RITUAL REFORM AND RITUAL BEHAVIOR

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The article focuses on the complex question of continuity and change as exemplified by ritual policies and ritual practices during the Lutheran reformation in 16th century Denmark-Norway. Thematically the article concentrates on matrimony and funeral. A main point is that despite changes in liturgy and church organisation motivations and practices demonstrate a remarkable continuity. The most eclatant change seems to have taken place in the field of ritual entrepreneurship: The Lutheran clergy lost control thus leaving initiative and interpretation to the congregations.
Keywords: *Reformation, purgatory, wedding, funeral, entrepreneurship*

Članek na primeru poroke in pogreba tematizira kompleksno vprašanje kontinuitete in sprememb na primeru ritualov in in ritualnih praks v času luteranske reformacije na Danskem in Norveškem v 16. stoletju . Kljub spremembam v liturgiji in cerkveni organizaciji je za motivacijo in prakso značilna kontinuiteta. Najopaznejša sprememba se je zgodila na področju obrednih aktivnosti: luteranska duhovščina je izgubila kontrolo in tako iniciativo in interpretacijo prepustila kongregacijam.
Ključne besede: *reformacija, vice, poroka, pogreb, aktivnost*

Large-scale ritual reforms took place during the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheran Reformation in northern Europe. This is especially the case regarding funeral and wedding rituals. A central tenant of the Lutheran ritual reformers was, for instance, to avoid any references in funeral rituals to the continued existence of dead souls in the afterlife and to their stay in purgatory. Instead, the intention of the new rituals was to address the living on issues related to their salvation and Christian life.

Hence, the Lutheran funeral rituals were reduced to an absolute minimum compared to the previous Roman Catholic liturgies. However, by the sixteenth century the new rituals had, in fact, developed into rich, complex, socially distinguishing, and culturally elaborate forms. They took the perspective of the living into consideration, but also with many references to the dead, their Christian lives, and their future destiny.

A reasonable perspective on this complex and seemingly rather contradictory process is the mutual relationship between the ritual reforms as dictated by the new ideologies and church officials, and the practice and needs of the performers or users of these rituals.

This article presents and analyzes some important elements of these ritual processes with emphasis on the Kingdom of Denmark–Norway during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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THE LUTHERAN "MIDDLE WAY"

What was the structure, ideology, and cultural practice of the Danish–Norwegian Lutheran Church with reference to liturgical rituals? The Lutheran "middle way" of the Reformation is often described as a strategy moderating between the radical upheaval of religious practice and memory on the one hand, and the traditionalist solutions to the religious challenges in Europe on the other. However, one should not close one's eyes to the fact that in Denmark–Norway Lutheranism strove for social and religious control, and such control seldom turns out to be "moderate." To succeed in this, it was—to put it simply—necessary to get people forget the religious past represented by the Roman Catholic Church and its interpretation of Christian history, belief, and dogma. At the same time, the Lutheran Church sought to retain an impression of continuity in rituals as far as was ideologically possible. To exemplify this, I examine more closely the rituals of weddings and funerals.

The reason for this thematic focus is rather evident. Rituals accompanying vital stages of individual life and the annual cycle were also of central importance to the confessional struggle on how people should interpret and remember their own lives, how time was recognized and divided, and how people should interact within church and society. In other words, these church rituals were substantial to both collective and individual memory. Given the fact that the Lutheran Reformation was explicitly critical of the Roman Catholic past, the question is how this "eradication of memory" was actually planned by the new authorities as an eradication or re-coding of history combined with a certain continuity.

In these two cases—weddings and funerals—the Lutheran protest against Roman Catholic dogma was obvious and explicit: the Lutherans refuted the sacrament of matrimony and the sacrament of extreme unction. Hence, the Lutheran rituals had to include the strategy of both oblivion and new memory.

