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During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, English merchants and travellers to Germany and the Baltic were surprised by the pre-Reformation furnishings that remained in the Lutheran churches they visited, particularly commenting on the altarpieces, organs and statues.¹ The survival of these aspects of late medieval worship has been attributed to the so-called ‘preserving power’ of Lutheranism. Significant numbers of images, ecclesiastical plate and vestments together with altarpieces remain even to this day through having been retained by Lutheran congregations.² Recent scholarship, however, has acknowledged that this material culture has not always survived without some adaptation to accord with the needs of Lutheran worship.³ Furthermore, it has been questioned whether ‘preservation’ or ‘survival’ are the appropriate terms to refer to these items associated with pre-Reformation worship but with which the Lutheran faithful continued to engage.⁴

Adiaphora has become a convenient term to explain the retention of this ecclesiastical material culture, particularly in relation to religious art and images, within the Lutheran tradition.⁵ *Adiaphora*, a Greek term, had its origins in classical philosophy but had been adopted by the some of the Church Fathers. The meaning of the concept gradually evolved so that by the late middle ages, it had come to refer to things that were permitted because they had neither been divinely commanded nor prohibited, as determined by the New Testament. These were matters, which were not regarded as necessary for salvation. It was this understanding of the term that was applied by the Reformers in the early sixteenth century. A distinction was drawn between those ceremonies and rituals which had been divinely ordained and those which had been established by the Catholic Church.⁶

¹ Andrew Spicer, ‘Lutheran Churches and Confessional Identity’, in Andrew Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Church in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, 2012), 3–5; Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2016), 994.

² Bridget Heal, ‘Sacred Image and Sacred Space in Lutheran Germany’, in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (eds), *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), 39–59; Bridget Heal, ‘“Better Papist than Calvinist”: Art and Identity in Later Lutheran Germany’, *German History* 29 (2011), 588–90; Bridget Heal, *A Magnificent Faith. Art and Identity in Lutheran Germany* (Oxford, 2017), 45–50; Caroline Bynum, ‘Are things “Indifferent”? How Objects Change Our Understanding of Religious History’, *German History* 34 (2016), 88–112; *Martin Luther: Treasures of the Reformation. Catalogue* (Dresden, 2016), 360–63. See also Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art across the Danish Reformation: Changing Interiors of Village Churches, 1450–1600* (Turnhout, 2018); Evelin Wetter, ‘“On Sundays for the laity ... we allow mass vestments, altars and candles to remain”: The Role of pre-Reformation Ecclesiastical Vestments in the Formation of Confessional and Corporate National Identities’, in Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches*, 165–95.

³ *Martin Luther: Treasures of the Reformation*, 199; Maria Crăciun, ‘Iconoclasm and Theology in Reformation Transylvania. The Iconography of the Polyptych of the Church at Biertan’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 95 (2004), 61–97; Maria Crăciun, ‘Marian Imagery and its Function in the Lutheran Churches of Early Modern Transylvania’, in Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches*, 133–64. See also Andrew Spicer, ‘The Material Culture of Early Modern Churches’, in Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling, David Gaimster (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon, 2017), 82–97.

⁴ Bynum, ‘Are things “Indifferent”?’, 88–112.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 91–92; Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London, 2004), 157–58.

⁶ For aspects of this subject, see Jason A. Fite, ‘Adiaphora: Theological War in Elizabethan England’, *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9 (2017), 113–140; Daniel R. Hyde, ‘Lutheran Puritanism?: Adiaphora in Lutheran Orthodoxy and possible commonalities in Reformed Orthodoxy’, *American Theological Inquiry* 2 (2009), 61–83; Joyce Irwin, ‘Music and the Doctrine of Adiaphora in Orthodox Lutheran Theology’, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983), 157–72; Wade Johnston, *The Devil behind the Surplice. Matthias Flacius and John Hooper on Adiaphora*, (Eugene, Or., 2018); John T. Pless, ‘The Relationship of Adiaphora and Liturgy in the Lutheran Confessions’, *And every tongue confess: essays in honor of Norman Nagel on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Dearborn, Mi, 1990), pp. 195–210; Bryan D. Spinks, ‘Adiaphora: Marriage and Funeral Liturgies’, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 62 (1998), 7–23; Bernard J. Verkamp, ‘The Limits upon Adiaphoristic Freedom: Luther and Melancthon’, *Theological Studies* 36 (1975), 52–76; Bernard J. Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean. Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens OH, 1977).

The late medieval Church had been criticised by men such as John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, and Jean Gerson, for the proliferation of ecclesiastical laws which imposed these manmade practices on the Christian faithful.⁷ Erasmus had condemned the external aspects of devotion such as ‘frequent visits to churches, in numerous prostrations before statues or saints, in the lighting of candles, in repeating a number of designated prayers’. He concluded that ‘for the most part, the realm of externals consists of imperfect and indifferent things’. These rituals were indifferent matters because they were not ‘ends’ in themselves.⁸ Martin Luther reacted against the legalism of the Catholic Church by arguing that it was a matter of Christian freedom whether or not matters that had neither been forbidden nor ordained by God were observed.⁹

Luther’s attack upon canon law and the legal impact of his theology has been the focus for several studies.¹⁰ This article will focus more specifically on his theological response to the ecclesiastical laws and requirements relating to late medieval worship. Firstly, it will discuss Luther’s criticism of the careful delineation by the Catholic Church of the liturgical requirements for the mass and their implications. He made a distinction between aspects of religious practice that had been divinely ordained or condemned, and those which were to be regarded as indifferent matters. This also had significant ramifications for Luther’s stance on the liturgy and the material culture of worship. Some of Luther’s most trenchant comments regarding *adiaphora*, particularly with regard to images, were made following the liturgical changes at Wittenberg and a new church order, promulgated in January 1522, that ordered the removal of altars and images. In the subsequent decades other German princes and magistrates introduced church orders that defined a number of aspects of religious practice.¹¹ Although recent research has discussed *adiaphora* in relation to images and religious art,¹² this article will consider more broadly Luther’s understanding of the concept in relation to the material culture and setting for services. It will also explore the extent to which Luther considered that there were limits in the application of the principle of *adiaphora*.

