
Loehe's Liturgical Imagination: Inspiration for Christian Identity and Mission

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Introduction

“I don't make statements. I make pictures.”

Those are the words of the young artist Kurt Barnert toward the end of the film *Never Look Away* by the German filmmaker Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (German title: *Werk ohne Autor: Sieh niemals weg*). Kurt's enigmatic, photographic paintings have generated some interest. At an exhibition of his work, a gathering of journalists and critics question Kurt about the images he has painted: Where do they come from? What are they about? His answers are—as we say in English—“curt” and not enlightening. Annoyed by the questions, Kurt says, “I don't make statements. I make pictures.”¹

There is much that could be said about the subject matter of this film. The plot unfolds during the artist's young life, beginning in the Nazi era, then in post-war Germany, first in the East, and finally in the West. The film has much to say about artistic imagination and the power of images. But it was Kurt's response to his questioners that struck me, and it has kept me thinking about imagination in theology and the role of images in the Bible, in liturgy, and in every kind of theological discourse.

In the arenas of church and theological school, we do indeed make many statements—statements about God, human beings, the world and all its peoples, and the purpose of God in all things. We should not, however, overlook imagination in theology and the foundational role of images in the Bible, in liturgy, and in theology. Is it not the case that faith itself—“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” as the Letter to Hebrews has it (Heb 11:1)—is in good part the gift of an imagination? Faith entails an imagination guided by the Spirit, shaped by the scriptures and preaching, nourished by the sacraments in the community of God's people, and engaged in God's unfolding

1. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, *Never Look Away*, screenplay (2018), 129, https://www.sonyclassics.com/awards-information/2018-19/screenplays/neverlookaway_screenplay.pdf. The film is loosely based on the life and work of the German artist Gerhard Richter.

F faith entails an imagination guided by the Spirit, shaped by the scriptures and preaching, nourished by the sacraments in the community of God's people, and engaged in God's unfolding purpose in the world. Such Spirit-led, ecclesially formed, and eschatological imagination gives shape to Christian identity and directs Christian life and mission.

purpose in the world. Such Spirit-led, ecclesially formed, and eschatological imagination gives shape to Christian identity and directs Christian life and mission. Quoting the prophet Joel in his sermon to the crowd at Pentecost, the Apostle Peter speaks of the dreams, visions, and prophecy that come with the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh in the last days (Acts 2:14ff.). The Spirit of God poured out on the disciples of the risen One, then and now, inspires imagination for the fulfillment of God's life-giving purpose.

We need to pay more attention to the pictures that help us to see and to trust God-with-us, God-for-us, and God's unfolding purpose for the whole world. At the same time, we must beware how pictures can mislead, how they can be or become false images that malform the imagination and distort God's intention. Like every human capacity, imagination is limited by the human condition and our enduring captivity to sin, death, and evil.

The Christian assembly, the congregation at worship, is a privileged arena for the pictures that give life to faith. Images,

especially biblical images, are foundational for Christian liturgy, and imagination immersed in the world of biblical images is crucial to liturgical-theological work. The American Lutheran liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop has explored what he calls the “saving images” of Bible and liturgy. “The purpose of Christian worship,” he writes, “like the Christian use of the scriptures generally, involves both setting out images that draw us into salvation and rescuing images themselves from misuse.”² According to Lathrop, the scriptural images at work in Christian worship—with their focal point in the person of Jesus Christ—are means for the ongoing “conversion of the imagination.”³ They refigure our identities and ways of life. They refigure the way we see God and the world.⁴ Craig Nesson, another American Lutheran theologian, offers an interpretation of worship as “imagining the kingdom of God” in his worship-centered theology of the congregation. In Nesson’s words:

What Jesus did in his ministry was to tell stories that invite people to imagine what it meant to have a living God who made a real difference in the way things are and the way things turn out. Jesus appealed to the human imagination to envision an alternative world, a world where God makes all things new. . . .

When we worship, we enter just such an alternative world. . . . While we ourselves engage in “imagining” the kingdom of God, God is in the very act of enacting the kingdom in our midst!⁵

Such imagination is a “dimension of faith”⁶ alongside the dimensions of trust and belief, and the imagination of the worshiping community shapes congregational life in both its identity and mission.⁷ Through my own years of teaching Christian worship, I came to understand my aim as “training the liturgical imagination” in its several dimensions: scriptural, sacramental, ecclesial,

2. Gordon W. Lathrop, *Saving Images: The Presence of the Bible in Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 81.

3. See Lathrop, 61-64, 71, 185-86. The reference to “conversion of the imagination” comes from Richard B. Hays’ characterization of the Apostle Paul’s interpretation of scripture and proclamation of the gospel: “We find Paul calling his readers and hearers to a *conversion of the imagination*. He was calling Gentiles to understand their identity anew in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Such a thoroughgoing conversion could be fostered and sustained only by a continuous process of bringing the community’s beliefs and practices into critical confrontation with the gospel story;” *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-6; quoted by Lathrop, 62.

