

Liturgy Beyond Sunday Morning: Christian Congregations and the *Liturgia horarum*¹

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In his essay, the German student of theology Michael Klein dedicates himself to the relationship between Sunday and working day in Protestant liturgy. As he outlines at the beginning, in his opinion the sole concentration of the service on Sunday morning represents a shortening. He contrasts this factual normality in many contemporary Protestant churches with individual historical examples of everyday liturgy, e.g. from the time of the Reformation. Especially he pays attention to the tradition of the Liturgy of the Hours as a model of daily worship. As an example of a successful integration of this tradition into community life, he refers to the Anglican Church. In a conclusion with a number of theses, he promotes a creative extension of the divine service over the week on the basis of biblical and systematic aspects and suggests the *Liturgia Horarum* as a possible source for such reforms.

Christian liturgical life has centred on Sunday since its earliest times. The day on which the Lord rose from death, is the regular focal point for the gathering of congregations for worship and common prayer, reading and interpretation of the Holy Scripture and the Sacraments, particularly the celebration of Eucharist.

Nowadays, Sunday is in most of the Protestant communities the only and exclusive time for service. Their churches are often closed for six days a week, just to be used for a period of two hours on Sunday., just to be used for a period of two hours. To maintain ancient buildings simply for two hours use on a Sunday morning, could be seen as an extreme luxury or perhaps an extreme waste, especially in times of scarce financial resources. However, this is neither the main problem nor sufficient to call this practice into question. Rather, for example, a look at the large sister denomination here in (the) Western Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church, shows that this Protestant habit is not a matter of course or without any alternatives. In a big city like Prague, one can observe a huge contrast. While most of the Protestant churches are not even open for tour-

1 This essay was written in the context of the seminar “Liturgical Theology” at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, held by doc. Tabita Landová in the winter semester 2020/21.

ists, but just for the 10 o'clock Sunday services, the Catholic churches are not only open to anyone who is interested to enter the church, they even offer an impressive schedule of liturgy. It is possible to attend a mass at almost any time of the day, from 6am until 8pm, and throughout the whole week. For example, in the church of St. Ignatius alone three masses are celebrated every day. Of course, they might be all the same and this practice also shows an understanding of the mass as a religious offer to "the people" rather than as a worship assembly of a local community. But here liturgy is also understood as a part of everyday life, not reserved for the pious quiet of Sunday morning. Why is this connection lost in Protestantism? Is such practice normal or a deficiency? And how could we regain liturgical life throughout the week? Perhaps a look at some historical points will help to answer these questions.

Weekly liturgy on Sunday and beyond

The New Testament texts show the first traces of worship practice in the early churches. On the one hand – as I have already mentioned – Sunday has a prominent position. There is no doubt, that Christianity adopted the Biblical structure of the week of seven days from the Jewish tradition. That is well described and explained by Gordon Lathrop in his work on "Holy Things".² The meaning of the week can be only experienced by distinguishing between its days. To do so is not natural for Christians anyway. Being liberated from the Old Testament law, especially from its cultic prescriptions, they do not have to observe any special days, like the Jewish Shabbat, with liturgical emphasis (Act 15,28–30; Rom 14,5; Gal 4,10).³ It is also important to notice, that to gather daily in temple was a common practice of the new believers, at least in Jerusalem, obviously for spiritual purpose, but also for communal meals, maybe including the Eucharist (Act 2,46).

However, the scriptures of the same New Testament, which claim this liberty regarding the weekdays, also show the first traces of the new

2 See Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things. A Liturgical Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 37ff.

3 For this topic in general cf. Friedrich Kalb, *Grundriss der Liturgik. Eine Einführung in die Geschichte, Grundsätze und Ordnungen des lutherischen Gottesdienstes*, Munich: Evangelischer Presseverband, ²1982, 63f.

