

Mission and Worship in a Secular Age: Reflections on Brazilian Lutheran Worship Movements

Mário Rafael Yudi Fukue

Introduction

Over the past forty years, worship has become a point of difference and disagreement in the *Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil* (IELB, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil). In this development, the IELB is like churches in other parts of the world. For example, I know that in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the United States that worship practices, forms, and ideas often break down into two streams: traditional and contemporary; liturgical and non-liturgical; transcultural and contextual. It has become this way in the IELB too. I also know that in the Missouri Synod some speak about “worship wars.” I fear a “worship war” could start in the IELB too.

Talk and concerns about “war,” “conflict,” and “antagonism” over worship are bad signs. There is, however, at least one good thing: Everybody still understands that worship is central to Christian identity, life, and witness. Worship wouldn’t matter so much if it weren’t so important to being and living as a Christian and for showing others what it means to be Christian.

So, we should not avoid talking about differences, disagreements, and conflicts about worship. We should try to understand worship better. This issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* gives me an opportunity to try to do this. In keeping with this issue’s theme of “mission and worship,” the article begins with a short discussion of mission and worship, and then an outline of how the IELB has seen divergence and antagonism develop over worship. After that, the article will introduce philosopher Charles Taylor and his work on the “secular age” to analyze what the developments in worship imply for how the churches in Brazil stand with respect to the wider society. Put very briefly, this article will argue that the divergences and conflicts found today in the IELB reflect different and inadequate ways



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of coping with what philosopher Charles Taylor calls “a secular age.”¹ For Taylor, a secular age is one in which Christians can no longer assume privilege and influence in a society. Rather, their religion and way of life are called into question by a fully secular outlook; that is, one in which gods or the transcendent are unimportant for leading a healthy productive life. Today, the very idea of “religion” is contested. It is now expected that Christian beliefs and values require apologetics, that Christian worship needs validation, that Christian outreach needs justification. But Taylor does more than offer a historical explanation for the situation. The article will show how he also gives a helpful framework for thinking about our outlook, lives, and practices, including mission and worship.

Mission and Worship

Lutherans think about mission and worship in different ways, as this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* shows. Such differences are not necessarily problems, but they do mean that it will be good if I am clear about how I understand the relationship of mission and worship.

First, mission and worship always go together because God carries out His mission (*missio Dei*) through His Word, and corporate worship services are the regular events in which one expects to hear the Word of the Gospel proclaimed and to receive the Sacraments as a “visible word” (Ap XIII 5).² God’s mission has been “reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). God did this in Christ, and He continued this through Paul and Timothy and through their co-workers and successors. God continued this work by giving them “the ministry of reconciliation” and “the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18–19). From the first days of the Church, this ministry has been conducted and this message has been proclaimed when believers come together for the Word and the Sacraments. In this way, mission and worship always go together.

Second, because worship involves God’s Word, we also can understand that mission and worship always go together by working the faith and faithfulness that leads to witness in the world. Faithful worship will “awaken and strengthen our faith” (AC XIII 1);³ faith will always “yield good fruit and good works” (AC VI 1);⁴ and good works will be occasions by which Christians will testify to their faith. The mission of God occurs in worship, but worship leads to the mission of God taking place through the lives of believers in the world.

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Third, mission and worship go together in the sense that corporate worship itself is a testimony and witness to the world. This is an anthropological observation, not a strictly Christian one. Stonehenge and the Sphinx are remains that still testify to religious beliefs and practices of people dead for thousands of years. But the connection is true for Christians too. Church buildings old and new testify to beliefs and practices even when

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services are not being held. And the Divine Service itself tells anyone who approaches that something is happening. Corporate worship itself is witness to the world.

This understanding of mission and worship focuses on the Word of God. But the preached Gospel is not a mantra, and the Sacraments are not magic. They do not work *ex opere operato*. So, it is always important *how* things are said and done. The kind of language and the order of service always matter. The music, postures, gestures, and settings involved in worship also always matter. I believe that most Lutherans would agree with this much. But it is clear that they do not always agree with how language, order, music, postures, etc. matter. The situation in the IELB illustrates this.

