also new histories, such as Johann Mathesius's life of Luther which incorporated the major events of Luther's career into salvation history. Luther is both the German prophet and the faithful shepherd of souls. Not incidentally, these portrayals were fashioned just shortly before the first appearance of the *Table Talk* in 1566, where the chronology and strict standards of recording were sacrificed to the compiler Johann Aurifaber's (Goldschmidt) principles of selection to provide for the "spiritual hunger and thirst" of readers according to topics including worship, marriage, sickness and death, schooling—in short, the needs to apply piety to everyday life shorn of medieval peasant rituals deemed superstitious and non-evangelical.²⁴

The emergence of Luther as not only prophet and pastor, but father of the domestic household, now emerged almost simultaneously and reenforced the initial enthusiasm of ordinary persons for the Reformation's emphasis on the sacredness of everyday life. Moreover, the role given to fathers, mothers, and children also received renewed treatment in the prayerbooks, tracts, and devotionals of the late sixteenth century. Simultaneously, the reverence for Luther as a saint and the tales of miraculous deliverances of his portrait, including tales of pictures that sweat tears in times of famine or threat of warfare, increased dramatically.²⁵

The gradual definition of Lutheran orthodoxy, culminating in 1580 with the publication of the Book of Concord, can only be connected to popular piety with difficulty, at least in terms of direct influence. Rather, it might be more accurate to say that the theological expressions of doctrine among the signatories reflected only in part the actual practice of piety among ordinary Lutherans. Lutheran doctrinal formulation emerged

²⁴Kolb, *For All the Saints*, chapter four, "Saint Martin of Wittenberg: Luther in the View of His Students," 103-138; see the introduction to *Table Talk*, LW 54: ix-xxvi.

²⁵The following paragraphs depend upon Paul Althaus, *Forschungen zur evangelischen Gebetsliteratur* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1927/ Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), 48-142.

somewhat as Luther thought it should in his 1522 Christmas Sermon. The ancient formula attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* ("let the rule of prayer set the rule of belief") lay behind Luther's own sermon. After half a century, a rule of prayer had emerged that revealed the character of much that reflected a genuine Lutheran piety. At the same time, we must remember that outside the bounds of the Holy Roman Empire, the warfare and theological disputation of the late sixteenth century did not touch these borderlands where the Augsburg Confession had won acceptance in the churches. Thus, in Scandinavia or the Baltic area, expressions of piety and mechanisms for its ritual nurture developed rather differently. The disputations and denunciations of theologians across confessional lines left many ordinary believers thirsting for other forms of spiritual comfort and nurture which now took a somewhat novel form.

Lutherans within the Empire maintained a virtual monopoly on the production of popular religious music and texts—up to 75 per cent of all books printed up to 1600. (The hymns sung in congregations, in combination with more elaborate manuals of piety centered on the household, gave to Lutheran piety its middling quality—what later generations would term either in derision or admiration, "bourgeois" or *bürgerlich*). Yet the content of the hymns also shifted gradually. The hymn collections from the later sixteenth century reveal a more individualistic content, and more hymns concentrating on the cross, on human suffering in times of pestilence, warfare, and poverty. The early emphasis in Lutheran hymnody and catechesis subtly changed with the emergence of a new printed form of piety that supplemented, and perhaps one could even say in some areas of Europe, supplanted, the earlier simple collections of hymns and the catechism: the prayerbook.²⁶

If one considers the rise of the prayerbook and its character, this index of piety reveals starkly the different character of Lutheran piety in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth

²⁶Patrice Veit, "Das Gesangbuch in der Praxis Pietatis der Lutheraner," *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* 197 (1992): 435-454; Brown, "Singing the Gospel."

centuries. To read these prayerbooks is to be struck by a paradoxical sense of what is *not* the focus of Lutheran piety. One does not see an emphasis on the “family,” or “household” for example, the direction earlier Lutheran piety’s focus on everyday life seemed to be moving toward. The context that produced the prayerbook may have dictated this paradox. The prayerbook is a product of “Lutheran Orthodoxy.” The refinement of doctrine and the intense and acrimonious battles between Lutheran and other theologians may have contributed to a decline in expressions of piety that reflected a confident communal identity.

