CTQ 81 (2017): 321–330

Restoring the Great Litany in the Lutheran Church

Benjamin T.G. Mayes

The Great Litany, often called simply "the Litany," is a responsive form of prayer inherited by the Lutheran Church from the early church and the Middle Ages, that quickly became popular in the Reformation. However, in modern times the Litany has declined in popularity, and in most places has become deformed and estranged from its original function. The Litany, once seen by Luther and the Reformers as a model prayer by which to protect Christian Europe against the invading Muslim Turks and by which all the necessities of life are requested from God,[1] has lost its place as a popular hymn of the people and has been relegated to the status of an obscure liturgical antiquity. In this short essay, our aim is to show how the Litany declined and to suggest ways to bring it vigorously into the life of the church again.

I. History and Deformation of the Great Litany

The Great Litany in the Middle Ages and in the Roman Catholic Church

A litany is "a form of prayer consisting of a series of petitions or biddings which are sung or said by a deacon, a priest, or cantors, and to which the people make fixed responses, e.g. *Kyrie eleison,* 'Grant, Lord,' 'We beseech thee, hear us', &c."[2] From roots in eastern liturgies of the early centuries of the church, the Litany became widespread in the western church of the Middle Ages, both in private devotions and public liturgies, such as the "Greater Litanies" on St. Mark's Day (April 25) and the "Lesser Litanies" on the three days before Ascension Thursday, in Rogate week. These litanies were sung in the context of processions and were prayed for the fertility of the fields and for other benefits. The invocation of a long list of saints was

[1] Ulrich S. Leupold, introduction to Martin Luther, *The German Litany and The Latin Litany Corrected* (1529): vol. 53, pp. 153, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

[2] F.L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), s.v. "Litany."

Benjamin T.G. Mayes is Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. He may be contacted at benjamin.mayes@ctsfw.edu.

central to the Great Litany during the Middle Ages.[3] Before the Council of Trent, there were at least eighty different forms of the Litany in use in the Roman Church,[4] but the Council trimmed back these litanies considerably. The great Lutheran liturgical scholar Wilhelm Loehe commented: "There are especially three litanies that have found the widest spread and acceptance in the Roman Church: the Litany of the Sweet Name of Jesus, the Litany of the Mother of God of Loreto, and above all what is called the 'Great Litany.' We Lutherans do not have the first two; whoever is familiar with them can easily understand why."[5] According to Loehe, even before the Reformation there were variations in the text of the Great Litany. "Luther, too, made use of this same freedom."[6]

The Great Litany in the Churches of the Augsburg Confession

The Litany probably fell out of use in Wittenberg during Karlstadt's reforms in 1521–1522. Seven years later, as Turkish armies were threatening Christian Europe, Luther sought to revive it. In *On War Against the Turk*, he wrote:

> After people have thus been taught and exhorted to confess their sin and amend their ways they should then be most diligently exhorted to prayer and shown that such prayer pleases God, that he has commanded it and promised to hear it, and that no one ought to think lightly of his praying or have doubts about it, but with firm faith be sure that it will be heard; all of which has been published by us in many tracts. The man who doubts, or prays for good luck, would do better to let prayer alone because such prayer is merely tempting God and only makes things worse. Therefore I would advise against processions, which are a heathenish and useless practice, for they are more pomp and show than prayer. I say the same thing about celebrating a lot of masses and calling upon the saints. It might, indeed, be of some use to have the people, especially the young people, sing the Litany at mass or vespers or in the church after the sermon, provided that everyone, even at home by himself, constantly raised to

[3] For the history of the Great Litany, or "Litany of Saints," see Michael D. Whelan, "The Litany of Saints: Its Place in the Grammar of Liturgy," *Worship* 65, no. 3 (1991): 216–223, here at 217–219; *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. "Litany" and "Litany of the Saints," and the literature cited by Otto Brodde, "Litanei," in *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon: Kirchlich-theologisches Handwörterbuch*, ed. Heinz Brunotte and Otto Weber (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), s.v. For the history of the Litany in the Church of England, see William P. Haugaard, "English Litany from Henry to Elizabeth," *Anglican Theological Review* 51, no. 3 (1969): 177–203.