4. The scriptures read in the assembly are a rich source for the images used in preaching and liturgy. For an extensive survey of images in the ecumenical three-year lectionary, see Gail Ramshaw, *Treasures Old and New: Images in the Lectionary* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002).

5. Craig L. Nesson, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 42.

6. Nesson, 42.

7. Nesson, 8-10, *passim*.

Is there a legacy to us in Loehé’s liturgical imagination that can inspire our engagement with matters of Christian identity and mission today?

eschatological, contextual, and ritual.⁸ The liturgical imagination is a dynamic interaction of all those things.⁹

All of this is an extended prelude to what I want to explore in Wilhelm Loehé’s liturgical work and legacy. I want to look for evidence of Loehé’s liturgical imagination and to begin to think about the impact of that imagination on his engagement with matters of Christian identity and the crises of his own time. The horizon of this exploration is a question: Is there a legacy to us in Loehé’s liturgical imagination that can inspire our engagement with matters of Christian identity and mission today?

The method of this exploration of Loehé’s liturgical-theological imagination will be to offer three “soundings”—to use an image from the nautical world, where sounding is the process of measuring the depth of the sea. In his writing, Loehé often used images to help his readers see something that was not immediately apparent or to see beyond the way things are to how they might be. The three soundings into Loehé’s liturgical imagination involve images that have to do with 1) participation in the life of the triune God, 2) eucharistic community, and 3) living liturgy—that is, the liturgy that continues in the Christian life, both personal and communal, what the Orthodox call “the liturgy after the liturgy.”¹⁰ With each sounding, we will consider two dimensions of Loehé’s liturgical imagination in relation to each other. Loehé’s liturgical imagination holds both 1) imagination *from* the liturgy and 2) imagination *for* the liturgy. Imagination *from* the liturgy is what worship helps us to see about God, one another, and our world. Imagination *for* the liturgy is about vision for the act of worship itself—what we do, what we say, and how it unfolds. With these soundings, I intend to paint some pictures of Loehé’s liturgical imagination, pictures that I hope will help us to see something of Loehé’s liturgical contribution and its potential value for a critical

8. Thomas H. Schattauer, “Training the Liturgical Imagination,” *Living Lutheran* 4, n. 8 (December 2019): 44-45, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2019/12/training-liturgical-imagination/>.

9. Among some in the field of practical theology, the development of pastoral imagination describes the broad aim of theological education in the practice of ministry. See Charles Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); also Craig Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” in Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 41-61; and Christian A. B. Scharen and Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “Learning Pastoral Imagination,” *Auburn Studies* n. 21 (Winter 2016).

10. See Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

appropriation in our own time as we engage matters of liturgy, identity, mission.

First Sounding—Participation in the Life of the Triune God

We begin our look into Loehé's liturgical imagination with the remarkable images in this passage from *Three Books about the Church*:

The church is not only an assembly that learns but also an assembly that prays. It prays not only as individual members in their closets but also together as large gatherings in its houses of assembly. It worships as it speaks and as it sings, and the Lord dwells among its songs of praise with his sacraments. Its approach to him, his approach to it—these holy forms of its approach and of his coming, we call the liturgy.

These forms are free. Few of them are commanded. Yet despite this freedom, from the very beginning the church has been pleased to select certain forms. A holy variety of singing and praying has grown up, and a lovely pattern of approach to and withdrawal from the Lord of Lords has been established. Just as the stars revolve around the sun, so does the congregation in its services, full of loveliness and dignity, revolve around its Lord. In holy, childlike innocence which only a child's innocent heart understands properly, the multitude of redeemed, sanctified children of God dances in worship about the universal Father and the Lamb, and the Spirit of the Lord of lords guides their steps.¹¹

Die Kirche ist nicht bloß eine lernende, sondern auch eine *betende*. Sie betet nicht bloß in ihren einzelnen Gliedern in den Kammern, sondern zusammen in Haufen in ihren Versammlungshäusern. Sie betet sprechend, sie betet singend an. Und der Herr wohnt unter ihren Lobgesängen mit seinen Sakramenten. Ihr Nahen zu ihm, sein Nahen zu ihr, — die heiligen Formen ihres Nahens, seines Kommens nennen wir die Liturgie. —

Diese Formen sind frei, wenige Stücke sind gebotene Sache. Aber trotz der Freiheit hat sich die Kirche von Anfang her für gewisse Formen mit Wohlgefallen erklärt. Eine heilige Manchfaltigkeit des Singens und Betens hat sich gebildet und ein lieblicher Gedankengang des Nahens und Fernens von dem Herrn Herr hat sich beliebt gemacht. Wie die Sterne um die Sonne, so wandelt die Gemeinde in Gottesdiensten voll Lieblichkeit und Würde um ihren Herrn. In heiliger, kindlicher Unschuld, die nur ein kindliches, unschuldiges Herz recht versteht, bewegt sich die Schar erlöster, geheiligter Gotteskinder feiernd um den allgemeinen Vater und um das Lamm, und der Geist des Herrn Herr führt ihren Reigen.¹²