Instead, the content of the prayers is very individualistic, and the prayerbooks themselves the compositions of pastors and theologians. Lay writers are conspicuously absent from these devotional manuals. The topical arrangement of prayers highlights the importance of humility as the key to all other Christian virtues; prayers in times of fear and distress—to be saved from the Turk, the Pope, plague, warfare, and famine—give an apocalyptic flavor to these manuals. Declension of the holiness of calling in everyday life also emerges as a theme in these prayer collections, but more in terms of lament than in providing spiritual guidance for remedying the defects. The emphasis on humility is profoundly Augustinian and Pauline, and the concern for the everyday as the place where God, temptation, and the life of faith are to be found still link these prayerbooks, albeit not profoundly, to the earlier forms of Lutheran piety.

Oddly enough, although the prayers refer to the sinfulness and lack of piety in households, these manuals do not talk of “family” per se, but rather the individual states of life of those who composed a household. Thus, there are prayers for women in childbirth, for heads of households, for a sick child, but not prayers that reveal a collective identity, that is “we, the members of this family or household.” The prayerbooks do not provide much practical spiritual advice beyond prayer for dealing with concrete, individualized dilemmas or problems. On the other hand, they reveal a shrewd insight into individual human psychology and provide theologically solid prayers on

the occasion of spiritual drought, anxiety, doubt, and temptation. In this, the Lutheran prayerbooks share a close affinity with some Roman Catholic manuals of piety from the same era. Although the *Andacht* tradition of meditative piety is well represented in these manuals, a specifically sacramental piety focused on the reception of the Lord's Supper is not a primary characteristic of the Lutheran prayerbooks. Martin Chemnitz, whose death in 1586 places him as a contemporary of the later prayerbook authors, labored vigorously to defend and advance not simply the proper doctrine of the Lord's Supper, but the disciplined observation of proper ritual surrounding its celebration. The omission of sacramental piety in the prayerbooks seems, given his life and work, even more striking.²⁷

The emergence of this form of individualized piety attached to deep themes of German mysticism crossed confessional lines and reached back into pre-Reformation spirituality. The emphasis on doing penance and forming one's life increasingly after the model of the Crucified had roots that wound around mystics like Johannes Tauler, included Thomas à Kempis, and stood at the beginning of all Lutheran Bibles in Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. Few prayerbooks drew more successfully on both old and contemporary themes than did that composed by the Wittenberg theologian Johann Habermann, whose *Christian Prayers for all Needs and Conditions of Christendom* became a classic, still reprinted centuries later. But Lutherans

²⁷Bernrad Vogler, "Die Gebetbücher in der lutherischen Orthodoxie (1550-1700)," *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* 197 (1992): 424-434; on Chemnitz, one may see for example Bjarne W. Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Trinity Lutheran Press; Distributed by Confessional Lutheran Research Center, 1986), 68-140; and especially at 184: "The break between the 16th century and the 17th century on the doctrine of the consecration is decisive. . . . A survey of the present standard conservative books of Lutheran dogmatics (Baier-Walther, Schmid, Hoenecke, Pieper) demonstrates how complete this triumph is." For a useful reminder of Chemnitz's insistence on discipline and careful attention to ritual, see Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, translated by Luther Poellet (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981); one may recall that this volume was written for the examination of pastors in Braunschweig.

shared the need for meditations, emphasis on mystical union with God, and individualized help for moral living with Roman Catholics, Calvinists, and radicals who were their contemporaries.²⁸