A REFORMATION OF RITUALS

From the very beginning, the Lutheran reformation was a reformation of rituals, as has been pointed out in recent international research; for example, by the historians Edward Muir (1997) and Susan Karant-Nunn (1997). Martin Luther himself wrote new church rituals or instructions for rituals; for example, his *Taufbüchlein* (Baptismal Liturgy) of 1523 (Luther 1950 III: 310–316) or *Traubüchlein* (Wedding Liturgy) of 1529 (Luther 1950 IV: 100–103), which immediately became models for Lutheran baptismal and wedding rituals all over northern Europe.

In the case of Norway and Denmark, the ritual changes succeeding the introduction of Lutheranism also were closely linked to the political changes that took place. Until 1537, there was an independent Norwegian church: the Roman Catholic Church of Norway, with its own Archbishop in Trondheim. Geographically, this church province also included

Iceland, Greenland, the Orkneys, and the Faroe Islands. However, when the last archbishop fled the country in 1537, the ecclesiastical sovereignty of Norway was abolished. The Lutheran King of Denmark, Christian III, made claims to the Norwegian throne, and he put military force behind them. Having defeated Archbishop Olav Engelbrektsson, King Christian simply declared Norway a Lutheran kingdom and introduced the new Danish Lutheran church laws and rituals (the Church Ordinance, published in Latin in 1537 and in Danish in 1539) as the only valid and centralized standard regulated by the authorities in Copenhagen. Thus, the Reformation united Norway and Denmark under one ecclesiastical and ritual rule and made the clergy subordinate to the king alone.

THE WEDDING RITUAL

The case of the wedding ritual is interesting. Martin Luther claimed that the sacrament of matrimony was a papist construction with no legitimacy in the Holy Scripture. In the Roman Catholic Church, it was not the church ritual that constituted this sacrament, but the physical union of the man and the woman. Nevertheless, the formal church rituals marking this union were elaborate and central in the late medieval church. The couple received the blessing of the church at the church door, followed by a nuptial mass inside the church. The nuptial mass was a ritual celebration of the wedding as a sacrament, and included a formal kiss, the exchange of rings between the parties, a nuptial crown, and candles. In addition, the priest blessed the bridal bed and the ritual drink given to the couple before going to bed. Thus, the Catholic ritual aimed at showing but not constituting the sacrament of matrimony (cf. Karant-Nunn 1997: 9 ff.).

To prevent any sacramental associations, Martin Luther prescribed that the church should stay as far away as possible from matrimony. Luther formed the opinion that the formal establishment of marriage was a purely secular business based on the consensus of the man and the woman (Fæhn 1993: 137). As an institution, marriage was according to God's will, and it was meant to establish organized households responsible for the production and distribution of God's gifts to man; however, marriage was not part of the ecclesiastical system for distributing divine grace. According to this view on marriage and the household, Luther prescribed only a short, optional church ritual that stated, "what has been united by God shall be separated by no man" and was followed by a prayer, some Bible texts referring to the obligations of the married couple, and a final blessing. In his introduction to his *Traubüchlein* he stated that the rituals both could and should differ from place to place according to local norms:

> *Dem nach / weil die hochzeit vnd ehe stand ein welltlich geschefft ist / gebürt vns geistlichen odder kirchendienern nichts darynn zu ordenen odder regiern / Sondern lassen einer iglichen Stad vnd land hierynn yhren brauch vnd gewonheit / wie sie gehen.* (Luther 1950 IV: 100)

Luther's point of view was that the use of this ritual should be voluntary: if the congregations demanded according to local traditions that the clergy say prayers and blessings or meet the couple at the entrance of the church, these traditions should continue—but, of course, without any references to old liturgies. The same principle was introduced as the rule of the Lutheran Church in Denmark and Norway as well. This follows the fact that Luther's *Traubüchlein* of 1529 was translated into Danish the same year as it was published in German. Some years later, the influential Danish Bishop Peder Palladius edited his own translation of Luther's book on matrimony (Palladius 1911–12: 96–101) and, in 1556, Palladius included this translation in his *Alterbog* (Liturgical Handbook) under the title "En liden Bog om Brudvielse" (Wedding Manual; Palladius 1916–18: 473–477, cf. Fæhn 1993: 137).

