

The Lutheran Church Has Always Chanted

During the Reformation Dr. Martin Luther was asked continuously to produce a Divine Service in the vernacular. His initial reluctance to comply was due to four reasons: First, he was concerned for the weak in faith.¹ His concern was that if change happened too quickly it would sour people toward the preaching of the Gospel, and also cause undo confusion on the part of the worshiper. Second, he did not want whatever liturgy he devised to be taken as binding on everyone. Luther believed that if the liturgy was too universally observed, it would give the appearance that the order was “divinely appointed and absolutely binding laws.”² He feared this would lead people to believe that these ceremonies and rites were needed for salvation. Third, he was not really opposed to having the Divine Service in Latin. In fact, he stated, “For in no wise would I want to discontinue the service in the Latin language, because the young are my chief concern. And if I could bring it to pass, and Greek and Hebrew were familiar to us as the Latin and had as many fine melodies and songs, we would hold mass, sing, and read on successive Sundays in all four languages, German, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. I do not at all agree with those who cling to one language and despise all others.”³

The fourth reason he was reluctant to change the Divine Service into the vernacular was that the Latin mass that was in use up to this point possessed “fine melodies and songs” which would not harmonize well with the German language. New music needed to be written that fit the German words and style of singing better. In other words, it was already assumed by Luther that the Divine Service would be sung, and in order to keep the service as familiar as possible, the

¹ However, Luther does state in “An Order of Mass and Communion” concerning the administration of both kinds in the Sacrament, “Here I say this: Now that the gospel has been instilled among us these two whole years, we have humored the weak in faith long enough.... For, if after all this time they have not understood the gospel, it matters little whether they receive either form.” *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, vol. 53, p. 34.

² Luther, Martin. “A Christian exhortation to the Livonians”, *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, vol. 53, p. 48

³ Luther, Martin. “The German Mass and Order of Service”, *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, vol. 53, p. 63.

music had to be familiar to the people, but also allow for them to understand the words which they were singing. This is why the Lutheran church has come to be known as the “singing church.” For, when the Divine Services eventually started being done in the vernacular, it was no longer just the clergy or the choir doing the singing, but the entire congregation sang the liturgy. We will look at the origins and history of the use of singing and chant in the Divine Service, and also examine what led to its disuse.

The beginning of the Divine Service being done in the vernacular was Luther’s German Mass, the *Deutsche Messe*. This was the first time the entire service was done in German, the language of the people. But, as important as the words were, just as important to Luther was the music that accompanied the words of Divine Service. It was so important to Luther that he requested the Elector to send to him the two leading musicians of the land, Conrad Rupsch⁴ and Johann Walter. The latter wrote after this that Luther had kept him for three whole weeks working on the music for the German Mass.

Luther’s Mass combined congregational singing of hymns with chanting of the parts of the liturgy to the Gregorian chant tones that were in common use in the Latin mass. For example, he prescribed that the Introit either be a German hymn or a Psalm sung according to the First Tone.⁵ The Kyrie was sung to the same tone. The Collect was “read”⁶ by the “priest” “in monotone on F-fa-ut.”⁷ The Epistle was chanted to the Eighth Tone, but instead of the reciting note being on C it was the same as the reciting note of the Collect (F-fa-ut), a fifth lower to accommodate adult male voices. In place of the Gradual a German hymn was sung. Then, the Gospel was “read” on the

⁴ Conrad Rupsch is usually a forgotten name in the process, because he died in 1525. The *Deutsche Messe* was released in 1526.

⁵ Luther, Martin. “The German Mass and Order of Service.” *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, vol. 53, pp. 70-71.

⁶ Even though Luther uses the word “read” he clearly means “chant” since music is prescribed for the collect.

⁷ The F-fa-ut refers to the F on the second highest line of the bass clef.

Fifth Tone, but again it was transposed down a fourth.⁸ Luther employed the common practice of his day used in the chanting of the Passion. The Evangelist was chanted on the reciting note of A. The words of our Lord Jesus were chanted on the reciting note of F and followed more closely the inflections of the Sixth Tone. And, the other voices in the Gospel were chanted on the reciting note of C. The Creed was then sung in German using the hymn “In One True God We All Believe.”⁹ Next followed only one of two parts of the liturgy that was not sung, the Sermon. Then the paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer and admonition to the Lord’s Supper was also spoken. The Words of Institution,¹⁰ the German Sanctus,¹¹ the German Agnus Dei,¹² the Post-Communion Collect, and the Benediction are also all sung or chanted.