Christian use of the week, which is centred by the first day of the week as “the Lord’s day” (Ap 1,10). Of course, the reason for this emphasis is the resurrection of Christ on this day (Mt 28,1). According to the Gospel of John, the disciples gather one week after the “Easter Sunday” and the Lord visits them again at that time (Joh 20,26). Therefore, it is rather understandable, that Sunday became the distinguished weekday for Christian service and Eucharist, which seems to be an ancient tradition (Act 20,7). Obviously, this pattern is very clear and effective until today, as I described at the beginning.

However, this use of Sunday only seems to be naturally combined with liturgical neglect of the rest of the week. To prove that, we can have a look at the beginnings of the reformational churches in middle and western Europe. As an example, I want to point out to the *Württembergische Große Kirchenordnung*,⁴ the most influential law from the origins of my church, the *Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg*. This decree was issued by Duke Christoph in 1559 and its regulations were valid for at least 200 years. It contains a chapter which is titled “*Ordnung der gemeinen Kirchenämptern beid am Feyertag und Wercktag*”,⁵ which could be translated as an order of the general church offices (services) both for holiday and workday. Firstly, a liturgy of vesper services is described for evenings before feasts and Sundays as a preparation, especially for receiving communion. Secondly, there are instructions for the Sundays and holidays or feast days themselves, including at least one service for catechetical purpose in addition to the main service in the morning. Finally, workdays are mentioned:

In each town are in every week two days and in each village one day, that would be most convenient for the place and people, to be preached on in such order, that at first before the sermon (some) Psalms, in the same way after the sermon should be sung every time a German Psalm, and it should be concluded with normal blessing.⁶

There is no place to examine here how these instructions were observed and put into action in the Swabian congregations through the cen-

4 *Württembergische Große Kirchenordnung* 1559, reproduction true to the original, Stuttgart: Schriftniederlage des Evang. Jugendwerks, 1968.

5 *Op. cit.*, LXXXVIIIv-XCr.

6 *Op. cit.*, XCr (translation M. K.).

turies, but they indicate clearly, that (also the) Protestant liturgical tradition is originally not limited to Sunday morning.

The historical tradition of the liturgy of the hours

There is another source of liturgical life besides the traditional Sunday service. Christian everyday life is to be formed by regularly repeated prayer. And a tradition of prayer throughout the day was also influenced by or even taken over from the Jewish liturgy.⁷ The book of Acts shows that it was an everyday practice for the early Christians to pray at special hours throughout the day: It is reported that Peter, as a guest in Joppa, went onto the roof of the house “to pray about the sixth hour” (Acts 10,9), which is noon. However, this was not just a private practice for single persons. When Peter dwelled in Jerusalem, he went to the temple with John “at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour” (Acts 3,1), which corresponds to 3 pm. We do not know, if these two Apostles wanted to pray there by their own, or together with other Jews or Christians, or if they wanted to take this opportunity for preaching. But Luke 24,53 and Acts 2,46 seem to support the view that there was a time, when the temple remained a place of everyday communal prayer for the Jewish-Christian community. They could do the same in private houses, as is the case on Pentecost at the third hour, about 9 o'clock (Acts 2,1.15).

Robert Taft describes another very important ancient document that shows the tradition of prayer at different daytimes as follows:

The first explicit, unambiguous reference to a system of daily prayer in the primitive Church is *Didache* 8, which gives the Matthean “Our Father” with the doxology “For yours is the power and the glory unto ages,” [sic!] followed by the rubric: “Pray thus three times a day.” Some consider this a deliberate Jewish-Christian substitute for the twice daily recitation of the Shema.⁸

If people nowadays know anything about the liturgy of the hours, the Divine Office, the *Stundengebet*, as it is called in German, they probably as

7 Cf. Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, *Liturgik*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004, 606ff. About this problem in general see also Robert F. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West. The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 21993, 3–12.