The effect of this obviously was that many common people in both Denmark and Norway simply did not call for the clergy at all when they were to marry (Kolsrud 1938). In general, it seems that the Reformation caused much confusion with regard to both matrimonial ritual norms and church legislation in marital issues. This was explicitly held by the "Ribe synod" in 1542 (Rørdam 1883: 198).

This made it necessary in the eyes of the authorities to change policy. As early as 1550 the clergy of both Norway and Denmark demanded that couples that had not attended the church wedding ritual should be considered adulterers (Kolsrud 1938: 105 ff.). During the 1580s the optional status of the wedding ritual was permanently changed from voluntary to obligatory through King Frederick II's Marriage Act. This act was valid in Denmark after 1582 and explicitly validated for Iceland in 1588 and for Norway in 1589 (Kolsrud 1938: 111). As a consequence of this, central parts of the ritual were also changed. The vicar was to no longer state that the man and woman were already united by God. Instead, in a central passage of the ritual he declared them man and wife. In addition, the ritual thenceforth included several very severe and investigating questions from the vicar to the couple, and it is presumed that the entire ritual would take place inside the church and in front of the high altar; that is, in front of God himself.

This new ritual development in Denmark and Norway in the 1580s can be interpreted as a re-ritualization of matrimony based of the fear of moral disorder. Luther's view on marriage as a civil business based on consensus between two parties led to too many instances of adultery, according to the church authorities. The solution—agreed upon by both the king and the Church—was that a strengthened and obligatory church ritual with many references to moral standards in family life should be introduced. The authorities must have regarded the risk small that common people still would remember the Roman Catholic dogma of the sacramental status of matrimony and find support for that view in the new ritual.

Of course, this new wedding ritual was used by congregations (they had no other options), but in practical life and at least in peasant communities many people still regarded the consensus of the two parties as the essential element of matrimony, and started their common domestic life before the formal wedding took place in the church.

In practice, then, popular culture continued to regard marriage as it was regarded before the Reformation: as a physical and consensual union of two parties. In addition, there are sources documenting that the new Lutheran rituals for decades after the Reformation were supplemented by older Roman Catholic elements such as the use of church bells, wedding rings, and Holy Communion, and that the ritual was even performed outside the church door (Fæhn 1993: 140 ff.).

This development included the fact that authority over and responsibility for rituals became more diverse. Of course, the wedding rituals were more loosely linked to the ritual year as such, but the principle is of higher importance here: the Lutheran ritual experiments resulted in the clergy losing control to a certain extent over rituals of vital importance to all members of the local congregations. This is even clearer in my next example, the rituals of death.

THE REFORMATION OF DEATH

The Lutheran reformation was not least of all a "reformation of death." The Catholic purgatory was totally and quite fiercely rejected as heretical by Martin Luther, as was the sacrament of extreme unction or anointing of the sick. The natural consequence was that the Lutheran death rituals should represent a total different view of the destiny of the dead. According to the Lutheran doctrine, there were no possibilities for the dead to repent or be purified in the afterlife. Luther persisted that a Christian status of faith was final at the moment of death. Accordingly, any ritual related to the funeral should be constructed around this new notion of dying and death. In 1542, Denmark and Norway had its new Lutheran funeral ritual published (Rørdam 1883: 85 ff.). Compared to the Roman Catholic rituals, which in practice accompanied the dying and the dead for days or even weeks until the moment of death and burial, thus organizing a temporal sequence of dying and death (cf. Fæhn 1993:146. Karant-Nunn 1997: 138 ff.), the 1542 ritual was extremely short, simple, and almost self-effacing (Amundsen 1991). The ritual is introduced as follows: to accompany a dead person to his or her grave is "a merciful act" by any living Christian. If a clergyman is asked to take part in this "merciful act" it will not be for the sake of the dead, but in order to "wake up the living," and his participation shall be limited to the day of the burial. Instead of being a ritual distributed in time and space, the Lutheran burial rituals were organized to speak instantly and for the moment—and they were meant to be so. Any sermon given at the grave should be addressed to the living and their situation, not to the dead or their fate in the afterlife. Moreover, according to the seventeenth-century Danish–Norwegian ritual, probably referring to an older tradition (cf. Schjørring 1959), the clergyman should ceremonially sprinkle earth on the coffin three times before the grave was filled, saying: "You have come from the earth, you shall turn into earth, and from the earth you shall rise." This was obviously also meant as a statement of the status of the dead:

the dead would stay in their graves until the Last Judgment. This gave no place for a ritual year of the dead. In short, the Lutheran funeral ritual was more like a non-ritual aiming at destroying old religious ideas about the dead and the afterlife. Despite some minor changes during the seventeenth century, this rather modest church ritual was maintained until the nineteenth century. Of course, the nobility and royalty were capable of developing even the Lutheran ritual into enormous proportions in both time and space, with processions, music, architecture, and hour-long sermons according to the Baroque manners of *pompa funebris*: the use of wakes, processions following the dead body from one part of the country to another, the ringing of church bells regularly for weeks, months, and even years, made such funeral rituals into time-dividing and time-structuring rituals for large communities (cf. Johannsen 2004). Even so, the Lutheran view on death and burial was never changed in Denmark and Norway during the following centuries: this ritual was about the living, not about the dead—and eventually only about the lives of the recently deceased, but not about their future destiny in the afterlife before the Last Judgment.

RITUAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

What is notable, however, is that the radicalism of the Lutheran funeral ritual opened the way for new ritual practices and new ritual masters and entrepreneurs, just as in the case of the wedding. The Norwegian church historian Helge Fæhn remarked that it is more or less unthinkable that the ritual changes in funeral rituals took place immediately after the Lutheran reformation in the 1530s. He advocated the view that the full implementation of the new "non-ritual" must have developed gradually and lasted for several generations (Fæhn 1993: 148).

On the other hand, there are actually no positive indications that the Lutheran clergy were disobedient regarding this issue. More thought should be given to another perspective, which was only hinted at by Helge Fæhn: according to the new Lutheran regulations, the ritual participation of the clergy was restricted to burial in the churchyard or in the church. This meant that all the old rituals—from the wake in the room where the deceased was placed until the burial to blessings of and prayers over the dead body and the use of church bells to mark the soul's travel onward into Purgatory—were free to all members of the congregation to use.

This ritual privatization actually has several positive source references from both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Several contemporaries comment on the fact that in many cases, and parallel with what happened with wedding rituals, ordinary people did not care to invite the local clergy to perform the new ritual. Members of the congregations simply organized the burials themselves. In a draft for a new church law, the Lutheran bishops of Norway in 1604 mentioned several examples of uncivilized or even heretical customs among the commoners of the country. With the access to the parish church, the

local congregation used the church bells to indicate the fate of the dead (*sjeleringing* 'soul ringing') at the moment of death ("through this they want to ring the soul into heaven"). Another example mentioned by the bishops was that the wake over the dead body still was common practice; however, to the bishops the fact that no were clergy present explained why wakes had turned into rather violent and vulgar parties for young people that wanted to dance and drink, just like "the heathens use to do" (Fæhn 1993: 148 ff.).

Even if such use of church bells or the use of wakes was explicitly prohibited during the seventeenth century, people continued to practice these rituals or ritualized customs. Wakes are documented in Norwegian popular use until the early twentieth century, and in much nineteenth-century folklore material the relationship between church bells and the eternal fate of the deceased is still very strong and important; for example, that the fate of the dead could be prophesied by the sound of the bells, or that the local church bells started to ring by themselves in instances in which the local minister had condemned a dead sinner to hell, indicating that the sinner's soul would go to heaven after all (see Hodne 1980 for numerous examples).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Lutheran Reformation in Denmark and Norway starting in the late 1530s was to a large extent a ritual reformation. It has been commonly assumed that the success of the Lutheran Reformation was due to continuous and successful religious instruction by means of Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*. Lutheran piety became a piety of reading and praying. The new words and new texts led to eradication of positive memories of the Roman Catholic past, of its rituals, of its spaces and places, and its annual circularity—in short, of its pious culture. However, by looking at the ritual development of the Lutheran church in Denmark and Norway, the picture turns out to be more complex. Of course, the new authorities could not possibly know how the common people would react to radical ritual changes, and there are indeed many indications of both open protests and violence, and more silent disapproval or disregard (cf. Kolsrud 1939). At the same time, it obviously must have been urgent to the authorities to have religious opinions changed as quickly as possible. The final success of the Lutheran Reformation was definitely not secured politically until the middle of the seventeenth century. To secure the cultural success of Lutheranism might have taken as much time as the political success, not least of all because it was necessary to turn the memory of the Roman Catholic period into oblivion or disregard. The two ritual reforms mentioned here had the obvious intention of oblivion or disregard, to rewrite and re-edit the ritual world and the temporal and spatial extension of the Christian religion. Many Lutheran reformers were of the opinion that rituals were substantially unnecessary to firmly believing Christians; rituals were meant for the weak-hearted and uneducated members of the congregation.