Historians probing social discipline now believe that among Roman Catholics, a highly individualized approach to confession and absolution emerged similar to the stricter demands evident among Lutheran authorities. Yet, perhaps in sharp contrast, more frequent confession seems to have led to more frequent communion among pious Roman Catholics; similar demands appear to have been resisted or avoided more cleverly among Lutheran counterparts. Among the latter, for instance, public confession and absolution had tended to displace private confession in Plauen and Württemberg already in the 1530s; by the 1550s in Mecklenberg and Waldeck; the use of the confessional persisted longer in Brandenburg-Prussia and Saxony.²⁹ Controversy surrounds the significance of mysticism and its impacts upon these patterns and the roles played by

²⁸Martin Brecht, "Das Aufkommen der neuen Frömmigkeitsbewegung in Deutschland: Voraussetzungen und Wurzeln, Symptome einer Krise," in *Geschichte des Pietismus: Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, edited by Brecht and others, (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 1:113-130; for a less rigorous but useful introduction in English, see Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); more impressive is the essay "Simul Gemitus et Raptus: Luther and Mysticism," in Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 126-154.

²⁹One may see, for example W. David Myers, 'Poor, Sinning Folk': *Confession and Conscience in Counter-Reformation Germany* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 161-81; Graff, *Geschichte und Auflösung*, 1: 382 does not offer an explanation for the gradual cessation; the social discipline historians suggest that abolition may have been due to passive resistance by the population; in Württemberg, the investigatory court, or *Kirchenconvent* was absorbed in a public "criminalization" of sins that in other areas were dealt with pastorally in private confession and absolution. On the village use of the courts in Württemberg, one may see A. G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 75-88.

mothers and fathers in the household.³⁰ Certainly Lutheran piety placed a great emphasis on the role of fathers in properly catechizing entire households. By household, sixteenth century writers meant “the entire house” including servants, day-laborers, extended family, and anyone for whom the head of the house was deemed responsible. Yet, scholars still wonder whether the long-term effects of catechizing children to internalize individual responsibility for faith did not also lead them to challenge authority, whether in household, church, or state—including the necessity of individual confession, absolution, and frequent reception of the Lord’s Supper. While mothers and single women in particular were quickly reprimanded in Lutheran piety if they diverged from the social norms Western Europeans had inherited from their medieval ancestors, mothers and women in general did play a significant role in the spread and inculcation of Lutheran piety. Whether that piety was connected to the sacraments of the Lutheran Church, however, still remains unclear.

Despite their acceptance of conventional social roles they firmly believed were biblically based, Magdalena and Balthasar Paumgartner of Nuremberg were partners in business, faith, and devoted marriage. Their surviving correspondence reminds us that middling believers had absorbed the central teaching of Lutheran theology about the sanctity of everyday life; that God ordained all for better or ill; that one could not bargain with God; that submission to His will left not only great freedom to order one’s life, but a profound obligation to do so according to the teachings of the gospel. These revealing letters deserve careful meditation, for they shatter easy and carelessly invoked categories of “patriarchy” and assumptions of authoritarianism in both church and household. As Ozment notes, “if there is a mistake worse than believing that the present and the past are the same, it is thinking they are completely different.”³¹

³⁰The following summarizes Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 132-177.

³¹Steven Ozment, *Magdalena and Balthasar: an Intimate Portrait of Life in 16th-Century Europe revealed in the Letters of a Nuremberg Husband and Wife* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 136-160; quotation at 161. For the grimmer

The first church orders of Lutheran cities include provisions that women should be catechized and that they had a legitimate role to play in teaching other women and children. Lutheranism maintained Luther's insistence on the education of young women at the start of the Reformation, although it suffered eclipse. The story of Lutheran women's piety and its profound impact upon sons who entered the pastoral office, hearing the chorales from their mothers' lips and learning prayers and catechism from both parents, perhaps watching them in the reception of the Lord's Supper, has never really been told adequately. The complex relationship of Lutheran women to the liturgical piety of the church and their own devotional practices in household and village also still remains a field of research only just now beginning to be tilled. Yet recovery of indices that document the persistence of household rituals tying the Reformation generation to those that followed is particularly difficult. Although, for example, the illustrations in Lutheran Bibles still included crucifixion scenes, inventories of estate do not exist for the entire cross-section of village populations that enable one to ascertain whether (for instance) a crucifix would have been found in moderately well-off Lutheran households by the early seventeenth century. Likewise, whether households actually followed Luther's suggested ritual of making the sign of the cross at the beginning and ending of daily prayers remains nearly impossible to document; whether fathers or mothers were actually those "in charge" of such ritual practices also remains an unanswered question.