In the *Deutsche Messe* we see almost the entire Divine Service sung. The only two parts not sung were the sermon and the Luther’s paraphrase of the Lord’s Supper and Exhortation to the Lord’s Supper. This follows with the historic practice among Lutherans that there are only two parts of the liturgy that are not sung: the sermon and the General Prayer. These are not sung, because they are the words of man. All the words of God are sung. This is done to distinguish the words of God from the words of man, and to give honor and beauty to the words of God.

The *Deutsche Messe* reveals to us two things: One, that the Lutheran liturgy is meant to be a sung liturgy. Two, that even though one might think that this Order is the one that Lutherans are supposed to adopt for their worship, because Luther wrote it and it is the language of the people, the history does not bear it out. If one looks at the Orders for the remainder of the 16th century, and through the 17th century, one notices that the Lutheran Reformers do not follow the *Deutsche*

⁸ Luther, Martin. “The German Mass and Order of Service” *Luther’s Works*. American Edition. Vol. 53, p. 74.

⁹ Ibid. p. 78.

¹⁰ Chanted to the same tone as the Gospel. The Fifth Tone.

¹¹ “Isaiah, Mighty Seer, in Days of Old.” TLH 249.

¹² “O Christ, Thou Lamb of God.” TLH 147.

Messe, but instead adopt something closer to Luther's *Formula Missae* of 1523. These Orders follow Luther's desire to not lose the use of Latin in the Divine Service, and so, they retain the use of the historic Latin chants, and introduce parts of the liturgy in German, sometimes even employing both the Latin and German on the same part of the liturgy.

The reason for this is not given. But it would stand to reason that the parts of the liturgy sung in German just did not approach the beauty and familiarity of the Latin parts of the liturgy. There had been a perfect marriage of text and tune, and the German language just did not fit into the familiar music. This was done also, one can surmise, for the benefit of the children who were learning Latin. This was also a desire of Luther, and why he did not want to see the Latin chants fall into disuse.

The structure of the *Formula Missae* is thus: the *Introit* sung in Latin according to the Propers for the particular Lord's Day,¹³ the *Kyrie* sung in Latin according to its "melodies for different seasons,"¹⁴ the *Collect* for the day chanted in Latin to its usual tone,¹⁵ the *Epistle* is "read" in Latin,¹⁶ the *Gradual* with or without the *Alleluia* is sung in Latin,¹⁷ the *Sequence* for the Nativity of the Lord may be used during its season and the ones for the Holy Ghost at Pentecost,¹⁸ the *Gospel* in Latin follows with or without incense and candles,¹⁹ the *Creed* is sung in Latin,²⁰ the *Sermon* spoken in the vernacular is either preached here or before the *introit* to the mass.²¹ Next bread and wine are brought to the altar and made ready for consecration and distribution,²² then

¹³ Luther, Martin. "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenburg." Luther's Works, American Edition. Vol. 53, p. 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 23

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 23-24. Luther again uses the word "read," but the context clearly implies that the Epistle was to be chanted.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 24-25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 25.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 25.

²² *Ibid.* p. 26.

the Preface and Proper Preface are sung in Latin with their responses also in Latin,²³ the Words of Institution in Latin according to the same tone as the Lord's Prayer,²⁴ the *Sanctus* is sung by the choir in Latin with the bread and cup being elevated according to the customary rite during the Benedictus, after this the Lord's Prayer is "read" in Latin according to the same tone as the Words of Institution,²⁵ then the *Pax Domini* is chanted in Latin,²⁶ the *Agnus Dei* in Latin is sung during which the Celebrant communes himself then the people,²⁷ the Communion Collect is sung in Latin after the distribution,²⁸ then the Salutation is chanted in Latin,²⁹ followed by the *Benedicamus Domino* in Latin adding an "Alleluia according to its own melodies where and when it is desired,"³⁰ the mass concludes with the customary *Benediction* sung in Latin, or the Aaronic Benediction, or Psalm 67:6-7.³¹ This is the structure of the *Formula Missae*. It retains the use of Latin and of the customary chants. The only part of the mass that is not chanted, is the Sermon.

We can see in the *Formula Missae* the similarities of the structure of the liturgy in use by us today. And, it makes sense. For, the liturgies which follow in the 16th and 17th centuries appear to follow the structure of the *Formula Missae*, rather than the *Deutsche Messe*. We will look at a few now.