Worship Movements in IELB

God's mission takes place through His Word, and it is accomplished when the Word is received by faith. Corporate worship is the center of this exchange. Therefore, we can affirm that worship is mission, because in worship God addresses people through Word and sacraments. In the IELB, there is no dispute about this. The IELB affirms this and also that God wants the Gospel to be proclaimed to every people.

But there are clear divergences in the IELB concerning the order and form of worship, the emphasis on Holy Communion, adiaphora, and the role of music in worship. I believe that those differences should not be ignored. However, the current problem in the IELB's worship landscape is radicalization and especially the lack of dialogue. In this way, divergence tends to absolutize and crystallize division. I believe that, just as the *missio Dei* as an act of speaking of God through the church is an inherent part of the church, it is imperative that everyone dialogues about the tensions and divergences regarding worship.

Some historical background is needed to properly understand the current situation on worship in the IELB. The IELB developed out of Missouri Synod missionary work. This was not an "external" mission, but an "internal" mission, because it was about serving Germans in Brazil. As heirs of the culture and liturgy of German Lutheranism, Lutheran churches on Brazilian soil did not face great difficulties in inheriting or transplanting the culture and liturgy of the Missouri Synod.⁵ The German language predominated well into the 20th century, and attention to liturgical questions only became significant after the Second Vatican Council.⁶ As a result, significant liturgical changes were introduced in the 1980s. There were some discordant voices, as with many changes. But there is no record of major turbulence.⁷

In parallel with the progress of liturgical changes, the IELB also registered a gradual growth in the diversity of musical instruments in worship. Despite the prejudice of some pastors, the use of the guitar became widespread. Due to the practicality of use and transport, the instrument is still widely used by pastors serving mission stations. From the 1980s to the mid-2000s, the Evangelical Lutheran Youth Organization of Brazil (JELB) composed songs, produced new songbooks and released new CDs at biennial National

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Youth Gatherings. These new songs would not be restricted to youth meetings but would also appear in the divine services of the IELB, alongside the hymns of the hymnal.

Thus, liturgical awareness in the IELB was and continues to be a gradual process belonging to the last four decades. In these forty years, without fanfare or rupture, liturgical improvements were organically promoted in many ways, including studies and lectures at national conventions and gatherings; reformulation of the hymnal; introduction of different liturgical vestments; publication of manuals and literature on worship and liturgy; and publication of articles in theological magazines and in the official magazine of the Synod, the *Mensagem Luterano (Lutheran Messenger)*.

But recently this progress led by the church body has slowed. Liturgical innovations did not keep pace with changes and developments in the 2010s. Attention to the youth, which had been strong at the end of the 20th century, waned in the 21st century. As a result, disagreements and diverging practices over worship and liturgy have developed in the IELB.

As in places such as the United States, the divergences fall into contemporary and traditional streams. I will refer to the contemporary stream as a “Contemporary Worship Movement” (CWM), and to the traditional stream as a “Liturgical Movement” (LM). I am not affirming that there are organized parties or groups in those streams. CWM and LM stands for tendencies and distinct movements which diverge in the IELB.

The CWM has an outlook similar to that of Brazilian Pentecostal churches such as *Igreja Batista da Lagoinha* (Little Lake Baptist Church), the rock band *Diante do Trono* (Before the Throne), and to foreign megachurches like Hillsong. Its basic assumption is that the style of worship should be congenial to the tastes and habits of a society, not alien to them. The CWM also contends that, since people are different, with different needs and visions, it is unlikely for the same type of worship style to be suitable for everyone, and it will be counterproductive to worship to insist on a uniform style. The CWM in the IELB proposes a type of “worship style” suited to certain Brazilian contexts, just as traditional worship and, eventually, a worship with high liturgy, would be suitable for other contexts. For example, several congregations of the IELB use this argument to offer contemporary worship, be it exclusively or along with a traditional Divine Service. CWM proponents advocate adopting contemporary Christian music and dropping the use of traditional artifacts, such as liturgical vestments.