In order to communicate with an illiterate population, the rituals were obviously of great importance to the Roman Catholic Church: in order to visualize, verbalize, and incorporate the Christian interpretation of individual and collective life, dogma, and history. To the Lutheran Church, it must have been of equally high importance to neutralize and abolish long-established and remembered verbalization, visualization, and incorporation by simply altering the rituals or by reducing them to an absolute minimum and making them optional and instant.

Seen from this perspective and with reference to the two ritual cases mentioned here, it seems that the ritual reforms of the Lutheran Church of Denmark and Norway had the character of experiments with no definite outcome. To a large extent, they turned out to be failures. Like Susan Karant-Nunn, one can wonder "how few uneducated people were able to accept this despirited, streamlined world" (1997: 186). A ritual or memory strategy based on limitation, restriction, and disregard of earlier rituals did not succeed, mostly because people remembered and, for example, made elements of the old funeral rituals their own, thus permanently loosening the church's grip on the complex matter of death and burial. In the case of matrimony, the Lutheran strategy was even less successful because it made it possible to continue to remember and practice the sacramental dimension of marriage by staying away from the church and the new clergy. This made the Lutheran church revise its strategy and re-ritualize this specific area.

However, in contrast, the use of the clergy at the burial remained optional through the following centuries. The only requirement was that the vicar be informed about the death and burial so that he could later perform the symbolic sprinkling of earth on the grave.

In short, ritual silence or ritual withdrawal did not turn out to be a successful strategy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Denmark and Norway. To compensate for the effects by giving the congregations new texts to memorize was obviously insufficient. On the contrary, this strategy paved the way for alternative memories of the ritual past, for uncontrolled memories of a religious culture that had been taken away from the congregations in both countries forcibly and without advance preparation.

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REFORMA RITUALNIH PRAKS IN RITUALNO VEDENJE

V luteranski reformaciji na severu Evrope v 16. in 17. stoletju je prišlo do obsežnih reform ritualnih praks. Ne nazadnje je to očitno tudi na področju pogrebnih in poročnih obredij. Pri pogrebnih obredjih so reformatorji zavzeli stališče, da se je potrebno izogibati kakršnemukoli sklicevanju na življenje mrtvih duš v posmrtnosti in vicah. Namesto tega so v novih obredjih nagovarjali žive o zadevah, povezanih v zvezi z njihovim krščanskim življenjem in odrešenjem. Zato je bilo luteransko pogrebno obredje v primerjavi s prejšnjo rimokatoliško liturgijo skrčeno na minimum. Kljub temu so se že v 16. stoletju ta nova obredja razvila v bogate, kompleksne, socialno razločujoče in kulturno izpopolnjene oblike – upoštevala so perspektivo živih, a so vseeno ohranila povezavo z mrtvimi, njihovimi krščanskimi življenji in njihovo bodočo usodo. Logično stališče glede tega kompleksnega in na videz nekoliko kontradiktornega procesa je vzajemno razmerje med obrednimi reformami, kot so jih narekovale nove ideologije skupaj s cerkvenimi uradniki, ter prakso in potrebami izvajalcev oziroma uporabnikov teh obredij.

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