God and God's people at worship as a living together: the Lord dwells in the assembly's house of song and prayer with his sacraments. In this, Loehé draws on the deep well of biblical images of God dwelling among God's people: the ark of the covenant in tabernacle and temple, Jerusalem, incarnation—Word become flesh, body of Christ.¹³ Loehé further elaborates this image of relationship with a related picture of worship as the mutual approach or coming together of the Lord and the church. The forms of the liturgy are “the lovely pattern of approach to and withdrawal from the Lord of lords.” Here Loehé's depiction of the assembly's encounter with the divine at worship resonates with the scriptures' own use of sexual and marital imagery for the relationship of God and God's people; for example, in The Song of Solomon, and the prophets Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Hosea (2:14-20), as well as in Ephesians (5:21-33—Christ and the church as husband and wife) and Revelation (21:1ff.—the marriage of the Lamb).¹⁴

Following these related images of personal relationships, Loehé further elaborates his picture of the liturgy with two more images. First, a cosmic image: the assembly gathered in the presence of God is like the stars revolving around the sun. Then, a social image: the movement of worship is like a ring dance led by the Spirit and circling the presence of God. Both images relate to Loehé's reference to the vision of heavenly worship in Revelation (4-5, 7), where the redeemed, together with the whole creation, gather in song and prayer around the throne of God and the Lamb.

This latter image of the circle dance deserves further attention.¹⁵ Despite Loehé's expressed reservations about dancing in connection with drinking and frequenting

There are three consecutive images here in Loehé's presentation of the liturgy. The first is an image of personal relationship, in fact two connected images. Loehé pictures the relationship between

11. Wilhelm Loehé, *Three Books about the Church*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 176-177. For an alternative translation and discussion of this passage, see Gordon W. Lathrop, “What Is Liturgical Theology: One North American Lutheran View,” *Worship* 87 (2013): 45-63. Lathrop is especially interested with Loehé's concept of the liturgy's pattern (*Gedankengang*) in relation to what it means to do liturgical theology.

12. Wilhelm Löhe, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche 1845*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (hereafter GW), ed. Klaus Ganzert, 7 vols., (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1951-1986), 5.1:176-177; emphasis in the original. See also the critical edition of the text in Wilhelm Löhe, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche 1845*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß, *Studienausgabe* 1 (Neuen-

dettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2006).

13. See Ramshaw's discussion of “temple” and related biblical images in *Treasures Old and New*, 379-386.

14. See Ramshaw's discussion of “marriage” and related biblical images in *Treasures Old and New*, 269-276. The gendered speech of Loehé's German, where the church is feminine, makes this imagery even more apparent. The expression “Nahen zu” in the German reflects the words of James 4:8.

15. For a historical summary and critical appraisal of the modern use of dance imagery in trinitarian theology see Riyako Cecilia Hikota, “Beyond Metaphor: The Trinitarian Perichōrēsis and Dance,” *Open Theology* 8, no. 1 (2022): 50-63, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0192>. It bears noting that Loehé's cosmic image of the stars circling the sun historically carries a connection to classical and medieval notions of the celestial dance.

taverns,¹⁶ he does not hesitate to use the folk tradition of the circle dance to characterize worship in the presence of the triune God. The image underscores several things about the liturgy: its communal and social dimensions, its character as a participatory and embodied act, and its joyful solemnity. Loehe's use of this image helps us to see worship as a participation in the circle of God's own life, in the mystery of the Trinity.¹⁷

In this compact set of images set forth in *Three Books about the Church*, Loehe's liturgical imagination encompasses the three interwoven dimensions of meaning enacted in all liturgical celebration: the personal, the social, and the cosmic. Loehe's use of these images suggests that Christian worship functions in each of these dimensions. Liturgy refers to the human person within the community of the church in relation to the whole created order, all of it drawn into the dance of the triune God. Loehe's images present a liturgy that shapes imagination for our life together with God, indeed for our life together within the dynamic of God's very own life.

To this point we have been exploring a piece of Loehe's theological imagination *from* the liturgy: the liturgy as it helps us to see our lives in relation to God and one another, specifically as participation in the life of the triune God. Such imagination from the liturgy corresponds to a piece of Loehe's imagination *for* the liturgy and its performance. Throughout his liturgical work—in congregational life and the diaconal community as well as in his liturgical orders and prayer books—Loehe encouraged the active participation of the assembly and sought to shape a “liturgically minded and liturgically formed” congregation.¹⁸ He was critical of the clerically oriented worship of his day and the generally passive role of the congregation:

We do not say, “The pastor celebrates the Lord's Supper,”

16. See Wilhelm Löhe, “Erklärung vom 21. November 1856,” und “Erklärung vom 7. Januar 1857,” GW 5.2:708-714.

17. The assembly's participatory movement in the life of God is evident in classic trinitarian shape of Christian prayer to God—through Christ—in the Spirit and in the structure of eucharistic praying, most especially in the Syro-Byzantine tradition, the source of many contemporary eucharistic prayers. Also note use of the dance image in contemporary hymnody: e.g., “Come join the dance of the Trinity” and “Lord of the dance.” The modern revival of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in systematic theology has heightened awareness of the social character of the trinitarian *perichoresis*, its reflection in the community of the church, and its impact on the social imagination of Christians.