The Liturgical Movement, by contrast, promotes *continuity in worship*. Its outlook is similar to Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches. This excerpt on liturgy from the Anglican Communion also represents the outlook of the LM:

Liturgy is not just a matter of taste, or churchmanship. Liturgy is central to Christianity and is an integral part of the Christian family’s relationship with God. The signs, symbols and sacred actions which form

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public prayer and worship spring from the language and events of God's own self-revelation.⁸

Therefore, instead of seeing worship forms as needing to be responsive and adapted to context, the LM tends to see liturgy as beyond any single culture because it derives from God. This argument can be found in online blogs, Facebook pages, and other social media which affirm to be “confessional Lutheran.” Missouri Synod theologian Arthur Just called the liturgy “transcultural,” and his description and analysis reflect the LM outlook. Just challenges the “common assumption today that the liturgy must reflect the language and ethos of the current culture.”⁹ This assumption, however, yields liturgies that “are not transcultural. At most, they will give only immediate satisfaction.”¹⁰ But the so-called “historic liturgy,” an order of service developed since ancient times for the rite of Word and Sacrament, is “transcendent and transcultural because of its biblical foundation. It is clean, elegant, and simple... .”¹¹ Just emphasizes the word *rite*, because rituals are basic and symbolically important in every culture. He uses the example of sporting events:

People are bound together by the ritual events of the game as they participate with enthusiasm in the same patterns time after time. Whether they realize it or not, the ritual of the game is a significant reason why they come, and the satisfaction they experience is as much from participating in the ritual as it is in the outcome of the game.¹²

Accordingly, the LM is inclined to call for exclusive use of older liturgical orders, and to promote gestures like the sign of the cross, the use of a crucifix, and the adoption of rubrics such as raising of the Host in the Eucharist.

One thing that both movements share is *innovation*. Both movements propose something new to the situation. A common problem with their innovations is the fast pace at which they are introduced. The IELB took fifteen years to consolidate the use of different liturgical garments and the use of the Lectionary Triennale. Compared to this, the CWM and the LM want to make changes almost overnight. This sometimes generates unnecessary crises among congregation members. For example, as a university chaplain, I have had to counsel a woman who doubted the validity of Holy Communion in her congregation because she read on Facebook that every Lutheran altar should have a crucifix, something her congregation chose not to have.

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It is important to recognize that these two movements in the IELB agree in principle with the Lutheran Confessions about justification by faith and about the preaching of the gospel and the giving of the sacraments as God's means for obtaining this faith. In a congregation that only offers contemporary services, for example, all services include the Sacrament of the Altar. Put another way, both the CWM and the LM in the IELB agree that corporate worship is the prime center of the divine speech acts of the *missio Dei*. Moreover, they agree because this is in keeping with the Scriptures, creeds, confessions. In other words, the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions remain the *loci orthodoxiae* which provide the structuring criteria of worship.

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Nevertheless, there are disagreement and antagonism. The biggest disagreement is over the freedom to change the liturgy. The CWM claims that to be relevant and intentional in outreach, the Divine Service has to be made simpler. Its proponents believe that the changes in the forms and the exclusion of the movable (ordinary) parts of worship do not compromise the *loci orthodoxiae*, which would be guaranteed by the maintenance of the fixed parts of the *ordo*: Baptism, Word, Holy Supper, and Prayers. The diversity and/or suppression of traditional rites are based in the freedom given by article VII of the Augsburg Confession: "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere" (AC VII 3).¹³ But the LM thinks that the historic liturgy stands above culture and should not be altered simply for cultural relevance. Some go as far as to claim that the traditional order of service (*ordo*) is basic to Lutheran identity. Open antagonism over this difference does not reach official channels in the IELB. However, several pastors and some presidents of IELB's Circuits have shared their worries about conflicts regarding worship. There is no "worship war" yet, but the initial conflicts have already damaged congregations and the faith of some members.

Mission and Worship in "a Secular Age"

Both the CWM and the LM are committed to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and both agree about the main elements of Lutheran confessional worship. This means that their differences are about how to understand and live in the wider culture. The CWM believes that worship should try to align with the wider convictions and values of Brazilian society, but the LM is suspicious about such attempts.

Since both seem to agree theologically, some might conclude that their differences and difficulties are about how to interpret the cultural situation theologically, and about

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theological priorities for Christian life and witness in the cultural situation. Questions like these would be relevant:

To what extent or in what ways is being “countercultural” necessary or desirable for Christians in evangelism and worship?

To what extent or in what ways is being “culturally relevant” necessary or desirable for Christians?