[4] Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Service of the Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 545.

[5] Wilhelm Loehe, *Agende für christliche Gemeinden des lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, 2nd ed. (Nördlingen: Druck und Verlag der C. H. Beck'schen Buchhandlung, 1853), 1:149.

[6] Loehe, *Agende*, 1:149.

> Christ at least a sigh of the heart for grace to lead a better life and for help against the Turk.[7]

In 1529, Luther revised and published the Litany in German and Latin, excluding the invocation of saints and adding a few petitions.[8]

The German and Latin Litanies became very popular and were seen by Luther, the Reformers, and their heirs as a core component of their life of worship and faith.[9] All over Reformation and post-Reformation Germany, the Litany appears to have been sung once or twice weekly (Friday and in some places also Wednesday).[10] It thus must have been extremely well known, probably well loved, and certainly well ingrained into the minds and hearts of all Lutherans. In his detailed study of early Lutheran worship practice, Joseph Herl notes that the German Litany was the fourth most popular "hymn" in the church orders that he investigated.[11] Several commentaries, sermons, and devotions based on the Litany were written during this period, of which we should not fail to mention Johann Gerhard's *Spiritual Gem of Pious Hearts* (1634).[12] This work includes a "comforting explanation of the customary church litany through devotional sighs taken from Holy Scripture."[13] Gerhard explains that this is useful for when the Litany is sung in church somewhat slowly "as is usual." In these cases, Gerhard's explanation can be read and meditated on in order to understand each petition of the Litany and keep one's heart "in the devotion."[14]

The singing of the Litany was even seen as a confessional ceremony, that is, a ceremony that confessed the distinctives of the Lutheran confession, a ceremony that was abolished where the Lutheran confession was abandoned and restored where the Lutheran confession was reinstituted. In Hessen-Darmstadt, the Litany

---

[7] Luther, *On War Against the Turk* (1529), AE 46:172–173.

[8] Translated in AE 53:153–170.

[9] Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 548.

[10] Paul Graff, *Geschichte der Auflösung der alten gottesdienstlichen Formen in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands* (Waltrop: Spenner, 1994), 1:224–225.

[11] Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism: Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 66.

[12] Johann Gerhard, *Frommer Hertzen Geistliches Kleinod/ Das ist: Vier unterschiedene Tractätlein: Deren Das erste in sich begreifft eine Erklärung des Catechismi . . . Das ander/ geistliche Gespräch Gottes des Herrn und einer gläubigen Seele. Das dritte/ Trostsprüche und Trostgründe … Das vierdte/ die Litaney mit andächtigen HertzensSeufftzern erkläret* (Lüneburg: Stern, 1634). Loehe (*Agende*, 1:151) mentions also Paul Eber's sermons on the Litany; J.G. Olearius, *Eröffnete Himmelspforte* (Leipzig, 1679), p. 872ff.; Phil. Han, *Consiliis oder Neuverbeßertem und vollständigem Kirchenbuch* (Magdeburg & Zerbst, 1692), 3:141; Balthas. Bozögel, *Die Litanei deutsch und lateinisch* (1720).

[13] "die Litaney mit andächtigen HertzensSeufftzern erkläret." Gerhard, *Frommer Hertzen Geistliches Kleinod, title page.*

[14] Gerhard, *Frommer Hertzen Geistliches Kleinod*, "Vorrede."

was to be read, not sung. But in 1623 when Lutheran influences in that territory became stronger, the calls for singing the Litany became stronger as well. After the visitation of 1629, the order was given that it should be sung everywhere "as much as possible."[15] However, as the seventeenth century wore on and the influences of both pietism and rationalism increased, the singing of the Litany waned.[16]

For a long time the Lutheran Church retained the singing of the Litany in Latin. Luther instructed that it was to be sung in Wittenberg by two choir boys in alternation with the choir on Wednesdays in German and on Saturdays in Latin.[17] The congregation was supposed to sing the responses of the German Litany together with the choir. In a sermon on August 15, 1529, Luther admonished the people to come to church on both Wednesday and Saturday and "learn to sing along, because all necessities are included in it, and therefore it is sung among you so that you may help pray with us, just as we pray for you."[18] Perhaps Luther intended for the congregation to sing along with the Latin Litany as well.[19]