The first of these, which we will not be looking at in detail, since I wanted to stick to the liturgies and chants from which we inherit our liturgy, is the liturgy of Olavus Petri of Sweden³² from 1531. His liturgy was in the vernacular, but was also spoken, since it was meant to be used

²³ Ibid. p. 27.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 27-28.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 28. Luther, or at least the translator, again uses the word "read" when the context clearly means "sing."

²⁶ Ibid. p. 28.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 29.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 29.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 29.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 30.

³¹ Ibid. p. 30. Psalm 67:6-7: "God, even our own God shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the Earth shall fear Him." (KJV).

³² For a more detailed account of this read, *The Mass in Sweden* by Eric Esskildsen Yelverton.

as a “low mass”³³ used on weekdays. The “high mass” was still in Latin and was sung according to the tones of the time. It was still used on Sundays and Festivals. The structure of Olavus Petri’s 1531 liturgy remained intact, apart from minor revisions, and in use in Sweden until 1917. It remains the Lutheran rite used the longest unbroken by Rationalistic and Pietistic reforms. The revisions that did happen to this rite involved music. Some of the first revisions were to restore some of the Latin chants back into the liturgy. These revisions were overseen by Olavus’ brother Laurentius Petri, the first Lutheran Archbishop of Sweden, who completed the revisions of his brother’s liturgy in 1571. This rite allowed for the use of singing the various parts of the liturgy in either Latin or Swedish.³⁴ This liturgy was well received and remained in use, as said above, until 1917.³⁵

What we learn from this, and can also be seen in the Orders used among the German Reformers, is that chanting of the service is maintained where the Latin is retained. Where the vernacular is introduced, the service is either spoken, or a hymn is used to replace a part of the service, such as in the *Deutsche Messe*.

This is seen in two works that employed the use of the Latin language to replace parts of the liturgy that had been corrupted by the Papists with God’s Word and not the legends and re-sacrifice language used prior to the Reformation. These two works are Lucas Lossius of Lüneburg’s *Psalmodia hoc est, Cantica Sacra Veteris Ecclesiae Selecta* of 1553 and The Magdeburg Cathedral Book of 1613. These works supplied the Offices of Matins and Vespers with Invitatories, Antiphons, Responsories, Hymns, and Sequences for the entire Church year. These

³³ The terms “low church” and “high church” in their original use, simply referred to whether the mass was spoken or sung, respectively.

³⁴ Yelverton, Eric Esskildsen. *The Mass in Sweden*. Pp. 58-63.

³⁵ Two attempts were made to replace this liturgy, both of which failed. The so-called “Red Book” of John III (named because of the color of the binding) in 1576. And, the liturgy of Charles IX in 1600. This latter work led to the eventual eradication of the use of Latin in the liturgy of Sweden in 1614.

works were in Latin and used the Gregorian chant tones in use at that time. What we learn from these two works is first, that chanting in the services of the Lutheran Church was maintained from Pre-Reformation up to the middle of the 16th century and continued into the beginning of the 17th century. Second, we learn when putting these two works side by side, that the music and texts are the same or very similar. Therefore, we begin to see the continuity of use of that which came before. We also learn that until the Lutheran Church was blessed with quality musicians, music used in the Service and Offices was combined with the Latin words, and not the vernacular.

However, even in the 16th century attempts were made to introduce as much of the service in the vernacular as possible with the Latin chants dispersed in the liturgies. One of these examples is found in the Agenda of Veit Dietrich of Nürnberg. His “Order of the Mass on Lands where Schools Are”³⁶ is as follows: *Confiteor* (or what his devotion reminds him to pray) spoken in Latin, *Introitus* in sung Latin (or a sung German Psalm), *Kyrie eleison* sung in Latin, *Et in terra pax* sung in Latin, *Dominus vobiscum* spoken or sung or *Der HERR sei mit euch* spoken or sung, the choir answers “Amen,” then the Collect chanted in German introduced with the words, “*Lasst uns bitten*” (Let us pray),³⁷ the Epistle is then spoken in German, followed by the singing of the Gradual with the Alleluia (or a German Psalm is sung), the reading of the Gospel (or the History of the Apostles) follows in German, then the *Credo* is sung in Latin by the School (or the people sing the “*Glauben Deutsch*”³⁸), then the Sermon is preached in German which should always be on “the Gospel, the articles of Christian faith, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Institution of Baptism, the Keys and the Lord’s Supper”, the Admonition to Communion follows spoken in German, then the Words of Institution are chanted in German according to the tone outlined in the

³⁶ Dietrich, Veit. *Agend Büchlein Darinnen angezeigt wie die Predigt Gottes worts und die heiligen Sacramenten*. pp. 5-20.