18. Wilhelm Löhe, “Vorwort,” in *Laienagende* (1852), GW 7.2:703. See Thomas H. Schattauer, “A Liturgical People: Liturgical Formation for an Apostolic Community in the Work of Wilhelm Loehe,” in Wilhelm Löhe und Bildung/Wilhelm Loehe and Christian Formation, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß and Jacob Corzine (Nürnberg: Verein für bayerische Kirchengeschichte, and Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2016), 53-58; see also Thomas H. Schattauer, “The Reconstruction of Rite: The Liturgical Legacy of Wilhelm Löhe,” in *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith: Essays in Honor of Aidan Kavanagh, O.S.B.*, ed. Nathan Mitchell and John F. Baldwin, S.J. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 268-270; and “‘Sung, Spoken, Lived’: Worship as Communion and Mission in the Work of Wilhelm Loehe.” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 33 (2006): 114-116.

The image [of the circle dance] underscores several things about the liturgy: its communal and social dimensions, its character as a participatory and embodied act, and its joyful solemnity. Loehe's use of this image helps us to see worship as a participation in the circle of God's own life, in the mystery of the Trinity.

but “the congregation!” The holy Supper is a celebration of the congregation, and it is shaped by the pastor and by Christ present and by the one or the many who receive, the congregation—even at the communion of the sick. The pastor does not act alone, but the congregation acts with him.¹⁹

For Loehe, the inherited patterns of praying at the liturgy themselves demonstrate the communal character of liturgical prayer. For example, the collect, although voiced by the pastor, was in fact the prayer of the whole assembly. The pattern of praying—from salutation (the unity of pastor and congregation in churchly fellowship) to *oremus* (“Let us pray”) through the prayer itself to the Amen (which properly belonged to the congregation)—make this clear.²⁰ In his teaching of worship and its practice, Loehe sought to engage congregational participation in what he regarded as the deepest movements of the liturgy: word and sacrament, prayer and offering.²¹

Loehe's imagination *for* the liturgy and his imagination *from* the liturgy inform one another. Assembly participation at worship mirrors our participation in the life of the triune God. At worship we embody and practice our relationships with God, with one another in the community of the church, and the world. The movements of the liturgy enact our cosmic circle dance with God.

19. Wilhelm Löhe, *Abendmahlspredigten* (1866), ed. Martin Wittenberg, GW, Ergänzungssreihe 1 (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1991), 173-174.

20. Wilhelm Löhe, *Agende für christliche Gemeinden des lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, 2nd ed., 2 pts. (1853/1859), GW 7.1:55-56.

21. In Loehe's view, these four liturgical movements correspond to the “principal components of New Testament worship: the apostles' teaching (word), fellowship (offering), the breaking of bread (sacrament), and the prayers (prayer)” (Acts 2:42); Löhe, “Vorwort zur Laienagende,” GW 7.2:702-704. See also Wilhelm Löhe, *Der evangelische Geistliche* (1852/1858), GW 3.2:250-251. For an English translation, see Wilhelm Loehe, *The Pastor*, ed. Charles P. Schaum, trans. Wolf Dietrich Knappe and Charles P. Schaum (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 279-281.

Second Sounding—Eucharistic Community

This second sounding focuses on another rich passage from *Three Books about the Church* and sets it in relation to Loehé's imagination for a eucharistic community:

The church of the New Testament is no longer a territorial church but a church for all people, a church which has its children in all lands and gathers them from every nation. It is the one flock of the one shepherd, called out of many folds (John 10:16), the universal—the truly catholic—church which flows through all time and into which all people pour. This is the great concept which is still being fulfilled, the work of God in the final hour of the world, the dearest thought of all the saints in life and in death, the thought for which they lived and still live, died and still die. This is the thought which must permeate the mission of the church or it will not know what it is or what it should do. For mission is nothing but the one church of God in motion, the actualization of the one universal, catholic church. Wherever mission enters in, the barriers which separate nation from nation fall down. Wherever it comes it brings together what previously was far off and widely separated. Wherever it takes root it produces that wonderful unity which makes “the people of every tongue” able to understand one another in all things. Mission is the life of the catholic church. Where it stops, blood and breath stop; where it dies, the love which unites heaven and earth also dies. The catholic church and mission—these two no one can separate without killing both, and that is impossible.²²