The popularity of the Litany among Lutherans was due perhaps in part to the fact that it was seen as a hymn that the congregation could easily sing. In the days when hymnal ownership and liturgical participation among the laity was low, the Litany was simple and repetitious enough to allow a high level of congregational participation. The Litany was perhaps the easiest hymn to learn without printed music or words. The leader's chant served as a signal to the people of when it was their turn to sing. With the choir leading the congregation's part, and with the Litany's frequent repetitions, it would have been simple to put these words of prayer into the mouths and hearts of the people.

Luther wrote to some pastors of Lübeck on January 12, 1530: "Among the most important things you must constantly impress upon yourselves as well as upon the people, however, are the prayers and litanies, both private and public, for purity and fruitfulness of the word, for common peace, [good] government, and for all other matters [about which] you can read in the litany."[20] As Luther wrote to the clergy assembled at Augsburg later that year, the Litany, in his view, is one of "the topics with which it is necessary to deal in the true Christian church and about which we

---

[15] Graff, *Geschichte der Auflösung*, 1:224.

[16] Graff, *Geschichte der Auflösung*, 1:224.

[17] Graff, *Geschichte der Auflösung*, 1:224.

[18] Martin Luther, *Sermon for Aug. 15, 1529 (12th Sunday after Trinity, on Mark 7:31ff.)*, in *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 29, pp. 517, lines 5–13 (hereafter WA).

[19] This is the suggestion of Graff, *Geschichte der Auflösung*, 1:224.

[20] Luther, *Letter to Some Pastors of the City of Lübeck* (1530), AE 49:263.

are concerned."[21] The Litany was included in some editions of the Small Catechism,[22] a fact that testifies to its popularity and to its centrality for teaching the Evangelical Lutheran faith. Loehe, followed by Luther Reed, reported that for Martin Luther, after the Lord's Prayer the Litany was the best prayer that could be made.[23]

When Lutherans began revising and printing their Latin liturgical books, the Litany was included. Lucas Lossius' Latin liturgical book, *Psalmodia*, explained the Litany as "a prayer of the Church that is an explanation of the Lord's Prayer, so to speak. For we pray, in turn, that God would preserve His Church, governments, and households; that He would be acknowledged, invoked, and praised in them; that He would hinder the efforts and raging of the devil and his members, who are trying to destroy the Church."[24]

The sixteenth and seventeenth century Lutheran liturgical books specify or assume that the Litany will be recited responsively, with a response by choir and congregation following each petition. "As indicated in the original texts, the Litany was supposed to be sung antiphonally by two choirs. . . . It should be noted that every petition was responded to; the modern practice of repeating a whole group of preces before the response is sung was unknown in Reformation times."[25]

The Modern Deformation of the Litany

In sixteenth-century England, Thomas Cranmer's English revision of the Great Litany made a significant change in the rhythm of the Litany by grouping several petitions together followed by only one response for each group.[26] In the first *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), and from that time to the present in the Anglican Communion, the petitions of the Litany have been grouped with a single response,

[21] Luther, *Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg* (1530), AE 34:52–53.

[22] Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 337.

[23] Loehe, *Agende*, 1:150; Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 542.

[24] Lucas Lossius, *Psalmodia, hoc est cantica sacra veteris ecclesiae selecta* (Nürnberg: Gabriel Hayn, 1553), 272.

[25] Leupold, introduction to, *The German Litany and The Latin Litany Corrected* (1529), AE 53:155. The Latin and German Litanies printed by Lucas Lossius present all the petitions having the same response bracketed together with the response to the side of the petitions, not following them: Lossius, *Psalmodia*, 277–279. Clearly, the response was to be sung after each petition. In Johann Keuchenthal's *KirchenGesenge Latinisch vnd Deudsch* (Wittenberg: Lorentz Schwenck, 1573), fol. 529r –537r, the Latin and German Litanies are printed with the two choirs' parts on facing pages. Petitions are not grouped, but where the response is supposed to be repeated, it is printed one or more times to the side of the petitions, not following them.