8 *Op. cit.*, 13.

sociate it with monks and nuns, religious orders and monasteries. That is quite correct. Perhaps no movement or institution had a bigger influence on the development of daily prayer in Western Christianity than monasticism. The most prominent document about monastic life is the Rule of Saint Benedict from 516. After the Prologue and general theological reflections, the first practical rules treat the structure of the *officia divina* (chapters VIII – XX), divided into eight times: *Vigiliae, Matutini* (later called *Laudes*), *Prima, Tertia, Sexta, Nona, Vesperae, Completorium*. The basis and main content of these communal prayer services performed by monks are the Old Testament Psalms. Again, they have a close connection to the tradition of Jewish prayer. Benedict explains in detail, which Psalms are to be sung at which time, and then adds:

Hoc praecipue componentes, ut, si cui forte haec distributio psalorum displicuerit, ordinet, si melius aliter iudicaverit, dum omnimodis id adtendat, ut omni ebdomada psalterium ex integro numero centum quinquaginta psalorum psallatur et dominico die semper a caput repleatur ad vigiliis... (XVIII,22 f).⁹

Indeed, throughout the centuries and the Roman Catholic Church were made several different distributions of the Psalms between times within the week. However, this rule, to pray the complete psalter in each single week, remained valid until the Second Vatican Council. The reforms in the 1970s broke up this pattern and replaced it with a cycle of four weeks to pray all Psalms, with the aim to relieve the duty of the Office for the clergy.¹⁰

Martin Luther, as former Augustine friar, was also used to this prayer-structured life. His spirituality was hugely shaped by the Psalms. He probably knew all of them by heart. However, he wanted to elevate the daily common prayer nearer to the value of the Sunday service. His main concern for the liturgy is the revival and regeneration of the sermon. Without preaching the word of God there is no real church service. By this, he distinguishes himself from the practice of the Divine Office in his time. That is most clearly expressed in his work *Von der Ordnung des Gottesdienstes in der Gemeinde* from 1523, where he writes:

⁹ Quoted from: Salzburger Äbtekonferenz (ed.), *Regula Benedicti. Die Benediktsregel (lateinisch-deutsch)*, Beuron: Kunstverlag, 1992, 134.

¹⁰ Cf. Bieritz, *Liturgik*, 617.

Three big abuses have penetrated the service. The first: that God's word has been silenced and they only read and sing in the churches, that is the worst abuse. The second: after God's word had been silenced, so many unchristian fables and lies came in, both in reading pieces as well as in song and sermon, that it is horrible to see. The third: that such service was done as a (good) work, in order to acquire God's grace and salvation. Faith was lost there, and everyone wanted to make foundations for the church or become parson, monk and nun. To dismiss these abuses now, one has to know first, that the Christian congregation should never gather unless they preach God's word and pray, no matter how shortly (...) Therefore: Where God's word is not preached, it's better neither to sing nor to read nor to gather.¹¹

These harsh words are pointed against the tradition of pure prayer assemblies, but clearly Luther's aim is not destruction of the liturgy throughout the weekdays. On the contrary, he wanted to give these gatherings the character and value of a real and full church service. One could question whether the sermon can be the decisive criterion for this quality, but I think this is understandable in the context of his time. He emphasizes here on positive support for a daily practice of services. Then he explains this more in detail: These services should be hold every morning and evening by a kind of core community: "Even if the whole congregation might not be able to attend such daily worship, it should be done by priests and students, and especially those who are hoped to become good preachers and pastors."¹²

As in the Catholic tradition, these daytime services are a matter of a kind of clergy that meets on behalf of the congregation. That might sound strange at first strange to nowadays Protestants, but in comparison with the practice of the parishes in Luther's time, the evangelical accent of the idea becomes clear. Just the emphasis on the sermon and the rejection of particular spiritual classes such as religious orders show that these celebrations can be understood as an open offer for the congregation – an almost "modern" idea. The only difference between the Sunday and such everyday liturgy is then the gathering of the whole congregation and the opportunity to receive the Sacrament. But there is no longer any separation between ritual prayer and the "real" divine service, the mass, and none yet between the liturgical Sunday and the "non-liturgical" week.