³⁷ Veit Dietrich provides a long list of Collects for various days and occasions in the Church year.

³⁸ We All Believe in One True God, TLH 251, second tune.

Order, after this follows the *Sanctus* sung in Latin or German, then the Lord's Prayer is chanted in German to the tone outlined in the Order, the *Pax Domini* follows in German according to the set tone in the Order, then either the schoolchildren chant the *Agnus Dei* in Latin or the whole church sings "*Als Jesus Christus unser Herr*" to the tune of "*Es sind doch selig alle die*"³⁹, then is sung the *Responsorium Discubuit* or what fits with the Scriptures, followed by the Post-Communion Collect and Thanksgiving spoken in German, then the *Benedicamus Domino* in Latin, afterwards the people are blessed with one of four options.

We see in this Order the use of both the Latin chants, and we are starting to see other parts of the liturgy being sung in German either to Gregorian chant tones or hymns.

If we fast forward a few decades, we see this trend with more refinement. In the Leipzig Agenda of 1672 we are given the "Order and Form of Singing the Office of Communion both on the Festival and Common Sundays."⁴⁰ In this Agenda we see more music being sung in German with music that fits the German words. In fact, most of the Order has options to sing the various parts of the liturgy in German, with the exception of some of the Ordinaries of the liturgy, the *Kyrie*, *Gloria in Excelsis*, Preface and Proper Preface, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*, being sung in Latin. The Order also increases the number of tunes used. There are tunes for both the Common Sundays and for Festival days.

The Order begins with the *Introit* sung to the melody of the season from either the Lord's Day or Festival as long as they are pure and "rhyme with the time", then the *Kyrie eleison* also is sung to the tune of either the season or Festival, the *Gloria in Excelsis* with the *Et in terra pax* is sung next according to the time of the year, followed by the Collect sung in either Latin or German

³⁹ Matthias Greiter, 1525.

⁴⁰ *Agenda, Das ist: Kirchen-Ordnung / Wie sich die Pfarrherrn und Seelsorger in ihren Ampten und Diensten verhalten sollen: Für die Diener der Kirchen In Hertzog Heinrichen zu Sachsen.* pp. 78-119.

according to “the common tune, or the daily tune, or the festival tune”⁴¹, the Epistle is chanted according to the method that Luther outlined in the *Deutsche Messe* in German (or an alternate melody may be used), the Gospel is next and is likewise sung according to Luther’s recommendation in the *Deutsche Messe* (or another tune may be employed), after the Gospel the Creed is chanted to the common tone in Latin *and* the “*Wir Glauben*” in German, after the Sermon in German, the Preface and Proper Preface in Latin according to the tones provided in the Order, the Sanctus is sung next in Latin, then follows Luther’s paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer, followed by the Words of Institution according to Luther’s tone from the *Deutsche Messe* (or another tune is provided), then the Lord’s Prayer to the same tune that the Words of Institution were sung to in German (both tones are provided in the Order), the *Agnus Dei* sung in Latin follows (but on Festivals, or if there are many Communicants, the German song, “*Als Jesus Christus unser Heiland,*” and the German Sanctus, “*Isaiah, Mighty Seer, in Days of Old,*” and Psalm 111, and if there is still time, the *Agnus Dei* in German, following Communion the priest prays the Collect in German, then the *Benediction* in German. The hymn, “*Gott sei gelobet*”⁴² may be sung by the people following the Service.

In this Order, we can see how music and singing are used throughout. We can also see that unlike in the 16th century, more parts of the liturgy use the German words set to music, and are not just replaced with German hymns. This shows a desire on the part of the framers of these *Ordnung* to chant and sing as much of the service as possible, and sometimes that meant retaining the Latin chants until the music of the liturgy could be combined with the German words. The same is true a few years later with the release of the 1691 Leipzig Agenda. The only difference from the 1672 Leipzig Agenda is that a Sequence Hymn or German Psalm may follow the Epistle. We can see

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 79.

⁴² “O Lord, We Praise Thee.” TLH 313

where the Lutheran church gets its moniker “the singing Church” from these *Ordnung*. Most of the liturgy is sung with the exception of the Sermon and Luther’s paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer and Admonition to Communion.