[26] F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), s.v. "Litany, The (BCP)." See also Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 549–550.

having roughly three petitions for each group. An option for repeating the response after each petition is not given.[27]

Lutheran hymnals in America have not followed the text of the Litany in the *Book of Common Prayer*, but have knowingly or unknowingly adopted the same practice of grouping the petitions.[28] The *Common Service*, incorporated in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's *Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), includes the Litany with the rubric that "The Responses may be repeated after each phrase," that is, after each petition, "or only at the end of each group, as here followeth."[29] The musical setting of the Litany, however, lacks this rubric and though the response is printed with a bracket beside the petitions, similar to sixteenth-century printings, in all likelihood the practice of gathering petitions into groups of about nine dominated American Lutheran liturgical practice.[30] The *Lutheran Book of Worship* allowed these groups of nine to continue, but gave the option of repeating the responses after roughly each three petitions. The text of the Litany was printed with an optional "℟" at the end of each line (of three petitions).[31] In the LCMS's *Lutheran Worship*, the optional "℟" was dropped. Here the ℟ only appears at the end of every three or four lines (nine petitions or more).[32] The latest hymnal of the LCMS, *Lutheran Service Book*, follows the practice of *Lutheran Worship* by omitting even the option of repeating the response at the end of each line, much less after each petition. Following

---

[27] Henry Baskerville Walton, ed., *The First Book of Common Prayer of Edward VI. and The Ordinal of 1549 Together with The Order of the Communion, 1548* (London: Rivingtons, 1870), "The Litany and Suffrages"; *The Book of Common Prayer, 1549. Commonly Called The First Book of Edward vi. To Which is Added The Ordinal of 1549. And The Order of Holy Communion, 1548* (New York: Church Kalendar Press, 1881), 227–231. The text of the Litany in the Book of Common Prayer tradition is quite different than that of the Common Service, discussed below.

[28] In the old German hymnal of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Litany is a hymn, sung by two choirs, though the music is not provided for this or any other hymn in the hymnal. The petitions are gathered in groups of about six: *Kirchengesangbuch für Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden ungeänderter Augsburgischer Konfession* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), no. 368.

[29] *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 110.

[30] *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927), p. 110; *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p. 110 and hymn 661. Luther Reed assumes that the Common Service's rubric, allowing the response to be repeated after each petition, will not be followed: "The Litany contains sixty-five separate petitions and prayerful phrases and twenty-four responses": *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 550.

[31] The Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg, 1979), pp. 168–173. The Lord's Prayer and traditional collects at the end of the Litany were omitted as "excessive": Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), 300.

[32] The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), pp. 279–287. Lutheran Worship restored the Lord's Prayer and traditional collects, however.

Lutheran Worship, the musical version of the Litany in the *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* includes the cadence at the end of each line of petitions, even though the congregation is not instructed to respond except at the end of a group. This means that the congregation cannot use the musical cadence at the end of a line as a cue for when to sing.[33]

The American Lutheran deformation of the Litany groups large numbers of petitions together and puts few words in the mouth of the congregation. This has been done, likely, to make a long prayer shorter or to avoid perceived monotony. Musical settings are often not provided, and when they are, the music does not serve as a cue to the people for when to sing. Both the grouping and the lack of music in the pew edition of *Lutheran Service Book* are signs of the state of disuse of the Litany in American Lutheranism.

Unfortunately, these features also contribute to that very state of disuse. This is because: (1) Without frequent repetitions, one must read the text to know when to respond. This limits participation to the literate, excluding some fourteen percent of the US population.[34] (2) Without music serving as a cue for the congregation's response, one must, again, read the text of the Litany to know when to respond. As the Litany was originally written and prayed, on the other hand, one could be an illiterate child or adult and still be able to participate. (3) Without music in the pew book, the accessibility to the sung music is further limited to congregational staff. The sung Litany is now exclusively the turf of professional church workers. It has been removed yet another step from the prominence it enjoyed in the Reformation and Age of Orthodoxy as one of the church's most popular hymns.