The passage offers a vision of the unfolding purpose of God in the church and its mission to be and to become a communion of all people. Here the scriptural sources for Loehé's imagination refer to the oneness of all people in Christ's church. The scriptural references include the “one flock of the one shepherd, called out of many folds” from the gospel of John, cited in the passage itself, and three more citations from the immediately preceding passage, all of which resonate throughout our focal text: the “[breaking] down of the dividing wall of hostility” between Jew and Gentile from Ephesians (2:13-22); Jesus' sending words in the gospel of Matthew (28:18-20) to “make disciples of all nations;” and the gathering of the people of Israel together with “a the great multitude . . . from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues” from John's vision in Revelation (7:2-12).²⁴

22. Loehé, *Three Books*, 59.

23. Löhe, *Drei Bücher*, GW 5.1:96; emphasis in the original.

24. Loehé, *Three Books*, 58-59; GW 5.1:95-96. The phrase “the people of every tongue” quoted in our text carries a clear resonance with John's vision in Revelation. In German, the words are a direct quotation from the first stanza of Luther's chorale *Komm, heiliger Geist, Herr Gott*; see Löhe, *Drei Bücher*, ed. Blaufuß, 32, n. 69. Loehé's further description that this people are “able to understand one another in

Die Kirche des neuen Testaments, nicht mehr eine Landeskirche, sondern eine Kirche aller Völker, eine Kirche, die ihre Kinder in allen Landen hat und aus allen Landen sammelt, die Eine Herde des Einen Hirten, aus mancherlei Stall zusammengeführt (Joh. 10, 16), die *allgemeine*, die *wahrhaft katholische* Kirche, die alle Zeiten durchströmt und aus allen Völkern Zufluß hat, — *sie ist der große Gedanke, der noch in der Erfüllung ist, das Werk Gottes in der letzten Stunde der Welt, der Lieblingsgedanke aller Heiligen im Leben und im Sterben, für den sie lebten und leben, starben und sterben*, — *der Gedanke, welcher die Mission durchdringen muß, oder sie weiß nicht, was sie ist und was sie soll*. Denn die Mission ist nichts, als die Eine Kirche Gottes in ihrer Bewegung, — die Verwirklichung Einer allgemeinen, katholischen Kirche. Wohin die Mission dringt, da stürzen die Zäune nieder, die Völker von Völker trennen; - wohin sie kommt, macht sie nahe, was vorhin ferne und weit getrennt war; — wo sie Platz greift, erzeugt sie jene wunderbare Einigkeit, welche “das Volk aus aller Welt Zungen” fähig macht, einander zu verstehen in *allen* Stücken. Sie ist das *Leben* der katholischen Kirche, — Blut und Atem stoken, wo sie stockt, — und die Liebe, die Himmel und Erde vereinigt, stirbt *da*, wo sie stirbt. Die katholische Kirche und die Mission, die beiden trennt niemand, ohne — was am Ende unmöglich ist — beide zu töten.²³

Though there is no mention of worship, this vision of the communion of all people is in fact very much a piece of Loehé's imagination from the liturgy. As Loehé makes clear in *Three Books*, the communion of all people that the church is and that remains the aim of its mission is created by God's Word.²⁵ The apostolic Word stands at the center of the church and provides the impulse for its mission of communion. This Word is the power of God at work in word and sacrament. Word and sacrament are the means of God's mission unfolding in the church and its activities:

The Lutheran church knows that the Lord gives his Holy Spirit only through his Word and sacraments and therefore it recognizes no other effective means than Word and sacrament. . . .

The church has various activities . . . even though the means through which it performs them and encourages all good things are the same—Word, sacrament, the holy office of the ministry.²⁶

all things” carries a reference to the Pentecost story in Acts (2:5ff.)

25. Löhe, 61-87; GW 5.1:97-115.

26. Löhe, 164-167; GW 5.1:168-170. See Christian Weber's

In the preaching of scripture and the celebration of the Lord's Supper practiced in the forms of the liturgy, including the assembly's prayer and song, the mission of God unfolds. That mission is to build up the church catholic as a communion of all people and to set it in motion for the sake of healing all human division. As Loehé's opening reflection in *Three Books* shows, this mission of communion (*Gemeinschaft*) is the completion of God's creative purpose: the desire for God and the desire for communion with others born in every person.²⁷

Such imagination *from* the liturgy is grounded in Loehé's imagination *for* the liturgy, specifically in his efforts to re-center liturgical practice on the Lord's Supper and so to renew the church as a eucharistic community (*Abendmahlsgemeinschaft*, the communion or fellowship in the Lord's Supper).²⁸ In the practice common to his time, the Lord's Supper was relegated to two communion seasons, spring and fall (*Frühlingscommunion*, *Herbstcommunion*), and people generally received the sacrament at most twice a year. Loehé's study of liturgical sources from the early church through the Reformation led him to understand that such a limited sacramental practice was an aberration. Earlier Christian practice shows a regular, weekly celebration of the Supper every Sunday as well as on major festivals:

The goal of the principal service of the church has always been the celebration of the Communio or Lord's Supper. The observance of the Lord's Supper was the core; the parts of the service before and after always stood in relation to it. This is the case in the eastern churches, in the Roman Church, and also in the evangelical [i.e., Lutheran] church. A principal service without the celebration of the Lord's Supper was not considered complete; it looked like a column in ruins, like a flower stem stripped of its crown.²⁹

Note the images for the principal service of the church without the sacrament—"a column in ruins" (*eine abgebrochene Säule*), "a flower stem stripped of its crown" (*ein Blumenstengel, dem man seine Krone nahm*). In Loehé's estimation, the distortion of eucharistic practice had diminished the church in its faith and life. To elaborate on these images, we might say it this way: Loehé worked to restore the broken column of worship in word *and* sacrament and so to build up the living stones of the church; he worked to cultivate the flower of worship in the fullness of its

magisterial presentation of Loehé's theology of mission in his *Missionstheologie bei Wilhelm Löhe: Aufbruch zur Kirche der Zukunft* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), especially 262-397; on word and sacrament as the means of mission, 306-312.

27. Loehé, *Three Books*, 47-51; GW 5.1:88-90.

28. See Schattauer, "Reconstruction of Rite" pp. 249-268. This essay provides a summary of the research in my dissertation "Announcement, Confession, and Lord's Supper in the Pastoral-Liturgical Work of Wilhelm Löhe: A Study of Worship and Church Life in the Lutheran Parish at Neuendettelsau, Bavaria, 1837-1872," PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, 1990, 180-293, 314-317.

29. Wilhelm Löhe, "Vorwort," in *Sammlung liturgischer Formulare der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, vol. 3 (1842), GW 7.2:698.

In Loehé's view, the Supper was the higher of the two [sermon and Supper], the goal of the liturgy, and the place on earth closest to heaven. The Lord's Supper completed the movement of the liturgy toward communion: the communion in the body and blood of Christ, which is at once a communion with God, a communion among the people of God, and a foretaste of the fuller communion that is God's purpose for the world.

bloom in the Supper, that the church might bear the fruit of love. In the forward to his *Agende*, Loehé used the image of climbing a mountain with two peaks—sermon and Supper—to describe the course of the principal service among Christians. In Loehé's view, the Supper was the higher of the two, the goal of the liturgy, and the place on earth closest to heaven.³⁰ The Lord's Supper completed the movement of the liturgy toward communion: the communion in the body and blood of Christ, which is at once a communion with God, a communion among the people of God, and a foretaste of the fuller communion that is God's purpose for the world.

In Loehé's view, the Lord's Supper established and enacted the communion of the church: the fellowship or communion (*Gemeinschaft*) of persons in their communion (*Gemeinschaft*) with Christ.³¹ Let me say it this way: Loehé imagined the church as a eucharistic community (*Abendmahlsgemeinschaft*). It was not a territorial church (*Landeskirche*), defined by geographical boundaries and culture, but rather by its relation to the presence of Christ among his people, and as such a catholic church. As a eucharistic community, the church was for Loehé sign and agent of God's larger, eschatological purpose for communion, for the healing of the world. In Loehé's liturgical imagination, eucharistic community reflects the movement of the church in mission toward the communion God intends.³²

30. Löhe, "Vorwort zur ersten Auflage" (1844), in *Agende*, GW 7.1:13; "Vorwort zur ersten Auflage" (1852), GW 7.1:18. For an English translation, see Wilhelm Löhe, "Prefaces to the *Agende für christliche Gemeinden des lutherischen Bekenntnisses*," *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 17, no. 3 (Holy Trinity 2008), 31-38.

31. See Wilhelm Löhe, *Prüfungstafel und Gebete für Beicht- und Abendmahlstage*, 4th ed. (1858), GW 7.2: 286; also Löhe, *Abendmahlspredigten*, 69-77.