11 Martin Luther, *Von der Ordnung des Gottesdienstes in der Gemeinde*, in: WA 12, 35, after LD 6, 82 (translation M. K.).

12 *Op. cit.*, WA 12, 36, after LD 6, 84 (translation M. K.).

This idea of liturgy carried out by a core community (of pupils) and the conservation of traditional (monastic) prayer times merged in the institution of monasterial schools in Württemberg. After the dissolution of all the monasteries during the reformation they were used as places for the higher education of the talented boys, as a preparation for their studies at the university, in order to become good ministers for church and country. The aforementioned *Große Kirchenordnung* provides detailed instructions for daily church services in the morning and evening for the pupils, including both German and Latin elements, reading and singing.¹³

The situation today and the Anglican model

Most of the liturgical traditions described seem to be lost and unrealistic in nowadays society. No effort of the Catholic reforms in the last decades made the *Liturgia horarum* a regular part of public church service outside of monasteries and religious orders. Even in most cathedrals a Sunday Vesper is the maximum offer of Divine Office in the church and for the people.

The Lutheran churches have lost their communal morning and evening prayers or weekday services long time ago.¹⁴ Perhaps the reformational regulations had connected them too closely to school and education. Of course, there have been liturgical movements and attempts of a renewal of the prayer times, which produced texts and melodies for a Protestant Liturgy of the hours (*Tagzeitengebet*). However, most of the congregations fail to use these parts of their hymnals or songbooks. In the main hymnal of the German Protestant church, the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, there are rather easy forms for four prayer times: morning prayer (*Mette*), noon prayer, evening prayer (*Vesper*) and night prayer (*Komplet*) (in the edition for Württemberg EG 779–782). Also, more recent forms of worship on weekdays have largely disappeared in the large Protestant churches of Central Europe, such as weekend prayers or other forms of *Andachten*, Bible studies or prayer meetings, as were common in the Pietist tradition. And in a time of deep crisis of the Church in general and in worship in particular, it might seem that one has to accept this situation with resig-

¹³ Cf. *Kirchenordnung*, CXLVIIv–CLr.

¹⁴ Cf. Kalb, *Liturgik*, 199.

nation. If just a few elderly people come even on Sunday, what is the point of making efforts for further gatherings?

On the other hand, a more diverse range of church services at different times could also be an opportunity for missionary congregations. At this point, it is interesting to have a look at the liturgy of the Anglican Church. The Church of England is not only permeated by a much stronger awareness that its evangelistic mission requires profound reforms than most of the other “popular” churches in Europe.¹⁵ At the same time, it has a strong connection to a tradition of the liturgy of the hours. The Church of England manages to hold modern forms of church work, yet in the same time preserves the tradition of worship. This tradition is indeed quite special: “Of all the churches which emerged from the Reformation of the 16th century, only the Church of England kept daytime worship and made it compulsory for the clergy by means of ecclesiastical law.”

In the history of the Anglican churches, daily worship has gained greater importance for the piety of both clergy and lay people. Of all the Christian churches in the West, the Anglican Communion alone maintained at least the daytime services of morning praise and evening prayer (evensong) as a really living part of the life of a community.¹⁶ Of course, it is not possible for our Central European churches just to copy this practice, which is had a long historical development and is for example connected to the English tradition of choral music. However, this look could help us not to give up hope for a greater variety of worship and not to consider the renewal of daily prayers impossible, even if perhaps limited to morning and evening.