II. Restoring the Great Litany in the Devotion and Prayer of the Church

If the Litany truly is one of "the topics with which it is necessary to deal in the true Christian church and about which we are concerned,"[35] then should we not take steps to make it known and loved in our churches? To make it known and loved, three steps are proposed here: (1) Choose a musical setting and teach it by using the

[33] In the Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK)'s *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Kirchengesangbuch* (Groß Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms, 1999), no. 138, rubrics are given that are much more helpful in this regard. There are two options: (1) The congregation responds after every petition. (2) Or the congregation responds after roughly every three petitions. If the latter option is used, the choir sings all the petitions except the last on one note, so that the cadence at the end of the group of petitions signals to the congregation that it is their turn to sing.

[34] As of 2003, fourteen percent of adults in the USA were functionally illiterate, according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy: http://nces.ed.gov/naal/kf_demographics.asp, accessed on October 1, 2017.

[35] Luther, *Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg (1530),* AE 34:52–53.

choir. (2) Increase congregational participation by having the response sung after each petition. (3) Make regular use of the Litany in congregational worship.

Music and Choir

In Luther's day, the Litany was printed with music and was to be sung antiphonally between two choirs. "The first choir was often made up of cantors or choir boys kneeling on the altar steps, the second by the choir whom the congregation could join."[36] Old Lutheran practice was to sing the Litany without organ accompaniment.[37] Several settings are available. In the Lutheran parish one could use *The Lutheran Hymnal* , no. 661, repeating the response after each petition, or *Lutheran Worship*, p. 279, repeating the response at the end of each line of petitions. By using *Lutheran Service Builder*,[38] a parish with *Lutheran Service Book* could provide the text of the Litany with a musical setting to its members, repeating the response at the end of each line of petitions. Finally, the *Brotherhood Prayer Book* offers a public-domain version of the Litany that can be used alone or in the context of a service of prayer and repentance. In this version, the response can be repeated after each petition.[39]

Response after Each Petition

When the Litany is prayed as it was originally conceived and written, with the congregation responding to each petition of the choir, an antiphonal rhythm develops that focuses the minds and hearts of those praying on the text of the prayer, a prayer that so wonderfully asks for all that God has promised to give. The antiphonal rhythm of the Litany is the same as in Psalm 136, where each phrase is answered with the same response. This is no "vain repetition" (Matt 6:7), but a meaningful repetition on the model of scriptural prayer.

It was this kind of repetitious prayer that Luther invited his people to pray twice a week for all their spiritual and bodily needs. The modern grouping of petitions followed by a single response was not the original Lutheran practice.[40] Wilhelm Loehe explained: "A *gathering of the petitions in groups* . . . is found only here and there" in the history of the Lutheran Church.[41] "Certainly no one should request a grouping, except only as a way to make people accustomed to [the Litany] and lead

[36] Ulrich Leupold, in AE 53:155; see also Loehe, *Agende*, 1:153; Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 553.

[37] Loehe, *Agende*, 1:153.

[38] http://cphconnect.org/builder/

[39] Benjamin T.G. Mayes, *The Brotherhood Prayer Book*, 2nd rev. ed. (Fort Wayne: Emmanuel Press, 2007), 570–583.

[40] Ulrich Leupold, in AE 53:155.

[41] Loehe, *Agende*, 1:153.

them to the traditional manner. The power of the prayer—the inner power as well as the external—is in the refrain, in the intonations and answers of each side following beat upon beat."[42] Loehe objected especially to a particular deformation of the Litany that, thankfully, has not appeared in American Lutheranism: the recitation of the Litany by the pastor alone:

> Here and there one finds instructions that the Litany is to be *recited* by the pastor; but this liturgical misconduct was not at all widespread. Who would have abused this ancient prayer so unnaturally if he had any historical and liturgical sense, seeing as its entire essence—not only its majesty and power—rests totally in the 'over-against,' in this simply repeating, plentiful refrain of the congregation? It was *sung* or *prayed* responsively.[43]

Grouping the petitions would be like having the pastor sing five and a half verses of a Psalm by himself, and then having the congregation sing one-half verse; then the pastor singing seven and a half verses alone, and then the congregation again singing one-half verse; and so on. The recitation of Psalms, as well as of the Litany, should be call and response in roughly even rhythm.