To what extent or in what ways should the Church be active in engaging non-Christians through evangelism, civil activities, and worship?

I agree that questions such as these matter, but I would argue that both the CWM and the LM usually ignore a more basic problem, one that affects both mission and worship. I believe that they ignore this problem because it comes from a new development for Christians in Brazil, as well as in most of both South America and North America and also Europe. This new development is a radical change in the social situation for Christians.

In an influential book, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls this situation “a secular age.” For Taylor, the term “secular” describes a society that had gone from one

in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith (at least not in God, or the transcendent). Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one’s faith. There will be people who feel bound to give it up, even though they mourn its loss. This has been a recognizable experience in our societies, at least since the mid-nineteenth century. There will be many others to whom faith never even seems an eligible possibility. There are certainly millions today of whom this is true.¹⁴

“Secularity” in this sense represents a massive shift for many, but especially for Christians. It was their God in whom “it was virtually impossible not to believe.”

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This description of a “secular age” fits Brazil. One clear sign is declining church attendance. Brazil is a historically Catholic country, and while many Brazilians still identify as Catholic, they do not attend Mass regularly. The story of a young woman named Alana illustrates this. Alana had been a committed Catholic who even brought her sister into the Church. But later Alana stopped attending worship herself. She said: “I am still Roman Catholic, but I do not attend church. Everyone has her opinion, following whatever she wants... There is no one way to be happy. I don’t think not attending church is a bad thing. It is up to the individual.”¹⁵ Another sign of the secular age in Brazil is that young Brazilians increasingly do not identify as religious at all. For example, the polling organization Datafolha recently found that the number of non-religious and atheist young people (16 to 24 years old) surpasses the numbers of both Roman Catholics and Protestants in São Paulo.¹⁶

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“Secular” does not only describe external social conditions like religious plurality. It also describes the outlook for nearly everyone who lives in such a society. Taylor provides an analysis of this outlook. He proposes that we understand life in a secular age as taking place within an “immanent frame.” This means that “immanence” alone is natural, and “transcendence,” like gods and spirits, is supernatural, if it even exists. For most of human history, people took for granted that there were beings and powers that transcended the visible, material world of everyday existence. Their outlook included “transcendence.” “Transcendence” was part of nature. But this is no longer the case. Today, “immanence” is a kind of “frame” that determines the everyday outlook. Immanence is generally assumed to be the way the natural world is. In an immanent frame, the transcendent realm of gods and spirits is not necessarily denied, but it is not understood as part of the natural world. Taylor explains, “[T]his frame constitutes a ‘natural’ order, to be contrasted to a ‘supernatural’ one, an ‘immanent’ world, over against a possible ‘transcendent’ one.”¹⁷ Demon possession illustrates the hold of the immanent frame. Many Christians in modern industrialized nations never think about whether anyone is under the power of the devil. Even among the Christians who do, demonic activity is almost always regarded as extraordinary, and it calls for special measures, i.e., exorcism. This outlook reflects the hold of the immanent frame. But its hold on modern Christians is illustrated even better with the idea of miracles. Today, a “miracle” is something “supernatural” by definition. Taylor explained this thinking well: A miracle is now assumed to be

a kind of punctual hole blown in the regular order of things from the outside, that is from the transcendent. Whatever is higher must thus come about through holes pierced in the regular, natural order, within whose

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normal operation there is no mystery. This is curiously enough, a view of things shared between materialists and Christian fundamentalists.¹⁸

The illustration of a miracle shows that Taylor's concept of "secular" is broader than the usual ones that understand secular as excluding spiritual or divine. This means that the inhabitants of the immanent frame are not restricted to materialists, but also include many traditionally minded Christians. So, his idea of "secular" and his concept of the "immanent frame" are more helpful for Christian thinking about worship and mission than the more common frameworks. Taylor's analysis permits a more nuanced description. We can see this in his distinction between "takes" and "spins" on the immanent frame. This distinction particularly helpful to explain both the CWM and the LM, and also to suggest ways to think beyond their differences and antagonisms in a way that promotes the mission of the Church.