IV.

It would be comforting to end this survey of early Lutheran piety on a positive note. The history of this theme, however, leads in a more solemn direction. The age of Lutheran orthodoxy, the social discipline role into which Lutheran pastors were cast, the impact of the first prayerbooks and the more

fate of an obstreperous, but very resourceful Lutheran woman, see Steven Ozment, *The Bürgermeister's Daughter: Scandal in a Sixteenth-Century German Town* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

individualist themes of late sixteenth-century hymnody were soon overshadowed by the most convulsive event to shake Europe to its foundations after the Black Death and before the outbreak of World War I. The Thirty Years War' yawns like a great gulf separating the world the Reformers had shaped from what emerged after 1648. Out of the maelstrom of horror that halved the population of German-speaking Europe would come profound expressions of piety, and some of the most fundamental challenges to older forms of Lutheran confessional piety and ritual imaginable.

The poetry and confessional witness of Paulus Gerhardt on the one hand, and the challenge of Lutheran Pietism, on the other, bracket these transformations. The gradual "privatization" of piety that marked pietist impulses in Scandinavia, the German-speaking lands and beyond, including North America, however, had already surfaced in the late sixteenth-century prayerbooks and other indices we have examined. Still, those tendencies were balanced by resurgent orthodox eucharistic and liturgical piety centers like Leipzig and Hamburg. Both tendencies in piety bequeathed multiple Lutheran traditions to the post-1648 world. The sanctity of the baptismal calling to holiness in everyday life survived all these upheavals. Yet the trajectory of popular piety and ritual practice leaves some essential questions unclear. Some historians have argued that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries represented the high-point of the Christian states' attempts at imposing social regulation and control over sometimes resistant and skeptical populations. What long-term effects did this success have in alienating ordinary believers' spiritual needs and expressions of piety from a clergy whose role as enforcers of social order made "official" piety in public liturgy alien or threatening? While it has long been conventional to suppose that a devolution from solid liturgical and confessional practice can be located in the age of "Pietism" and "Rationalism", the problem clearly surfaced much earlier.³²

³²One may see Heinz Schilling, "History of Crime or 'History of Sin'—Some Reflections on the Social History of Early Modern Church Discipline," in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey*

Surely, if a major desire of Luther and the reformers was to encourage more frequent reception of the Lord's Supper, attention must also be paid to whether the manuals of devotion of the late sixteenth century still reflected this insistence. Neither their content, nor the documentation of frequency of reception on the part of parishioners in various parts of Europe allow us to conclude that close ties bound this central public act of Lutheran piety and ritual practice to "private" devotionism. The tendency, in other words, to settle for various forms of individualized piety had already become noticeable long before the onset of Pietism's emphasis on "personal conversion" and observably changed "behavior."

What long-term memories were wrought, and how later generations of Lutherans drew from these events as the churches struggled to recover after 1648 remains a topic in urgent need of reexamination. The stale, and conventional apposition of "pietism" against "dead orthodoxy" fundamentally misrepresents the deeper crisis surrounding popular piety's relationship to both pastoral office and public worship. While historians, theologians and pastors should properly and profitably reassess those seventeenth and eighteenth-century issues, it seems prudential in the critical task of renewing contemporary confessional Lutheranism to include the 'long view' of tensions that beset "official" and "nonofficial" piety and ritual in the Lutheran theological tradition.