32. For a fuller account see Thomas H. Schattauer, "Reclaiming

Some might argue that this picture of eucharistic community in Loehe's liturgical imagination is more my picture than truly his. I recognize that for Loehe *Abendmahlsgemeinschaft* (the communion or fellowship of the Lord's Supper) was also about the protection of confessional boundaries in relation to Reformed and Union churches and the preservation of a common faith and standards of life in the practice of church discipline (*Kirchenzucht*).³³ The term was associated with restrictions on access to the Lord's Supper: restrictions of confessional alignment placed on pastor and congregation and restrictions of faith and life placed upon individual communicants. In this, Loehe was reacting to forces in the Enlightenment that had blurred confessional distinctions and diminished the importance of well-formed faith and integrity of life. I would argue, however, that the picture of eucharistic community I have drawn does have a basis in Loehe's liturgical imagination. Alongside his clear commitment to confessional discipline at the Lord's Supper, Loehe could also speak eloquently about the profound unity (*Einigkeit*) of Christians in the observable fact of the practice of the Supper across the separated traditions.³⁴ Such unity in eucharistic practice carries implications for the deeper reality of the communion or fellowship (*Gemeinschaft*) of all Christians in Christ. Regarding Loehe's practice of church discipline at the Supper, it should be remembered that the aim of warning an errant parishioner away from participation in the sacrament was ultimately reconciliation and restoration to the communion of the church. Furthermore, the communion of the church was a significant and positive impulse in Loehe's efforts in the North American mission to German Lutheran immigrants as well as in his vision for a mission to native Americans. In the first case, Loehe sought to maintain the bonds of the church as a eucharistic community beyond national boundaries. In the second Loehe sought to extend the bonds of eucharistic community beyond ethnicity, admittedly according to his own delimited understanding of God's purpose for the communion of all people. Consequently, I believe my picture of eucharistic community in Loehe's liturgical imagination is a defensible construal of his legacy to us.

the Christian Assembly as *Communio*: The Significance of the Lord's Supper in the Work of Wilhelm Löhe" in *Wilhelm Löhe: Erbe und Vision*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 50-66; also published in *Worship* 84, no. 3 (2010): 219-236.

33. See Schattauer, "Reconstruction of Rite," 270-273; also "Announcement, Confession, Lord's Supper," 41-105, 304-312.

34. Löhe, *Abendmahlspredigten*, 45-77.

35. My translation.

Third Sounding—Living Liturgy

This third sounding into Loehe's liturgical imagination takes its starting point from the way that Loehe pictures the relation of liturgy and life. The following passage from Loehe's *Haus-, Schul-, und Kirchenbuch* provides our reference point for his conception of living liturgy:

Die Kirche hat übrigens nicht bloß einzelne Gebete, sondern ganze Gottesdienste verschiedener Art, nach heiligen Ordnungen zusammengereiht, und wert als die höchste Harmonie des irdischen Lebens von allen Gläubigen verstanden und nicht bloß mitgesungen, mitgesprochen, sondern mitgelebt zu werden. An der Spitze dieser heiligen Ordnungen steht die *Kommunio*, d. i. der kirchliche Hauptgottesdienst, in der alten Sprache, sogar noch in unseren lutherischen symbolischen Büchern die Messe genannt. ... Die zweite Stelle in den heiligen Ordnungen der Kirche nimmt der tägliche Morgen- und Abendgottesdienst ein, oder nach alter Weise zu sprechen, die *Matutin und Vesper*. ... Alle übrigen Gottesdienste sind weiter nichts als Abarten der bereits genannten.³⁶

Here we see in full display Loehe's vision of the foundational rites of the church: the *Communio*, the principal service of Sundays and feast days, also called the Mass, and the daily services of morning and evening prayer, also called matins and vespers. Loehe portrays these liturgical orders as "the highest harmony of earthly life (*Leben*)." In the picture that Loehe draws, the assembly of God's people—the congregation with its pastor—sings and speaks these rites, and something more: it lives them. "Sung, spoken, and lived" (*mitgesungen, mitgesprochen, mitgelebt*), the liturgy comes to life in our singing and speaking and in our living. The *mit-* of the German carries both the sense that the liturgy is something we follow and something we do together with others. We live with it together, just as at worship we sing with it together and speak with it together. The liturgy is a living thing and a thing for living. As we know, Loehe labored long and hard for the ways liturgy comes to life in its ritual embodiment, but that was not the end of his interest. His aim was the embodiment of the liturgy in the life of God's people as church community as well as in the daily lives of the faithful.

In his writings, Loehe often emphasized his concern for

36. Wilhelm Löhe, "Von den heiligen Personen, den heiligen Zeit, der heiligen Weise und dem heiligen Orte," in *Haus-, Schul- und Kirchenbuch für Christen des lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, pt. 2 (1859), GW 3.1:570; emphasis in the original.

the life of faith (*Leben*), not only faithful doctrine or teaching (*Lehrer*).³⁷ In his time he witnessed the dangers of what he called “dead orthodoxy” and a “professors church.”³⁸ While Loehe was clear about his confessional commitments and understood the Reformation to be complete in doctrine, he recognized the deficiencies of “churchly consciousness, life (*Leben*) and work” among Lutherans³⁹ and sought to do something about it in all the arenas of his pastoral activity, including liturgy, mission, diaconal service, and the formation of individuals and communities in Christian life, what he called the apostolic life (*apostolisches Leben*).⁴⁰ As we have already seen above, the church’s mission to overcome division and unite all nations and peoples is, in Loehe’s words, “the life (*Leben*) of the catholic church.” For Loehe, the centrality of the Lord’s Supper was about “sacramental life (*sakramentalisches Leben*) and the experience of the blessing of the sacrament that is possible only through partaking of it abundantly,” much more than a matter of right doctrine.⁴¹ All of these references to life are finally about the gift of God’s abundant life in the church’s life and through the church for the life of the world. As the “the highest harmony of earthly life,” the liturgy bears this gift and witnesses to it.⁴² Loehe’s imagination for living liturgy helps us to see that the abundant life the Spirit of God bestows at worship is the abundant life that God promises in all the arenas of life.