The terms "take" and "spin" refer to the two fundamentally different ways there are to live in the immanent frame.¹⁹

A "take" is when you recognize and appreciate that your own understanding of things—your own *take*—is contestable. Taylor says that this is like standing "in that open space where you can feel the winds pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief."²⁰ You have your own convictions and values, and you live according to them. They are your *take*. But you know and sense the power of very different convictions and values that lead others to a different life. They are their *takes*. What makes them "takes" is that you "can actually feel some of the force of each opposing position."²¹

By contrast, a "spin" is when you hold and live according to your convictions and values without feeling the force of other positions and beliefs. Reformed philosopher James K. A. Smith described a "spin" as "an overconfident 'picture' within which we can't imagine it being otherwise, and thus smugly dismiss those who disagree."²²

Taylor applied the ideas of takes and spins to different attitudes about the immanent frame itself, namely, whether and how one was open to transcendence or whether and how one held that the universe is closed to transcendence. For example, Taylor identified the Academy with those who held an "immanent spin" or "spin of closure."²³ He cited sociologist Max Weber as an example, because Weber

speaks sneeringly of those who would go on believing in the face of 'disenchantment' as having to make an 'Opfer des Intellekts' (a sacrifice of the intellect). 'To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he rather return silently,... The arms of the Churches are open widely and compassionately for him.'²⁴

This is an "immanent spin" because it openly dismisses those who will not agree about the closed universe. In a similar way, the Christian fundamentalists that Taylor alluded to

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when discussing miracles often reflect a “transcendent spin” or “spin of openness.” A lot of contemporary apologetics,” said Smith, “bent on ‘defending the faith’ against the charges of new atheists, seem to offer a transcendent ‘spin’ as the alternative to immanent ‘spin.’”²⁵

An “immanent take” or “closed take,” by contrast, recognizes and appreciates the transcendent, or at least those who lead their lives by something more than the visible, material world holds. Smith offered the example an HBO documentary about Dolores Hart, an actress who gave up a career in movies and television to become a Benedictine nun.

One can imagine what sort of account of this would be generated by closed spin—just consider Christopher Hitchens’s excoriating book on Mother Teresa. But interestingly, that’s not what we get in the HBO documentary. Indeed, the documentary is a refreshing example of a closed take. The point of view is respectfully puzzled, admirably incredulous. On the one hand, Hart’s journey and choice seem unimaginable, almost unintelligible; on the other hand, they testify to a ‘something more’ that holds the attention of both the director and the viewers.²⁶

An example of a “transcendent take” would be Charles Taylor himself. Taylor is a Roman Catholic, and his Christian convictions were apparent in *A Secular Age*. But the book was not a “spin” on the Christian God in particular or the transcendent in general, “bent on ‘defending the faith’ against” unbelievers. It is a book written by a Christian who “fe[el]t the winds pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief.”²⁷

When we apply Taylor’s distinction between “takes” and “spins” to the situation in the IELB, we can see that both the CWM and the LM have adopted transcendent spins. This is easier to recognize with the LM, because it promotes the ongoing use of traditional orders, forms, and practices and dismisses attempts to align with some features of the prevailing culture. The LM is a spin because it does not recognize the pull or force of others. This does not imply that traditional forms and ways are necessarily deficient, but the question about how adequate they are today in a secular age is rarely considered in a fair, objective manner. It is usually assumed that the old ways are sufficient. But the CWM is also a spin because their proponents also often see no need for a thorough self-examination. They focus on settings and styles, but frequently they give little attention to the pull or force of others.

A Better Approach: Mission and Worship as “Takes” on Transcendence in Today’s Immanent Frame

The differences and disagreements between the CWM and the LM are real, and they call for attempts to converge on worship, not to continue to diverge. But both movements are usually *spins*. Addressing this fact is a more basic and pressing need. When Christians have a transcendent spin in a secular age, they are confident and unquestioning about their

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own picture of the world, and they tend to be dismissive of other pictures, such as an atheist's or a pagan's or a Muslim's. Christians with a transcendent take are not doubters, but they recognize that some other pictures that should not be dismissed as ignorant, superstitious, or self-serving. Christians with a transcendent take likely will be more empathetic and also more capable of witnessing in ways non-Christians can grasp, but also more empathetic to fellow Christians who feel the pressures of life in the immanent frame. Christians in a secular age, in Brazil and elsewhere, should adopt transcendent takes on their situations and avoid transcendent spins.