After the effects of Rationalism and Pietism in the last half of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, a resurgence to reclaim what was lost can be seen in the liturgies of the last half of the 19th century. This can be seen in the work of Dr. Ludwig Schöberlein in 1865, *Schatz des liturgischen Chor- und Gemeindegesangs*, in which he compiled all of the music from the *Ordnung* of the 16th and 17th centuries. This work includes the various parts of the liturgy in German set to both chant tones (in four parts), and German hymns that were used for various parts of the liturgy. It is interesting to see the parts of the liturgy in their musical forms from the time of Martin Luther up through the middle of the 17th century. This also includes their musical forms for both common and festival Sundays. The *Introit*, *Kyrie*, *Gloria in Excelsis*, Salutation, Versicle, Collect, Epistle, Gradual and Hallelujah, Sequence, and Tract, Gospel with the *Laus tibi*, the Creed, Offertory (which included Psalm 111, *Discubuit Jesus*,⁴³ Psalm 51:12-14, and several others), the Preface and Proper Preface, the *Sanctus*, the Words of Institution, the Lord’s Prayer, *Pax Vobiscum*, *Agnus Dei*, Distribution hymns, Post-Communion Collects, Versicles, Salutation, *Benedicamus Domino*, and *Benediction* all are sung and have music from different ages assigned to them.

This work shows how all but the Sermon and Luther’s paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer (which is replaced in our liturgy with the General Prayer) are sung and chanted. The chants typically follow the Gregorian chant tones. In some places and times, parts of the liturgy were replaced with German hymns. Schöberlein presents all of this material in an easy to follow format.

⁴³ The German is “O Mensch, beweine dein Sünden groß.”

One final note about this work is it looks to the past and what has come before, and does not create any innovations of its own.

This brings us to the 20th century and the development of the music of our liturgy. *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) appears at first glance to be against the use of chant (and singing unless it is done by the congregation). This could not be further from the truth. Two factors that are important in the development of this hymnal are not evident at one's first look at the TLH: the first is the *Church Book for the Use of Evangelical Lutheran Congregations*. From this hymnal TLH borrowed extensively. Pretty much the whole "front part" of the TLH (with the exception of the Divine Services and Offices) is taken from the *Church Book*. The second is the release dates of the source materials that contains the chants for the *Introits and Graduals of the Church Year*, and *The Music for the Liturgy*. The hymnal was published in 1941. The music for the *Introits* (which put them to Gregorian chant tones) came out in 1942. The music for the *Graduals* (which used more Anglican type chants) came out in 1943. The chant tones for the Minister in *The Music for the Liturgy* did not come out until 1944. There are several things to point out about these factors.

With TLH's copying of the *Church Book*,⁴⁴ shows that the framers of TLH envisioned a similar work but with different music.⁴⁵ This is further evidenced by the music that was released for the *Introits*, *Graduals*, and chanting parts for the Minister. Music for the Minister was not included in the *Church Book*, even though it has multiple musical selections for the congregation for each part of the liturgy.

Whether this was poor planning on the part of the framers of TLH or poor foresight, the delay in the release of the chant tones for the *Introits*, *Graduals* and for the Minister (combined

⁴⁴ Including all of its typos.

⁴⁵ The music for the Church Book was arranged by Harriet Reynolds Krauth, the daughter of Charles Porterfield Krauth.

with a limited availability) led to the Minister speaking his part. This in turn led to the disuse of chant among the congregations of those who used TLH. With the release of *Lutheran Worship* in 1982, steps were made to restore some of the chanting that was lost. There were many parishes that did not receive this change well, since they had been without chanting for over four decades.

So now, we are confronted with a mindset that thinks either chanting is “something Roman Catholics do,” or “something guys today are doing.” The reality, however, is that the disuse of chanting among Lutherans started with the ages of Pietism and Rationalism, and continued into the 19th and 20th centuries. In the first two and half centuries of the Lutheran Church the majority of the Divine Service was sung or chanted. Today, sadly, we see that this is not the case in many parishes. It has developed a domino effect where since there is less singing and chanting in the parishes, there are now less skilled singers and chanters in those same parishes. Singing is a skill, and if it is not used, or if the requirements for singing are dumbed down, that skill is weakened and so the music life of the Church suffers.

The Lutheran Church has always been a reforming church, meaning, it always looks to restore what was lost that serves the Gospel well and removes that which harms it. Music is meant to enhance and give beauty to the Word of God, and therefore, wherever the chanting of the Words of God in the liturgy can be restored, keeping in mind Luther’s admonition to have concern for the weak in faith, it should be restored. For, just as the Lord God instructed King David to set His Words to music when writing the Psalms for use in the worship of the Temple in order that His Name might be praised and glorified, we too should praise and glorify God’s holy Name through our song. Lutherans have always chanted to give beauty to God’s Word in the Divine Service, let us continue this practice so that we may reap the benefits for another 500 years.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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