Why we need a wider range of times for liturgy and what the *Liturgia horarum* can contribute to that

The comparison of today’s liturgical practice of normal Protestant churches with traditions of other denominations and in former times reminds us, that congregational assemblies are not necessarily limited to Sunday services, but that there is a rich treasure trove of liturgical life to be found

15 See, for example, the process represented by the report on “mission-shaped church” from 2004.

16 David R. Holeton, Der anglikanische Tagzeitengottesdienst in der Gegenwart, in: *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 33 (1990/91), 215.

in everyday life. In the following I will give theological reasons – in form of some theses – why we should strive for a renewal of the liturgy throughout the week. Some of these points have already been mentioned or arise from the historical reflections:

- The New Testament understanding of worship and the example of the early church should convince us, that gathering in the name of Jesus Christ is profoundly important for Christian life and generally free from any bondage to special days during the week or year. That does not rule out the celebration of Sunday and other feast days. However, the necessary distinction between workday and holiday should not be one between “normal” life and Christian spiritual life.
- The primary reference and setting for Christian life and worship is the community church, specifically the local congregation. Especially there is God’s word spoken, and there is the foremost place for prayer and adoration, praise and lament, of course for the sacraments. That does not invalidate individual, personal prayer, and private Bible study. But with one regular spiritual meeting a week we are far away from this necessary focus on community.
- We need a wider range of worship services in order to do justice to the people, whom God wants to meet with our missionary mandate. Not everyone wants to or is able to come on Sunday morning. Of course, it is important to unite a congregation in general worship assemblies, and not to divide believers into different separated groups. The Sunday morning meeting of the congregation can rightly remain the main service. However, we must not be blind towards the fact that this time effectively excludes some people. The church should have more points of contact for spiritual hunger.
- Sunday service can only benefit from additional spiritual and liturgical events. Our churches are lacking preparation and follow-up to this centre of their lives. Such accompaniment can take place for example in discussion groups, but the sermon text or the proprium of the week can also gain space in more liturgical forms. Finally yet importantly, the penitential service before a sacrament Sunday might be worthy of a new discovery.
- The tradition of the Liturgy of the Hours in the context of the Protestant school system may have overemphasized the educational as-

pect of worship. Even of that, we should not dismiss the catechetical dimension of the liturgy as outdated. It can also contribute to the strengthening of the knowledge of faith and spiritual maturity. Liturgy should be integrated into schools, confirmation classes, activities with children and education of adults.

- Liturgy can provide a room for creativity in various forms of expression, starting of course with church music. The potential for such spiritual languages in the churches is too great for only one service per week.

Both the introductory historical insights and these general values of the liturgy in everyday life revealed that the renewal of the same can take place in very different forms. Nevertheless, the *Officium* has a special significance for the divine service during the week, especially if in Protestantism one rejects the daily celebration of the mass and wants to maintain the tension between Sunday and week. In addition to the traditional argument, I put also the following reasons:

- From its origins, the *Liturgia horarum* can be seen as an embodiment of uninterrupted prayer, as the Holy Scriptures suggest (Ps 119,62.164; 1 Thess 5,17). Orientation towards given texts supports this, especially in a context in which many people have lost the practice of personal prayer.
- The prayer hours not only provide assistance in talking to God, but also in structuring everyday life in a practical way. This can be seen in the life of the monastery, even if this proves unrealistic when applied to the wider community.
- The *Liturgia horarum* takes seriously the condition of the creature by the time of day and confronts it with God and his word. What the church year means for Sunday worship is more the circle of day and night for daily prayer. Here is a chance for a spirituality “in harmony with the rhythm of nature”, without any esotericism.
- The Divine Office reveals the treasure of the Psalter to all Christians. It is not necessary here to elaborate on the value of the Psalms for Christian spirituality. This is a theoretical matter of course that cannot be put enough into practice. Finally yet importantly, these texts create a connection to the people of God of the Old Covenant like no other.

- The example of the early church and the catechetical value could be mentioned here again in particular.

I am convinced that, gathering more frequently during the week would greatly enrich Protestant congregations and their liturgy. There are many different forms and liturgical structures to do so, even with little effort in preparation. The liturgy of the hours is one very significant and traditional model, which can be adapted in a variety of ways. It is not important when and where to start which liturgy, but to be courageous and joyful in the attempt.

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