Being Christian with transcendent takes is a very big topic, even when the discussion is restricted to only one society like Brazil. In concluding this article, I want to make a few recommendations for Christians to adopt takes rather than spins, based on the three points about mission and worship that the article began with.

The first point about mission and worship is that they always go together, because the mission of God takes place regularly and intentionally in corporate worship. Life in a secular age makes understanding and appreciating this fact more important. Life in a secular age means questions, challenges, and alternatives to being Christian and being religious in general are part of everyone's existence. Sometimes Christians will experience uncertainty and doubt, and occasionally these will be new experiences. As a result, corporate worship in a secular age will become increasingly like the opportunities for witness and evangelism found outside of worship, even when the services are attended only by regular members. This is because life in a secular age, with its immanent frame and its plurality of religions and philosophies, will give Christians themselves reasons to have new and challenging questions and concerns about God, Christ, creation, and salvation. Therefore, Christians themselves will come to worship more frequently rather like the crowds who went out to hear Jesus or the people who asked the apostles to speak to them.

Life in a secular age means questions, challenges, and alternatives to being Christian and being religious in general are part of everyone's existence.

This situation calls for worship that reflects a transcendent take. Worship that reflects a transcendent spin, whether like the CWM or the LM, will do little for these questions and concerns, because a spin does not take them seriously. Worship as a transcendent take will be willing to deal with them. There could be many ways to practice this. But one constant should be the willingness to discuss, adapt, supplement, and reform almost anything so that the Gospel in Word and Sacraments will indeed be good news for life in a secular age.

The second point is that mission and worship always go together by working the faith and faithfulness that leads to witness in the world. I propose that worship as a transcendent spin will be less likely to promote faithful evangelism outside of worship than will worship as a transcendent take. I acknowledge the Lutheran confession that God gives His Spirit as He pleases (AC V), and so I do not propose this as a certainty. But from our standpoint

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before the world, worship as a transcendent take is more responsive to life in a secular age and, therefore, it is more likely to strengthen the faith of Christians and to promote their faithfulness in their lives. This means not only more opportunities to witness, but also more willingness to witness and a stronger, more robust message to share.

The third point is that mission and worship go together in the sense that corporate worship itself is a testimony and witness to the world. How Christians worship and how they deal with worship testifies to others. I will begin with how Brazilians deal with worship. As presented earlier, worship in the IELB has become a matter of divergence and even antagonism. Like many others, I believe that the Christian Church can and should accommodate a variety of worship practices and styles, but this must always be done with mutual respect and support. Unfortunately, the situation in the IELB seems to be one where respect and support are lessening, not growing.

However, although there are radical and polarized movements in the clash over worship, the vast majority of IELB members are moderate and open to dialogue. I believe that these moderates and irenic Christians should actively prevent worship from becoming a battleground. The IELB needs to extract the best of both movements. The time has come to re-prioritize worship, providing an organic development of liturgy, considering that the liturgical tradition is open to change. I agree with Bryan Spinks: “Organic development of liturgy, *providing that the liturgical tradition is open to change*, will probably be more successful than liturgical genetic engineering where we are always intervening to *make* the liturgy contemporary.”²⁸ Spinks’s qualification is significant, but I am hopeful. The LM recognizes that the so-called “historic liturgy” has undergone modifications over the centuries, and so it is not opposed to change in principle. I suspect that the LM’s hesitance with the CWM comes from thinking it is more like “liturgical genetic engineering,” as Spinks puts it, than organic development.

Again, I am hopeful. I believe we will witness a movement of convergence, where both movements will dialogue and work together, merging the old with the new. There is room for this. One reason for hope comes from the younger generations themselves. What Dan Kimball wrote about the North American situation applies in Brazil, too:

The ironic thing is that, among emerging generations, there is a desire to seek the ancient. There is even a backlash against the church feeling like a modern business. So a revival of liturgy and other ancient disciplines, when brought back with life and meaning, are a desired approach to worship in the emerging church. I’m not suggesting we abandon all contemporary forms of worship and music. I’m simply suggesting we don’t ignore 2,000 years of church history. There are beautiful expressions of worship from various time periods we can integrate into how we worship today.²⁹

In Brazil, emerging churches are recovering liturgical elements. For example, Vineyard Praise Ministry includes the ecclesiastical year in its worship lessons. Moreover,

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there is a noticeable growth in young people's interest in the rich liturgical tradition of the Christian Church. Many people have left Pentecostal or emerging churches to seek liturgical churches. These people hold a genuine interest in traditional forms of worship. They seek the “take” in transcendence that the liturgy rooted in the Christian tradition can offer. In this case, Lutheranism, having a “liturgical DNA,” can be a strong evangelistic voice. So, conversation and convergence between the CWM and the LM could take place in this vein.