Regular Liturgical Use

The old Lutheran service books state that the Litany is to be sung while standing or kneeling. In some places, the prayer bell was rung during the Litany.[44] At Wittenberg in Luther's time it was led by choirboys or cantors kneeling on the altar step.[45] The rubrics for the Litany in the *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*[46] list nearly all of the customary Lutheran uses of the Litany.[47]

> 4. The Litany may replace the prayers in the Daily Office (Matins, Vespers, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer)[48] or the General Prayer in the Divine Service.[49] It may also serve as an entrance rite in the Divine Service, replacing

---

[42] Loehe, *Agende*, 1:153.

[43] Loehe, *Agende*, 1:153.

[44] Graff, *Geschichte der Auflösung*, 1:225.

[45] Ulrich Leupold, in AE 53:155; see also Loehe, *Agende*, 1:153; Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 553.

[46] The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 410.

[47] One use left out by the *LSB: Altar Book* is the use of the Litany as the sequence hymn between the Epistle and Gospel: Herl, *Worship Wars*, 57; Loehe, *Agende*, 1:153.

[48] Herl, *Worship Wars*, 260 n. 26; John T. Pless, "Daily Prayer," in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 440–470, here at 467; Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 553–554.

[49] In earlier Lutheran liturgical books, the Litany was not to be used at the Communion services, however. Paul H.D. Lang, *Ceremony and Celebration* (Fort Wayne, IN: Emmanuel Press,

the Introit, Kyrie, and Hymn of Praise.[50] 5. The Litany may be used as a separate service, either alone or supplemented by Psalms and Scripture readings.[51] 6. The Litany is particularly appropriate in penitential times, whether seasons (Lent, Advent) or days (Wednesday, Friday,[52] and special days of repentance and prayer).[53]

The Litany can be used at every Advent and Lent midweek service including, as the LSB Altar Book directs, on Ash Wednesday. In addition, the Litany with its repeated responses is well suited to family use, even with small children. Families gifted with musical talent can also sing it regularly as part of their family devotions.

III. Conclusion

Can the Great Litany, the Lutheran Church's heritage from ancient days, again be restored to its original form, and once again become loved and cherished in our congregations and homes? It undoubtedly can. The needs and dangers of our time are no less than when Luther reintroduced the Litany against the threat of Muslim invasion in Europe and against papal suppression of the fledgling Reformation movement. Our need for this ancient prayer is no less than it was in the sixteenth century. Even today, it can cease to be an obscure liturgical antiquity and can become a well-known hymn and one of "the topics with which it is necessary to deal in the true Christian church and about which we are concerned."[54]

2004), 92; Loehe, *Agende*, 1:152, 153; Pless, "Daily Prayer," 467; Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 553–554.

[50] Pless, "Daily Prayer," 467. This use of the Litany, even if based on ancient practice, did not find a place in Lutheran service books before the late twentieth century.

[51] Benjamin T.G. Mayes, *The Brotherhood Prayer Book*, 2nd ed. (Kansas City: Emmanuel Press, 2007), 570–583; Lang, *Ceremony and Celebration*, 121; Pless, "Daily Prayer," 467; Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 553–554. In some Lutheran churches of the sixteenth century, a sermon followed by the Litany often replaced Matins or Vespers: Herbert Goltzen, "Der tägliche Gottesdienst: Die Geschichte des Tagzeitengebets, seine Ordnung und seine Erneuerung in der Gegenwart," in *Leiturgia: Handbuch des Evangelischen Gottesdienstes*, vol. 3 (Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1956), 99–296, here at 205.

[52] Herl, *Worship Wars*, 66. The 1533 Wittenberg church order established Wednesday and Saturday after a sermon as the weekly days for the Litany: Loehe, *Agende*, 1:150–151. But the Saxon church order of 1539 and many others prescribed the Litany for use in preaching services on Wednesday or Friday: Graff, *Geschichte der Auflösung*, 1:224; Loehe, *Agende*, 1:152. The Anglican Church, likewise, set these days as Wednesday and Friday: Cross, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. "Litany, The (BCP)".

[53] Loehe, *Agende*, 1:152.

[54] Luther, *Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg* (1530), AE 34:52–53.