Loehe’s imagination *from* the liturgy to life corresponds to his imagination *for* the liturgy in the ways he connected its practice to the realities of life. A complete account would take us into an examination of Loehe’s preaching, his formulation of intercessions (*Fürbitten*) and use of the general prayer (*allgemeines Gebet*), his preparation of announcements (*Abkündigungen*), and his aims for collecting an offering.⁴³ All of these things are moments during worship when the realities of life in the world are brought into the symbolic, sacramental realm of the liturgy and its biblical images. There we come to see ways to live our lives in the world in

37. For a more extended presentation of this point, see Schattauer, “Reconstruction of Rite,” 247-254; also “Announcement, Confession, Lord’s Supper,” 301-303.

38. Wilhelm Löhe, *Vorschlag zu einem Lutherischen Verein für apostolisches Leben samt Entwurf eines Katechismus des apostolischen Lebens* (1848), GW 5.1:219.

39. Löhe, *Three Books*, 155; GW 5.1:162.

40. Löhe, *Apostolisches Leben*, GW 5.1:213-225. See also the critical edition of the text in Wilhelm Löhe, *Apostolisches Leben: Vorschlag und Katechismus 1848*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß, Studienausgabe 2 (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2011).

41. From Loehe’s remarks at a pastors’ conference, October 3, 1865; as quoted by Johannes Deinzer, *Wilhelm Löhe’s Leben: Aus seinem schriftlichen Nachlaß zusammengestellt*, vol. 2 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1880), 523. Loehe goes on to refer to his stance on the centrality of the Lord’s Supper in churchly life as “sacramental Lutheranism.”

42. See also Wilhelm Löhe, “Eine protestantische Missionspredigt innerhalb der Gemeinde” (1853), GW 5.2:673. There he says that “there is no higher view of earthly life—and therefore no more perfect blossom of earthly life” than in partaking of the Lord’s Supper (my translation).

43. See Schattauer, “Reconstruction of Rite,” 260-261; also “Announcement, Confession, Lord’s Supper,” 266-276.

All of these references to life are finally about the gift of God’s abundant life in the church’s life and through the church for the life of the world. As the “the highest harmony of earthly life,” the liturgy bears this gift and witnesses to it.

the new ways of God’s life-giving purpose. Loehe scripted these moments to give substance to the connection between liturgy and life. In Loehe’s imagination for living liturgy, the liturgy provides orientation and pattern for our living, and our lives give concrete shape to liturgical meaning.

Conclusion

In these three soundings, I have begun to sketch a picture of Loehe’s liturgical imagination. It is far from a completed painting. I have attempted to delineate the contours of three major features of Loehe’s imagination *from* the liturgy in connection to his imagination *for* the liturgy: 1) a vision for our participation in the life of God in connection to the communal and participatory character of worship; 2) a vision of church as communion for all people transcending human divisions in connection to the eucharistic community established in the regular celebration of the Lord’s Supper at the principal service on Sundays and feast days; and 3) a vision for living liturgy—God’s abundant life embodied in the life of the church community and in the lives of all the faithful—in connection to the pastoral use of sermon, intercessions, announcements, and offering to show the intersection and interaction of liturgy and life.

With focus on the Christian assembly around word and sacrament, Loehe’s liturgical imagination funded his imagination for a distinctive and responsive church community.⁴⁴ The church Loehe envisioned and worked for was to be a visible community defined by its *communio* in the triune God and freed of its captivity to the territorial limits of the state and the disintegrating forces of Enlightenment culture and industrial society. The church Loehe envisioned and worked for was to be a community responsive to the human needs set before it—physical, social, and spiritual—as in the service of mercy provided by his diaconal community and his efforts in support of emigrants to North America. Loehe’s liturgical imagination funded his imagination for Christian identity and mission amid the crises he saw and experienced in his time and place.

44. For a fuller treatment of this point, see my “The Löhe Alternative for Worship, Then and Now,” *Word & World*, 24.2 (2004): 145-156.

What shall we make of this legacy? How might a robust liturgical imagination fund our imagination for Christian identity and mission today? The picture I have drawn of Loehé's liturgical imagination is something to contemplate and inspire us as we draw our own pictures of liturgy and life in the service of God's mission in and for the world. May Loehé's imagination encourage us in our dance with the triune God amid the crises of our own time and place.

The picture I have drawn of Loehé's liturgical imagination is something to contemplate and inspire us as we draw our own pictures of liturgy and life in the service of God's mission in and for the world.