Another way to overcome polarization would be to strive for excellence. Too many current Gospel songs in Brazil import a pop musicality. The industry of Brazilian Contemporary Christian Music is far less diverse and rich than in the 1980s. In Brazil, Contemporary Christian Music is just called “*Worshippismo*” (“worshipism”), and it receives criticism even from emergent and Pentecostal churches, like “the lyrics are nonsense and sounds like a mantra with endless repetitions.”³⁰ The youth in the *Juventude Evangélica Luterana do Brasil* (JELB) also perceive this problem. In “*95 Teses para a Igreja Hoje*” (“95 Theses for the Church Today”), they write:

Thesis 50: We regret the transformation of public worship of God into moments of pure “gospel” entertainment, with the presence of auditorium animators and pastors who, empty of the Word, fill the people with nonsense and catchphrases that have nothing to do with the simplicity and depth of the Gospel of Christ (Rom 12:1–2).

Thesis 51: There must be awareness of what is sung. May we be faithful to the Word when it says, “I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.” May the songs and hymns be more God-centered than the first person singular (I). We also reject songs that consist of endless repetitions, in order to take the people to induced ecstasy, weakening the mind to receive the Word and give God rational worship, according to the Scriptures (Rom 12:1–2; 1 Cor 14:15; John 3:30; 1 Cor 14:15).³¹

Brazilian Lutheran Christians need to meet the need to compose new musical expressions. But the excellence and aesthetical competence of musicians of the CWM can overcome the industrialization and homogenization of Christian music by promoting indigenous Brazilian Christian music. Lutheran musicians and artists have an opportunity to bless all of Brazilian Christianity with biblical and theological well-founded songs. Would it be beautiful to participate in a Divine Service with a *Kyrie* and *Te Deum Laudamus* in *pagode* or *chorinho* style?

The possibilities are countless. What I am proposing seeks to follow Norman Nagel, an Australian Lutheran and a long-time professor at Concordia Seminary in the Missouri Synod but known to many Brazilian Lutherans. He saw the “living heritage” of liturgy as something constantly being renewed: “Each generation receives from those who went before, and, in making that tradition of the Divine Service its own, adds what best may

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serve in its own day—the living heritage and something new.”³² At the very least, we can have contemporary songs and highly liturgical services coexisting and cooperating in the same Synod and dialoguing in order to prevent misgivings and excesses. But personally, I would rather see the emergence of blended worship in which the traditional *Ordo* is blended with contemporary language and musicality. In the case of Brazil, this means songs that go beyond European anthems and Pop-Rock, but which bring typical elements of Brazilian musicality. Perhaps this would be the beginning of a true inculturation of the Lutheran worship on Brazilian soil.³³ It will be a paradoxical service, in which the gospel will be proclaimed, and, at the same time, church members will be taught through liturgical richness and not-yet-Christians will see the gospel as “takes” on transcendence that point beyond the immanent frame of a secular age.

My dream is to see my daughters singing the beautiful *Magnificat* and Renascere Praise’s “I surrender” peacefully in a Divine Service. Let’s delight in our living heritage and something new. Not only must we avoid war, but with an attitude of convergence and inculturation, we can proclaim the gospel of Christ to non-Christians while discipling Christians. In this convergence, worship will remain the place par excellence of performative interaction between the God of grace and human beings. Let’s talk!

Endnotes

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

² Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 220.

³ Kolb/Wengert, 47.

⁴ Kolb/Wengert, 40. See also FC Ep IV 6: “That good works follow from true faith (when it is not a dead faith but a living faith), as certainly and without doubt as fruit from a good tree.” Kolb/Wengert, 498.

⁵ Paulo W. Buss, *Uma Proposta Litúrgica para a IELB, Estudo apresentado à 50a Convenção Nacional da IELB*, São Leopoldo, janeiro de 1986. Even so, Paulo Buss states that “the Germans of Brazil did not peacefully accept all the liturgical practices that were proposed to them.” For example, congregations were not used to the inscription of Holy Communion, the sign of the cross, a more regular attendance at services and Holy Communion, and the modified use of private confession. Furthermore, because of their poorer financial conditions, simple churches (chapels) without bells, pews without kneelers, simple wooden crosses instead of more exquisite crucifixes, black cassocks instead of full liturgical vestments were common.

⁶ Ely Prieto e Oscar Lehenbauer, *O culto Lutero In Material de Estudos da 56a Convenção Nacional da IELB*.

Prieto and Lehenbauer write that in the post-war period, “particularly from 1945 to 1960, liturgical questions were still not given much attention.”

⁷ In the 1970s, the IELB had to deal internally with a Pentecostal movement inspired by the Church Growth Movement. We will not address this movement because the iconoclastic character of the worship of this movement was the result of the charismatic-Pentecostal theology of the group rather than a practice arising from liturgical reflection within IELB.

⁸ From “Liturgy.” <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/theology/liturgy.aspx>

- ⁹ Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 28.
- ¹⁰ Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 28–29.
- ¹¹ Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 32.
- ¹² Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 33.
- ¹³ Kolb/Wengert, 42.
- ¹⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.
- ¹⁵ Itamar Melo, “Avanço do secularismo é apontado como uma das causas do enfraquecimento da Igreja Católica,” *Religião. Gaúcha Zero Hora*, April, 24th, 2022. <https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/comportamento/noticia/2016/04/avanco-do-secularismo-e-apontado-como-uma-das-causas-do-enfraquecimento-da-igreja-catolica-5762633.html>
- ¹⁶ Taís Carrança, “Jovens ‘sem religião’ superam católicos e evangélicos em SP e Rio,” *BBC News*. BBC, May 9th, 2022. (<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-61329257>).
- ¹⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.
- ¹⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 547.
- ¹⁹ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 92–97. My reading of Taylor on “takes” and “spins” has been informed by Smith’s interpretation.
- ²⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549.
- ²¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549.
- ²² Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 95.
- ²³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549.
- ²⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 550. The Weber quote is from “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber*, trans. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), 155.
- ²⁵ Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 96.
- ²⁶ Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 97.
- ²⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549.
- ²⁸ Bryan Spinks, *The Worship Mall: Contemporary Responses to Contemporary Culture* (New York: Church Publishing, 2010), 215, emphasis original. See also James Marriott’s discussion of inculturation and worship in “Reframing the Worship Wars in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: An Analysis of Ordo and Music through the Lens of Inculturation and Cultural Hermeneutics” (PhD dissertation, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2017). I wish to acknowledge Dr. Marriott’s influence on my thinking about worship.
- ²⁹ Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 73.
- ³⁰ In one episode of a “Paxtorzão” podcast, the criticism to “worshippismo” is about the poor and simplicity of this type of music (https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=paxtorz%C3%A3o+worship)
- ³¹ Juventude Evangélica Luterana do Brasil. *95 Teses para a Igreja Hoje*. JELB, 2021. (<https://www.ielb.org.br/noticias/visualizar/7299/institucional/politica-de-privacidade>)
- ³² Norman Nagel, “Introduction,” *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), 6.

³³ Raul Blum writes that “a Lutheran attitude towards worship is always one of prudence. Radicalizations provoke reactions and dissatisfaction. If we always want changes, ignoring our heritages, we will be in constant search of novelties and will not settle for anything. On the other hand, if we do not admit changes, we run the risk of following an order of worship simply for the sake of following it, without reflecting on its content.” (Raul Blum, “*A Palavra imutável num mundo*,” Mensageiro Luterano (Porto Alegre: Editora Concórdia, maio 2014 - publicado no site oficial em junho de 2020: <https://www.ielb.org.br/noticias/visualizar/6994/a-palavra-imutavel-num-mundo-mutavel&r=1&r=1&r=1&r=1&r=1&r=1&r=1&r=1>)