I

During the summer of 1516, Martin Luther lectured on St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, in which he discussed how the law of Moses, with its restrictions on diet and other religious obligations, had been surpassed with the coming of Christ. Luther drew parallels with the restrictions of Mosaic law and criticised the ecclesiastical laws and ceremonies of the Catholic Church. In particular, he challenged the laws relating to the liturgy and requirements of worship, which he regarded as being at odds with the new law instituted by Christ:

⁷ Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean*, 10–11.

⁸ Ibid., 36–37.

⁹ Bernard J. Verkamp, ‘The Limits upon Adiaphoristic Freedom: Luther and Melancthon’, *Theological Studies* 36 (1975), 52–76.

¹⁰ See John Witte, *Law and Protestantism. The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002); Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution II. The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Law* (Cambridge, 2004); Virpi Mäkinen (ed.), *Lutheran Reformation and the Law* (Leiden, 2006).

¹¹ Volker Leppin, ‘Kirchenausstattungen in territorialen Kirchenordnungen bis 1548’, in Sabine Arend and Gerald Dörner, *Ordnungen für die Kirche – Wirkungen auf die Welt: evangelische Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 2015), pp. 137–55.

¹² Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, 157–61; Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts. The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London, 1993), 14–15, 191; Reimond B. Szuj, *Adiaphorie und Kunst. Studien zur Genealogie ästhetischen Denkens* (Tübingen, 2005); Bridget Heal, ‘Kirchenordnungen und das Weiterbestehen religiöser Kunstwerke in lutherischen Kirchen’ in Arend and Dörner, *Ordnungen für die Kirche - Wirkungen auf die Welt*, pp. 157–74.

Nor does it belong to the new law that we build this or that church or that we ornament them in such and such a way, or that singing be of a certain kind or the organ or the altar decorations, the chalices, the statues and all of the other paraphernalia which are contained in our temples. Finally, it is not necessary that the priests and other religious wear the tonsure or go about in distinctive garb as they did under the old law. For all these things are shadows and signs of the real thing and thus are childish.¹³

Luther argued that this did not mean that ‘all churches, their ornamentation, all offices in them, all sacred places, all fast days, all feast days, all the distinctions between the priests, bishops, and religious in rank, garb’ should be abolished, but he pointed out that ‘none of them are necessary for salvation’.¹⁴ Four years later in his *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), Luther similarly criticised ‘those numberless mandates and precepts of pope, bishops, monasteries, churches, princes, and magistrates upon which some ignorant pastors insist as if they were necessary to righteousness and salvation’.¹⁵

The standard authority on liturgical practice and worship on the eve of the Reformation was the *Rationale divinorum officiorum*. Compiled in the thirteenth century by Guillaume Durande, bishop of Mende, this collection of ecclesiastical laws became one of the most circulated liturgical treatises with over two hundred Latin manuscripts and further vernacular translations.¹⁶ It addressed a range of ecclesiastical matters such as church buildings, altars, vestments as well as rituals such as consecration, dedication and reconciliation. In some cases, there are extensive descriptions of the liturgical items required for the celebration of the mass as well as their allegorical significance. For example, the material from which a chalice could be made was carefully delineated:

the Council of Rheims decreed that the sacrifice be offered in vessels of silver or gold; or on account of poverty, out of tin, since it does not rust, but not out of wood or cooper. The vessels should not be made of glass on account of the danger of spilling the wine; neither should it be made of wood since it is a porous and spongy material that will absorb the Lord’s Blood; neither should it be made of brass or copper, since the strength of the wine mixed with rust would induce vomiting when drunk.¹⁷

By being consecrated, the chalice became ‘a new sepulchre for the body and blood of Christ’.¹⁸ The exposition on the mass included a section on altar linen, specifically the corporal which was placed on the altar beneath the chalice during the mass. According to canonical decree:

no one should presume to celebrate the sacrifice of the altar on a silk cloth, or on a cloth that had been dyed, but on pure linen that has been consecrated by a bishop; namely a linen that comes from the earth, that is born and woven from the earth, just as the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ was buried in a linen shroud.¹⁹

¹³ D. Martin Luthers Werke kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1883–) [hereafter *WA*] 56: 493–94; *Luther’s Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, 56 vols (St Louis, 1955–86) [hereafter *LW*], 25: 487.

¹⁴ *WA*, 56: 494; *LW*, 25: 487–88.

¹⁵ *WA*, 7: 37, 68; *LW*, 31: 370.

¹⁶ *The Rationale divinorum officiorum of William Durand of Mende*, edited by Timothy M. Thibodeau (New York, 2007); M. Albaric, ‘Les éditions imprimées du *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* de Guillaume Durand de Mende’, in P.-M. Gy (ed.), *Guillaume Durand. Evêque de Mende (v. 1230–1296). Canoniste, Liturgiste et homme politique* (Paris, 1992), 183–205.

¹⁷ *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 46.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁹ William Durand, *Rationale IV. On the Mass and Each Action Pertaining to it*, edited by Timothy M. Thibodeau (Turnhout, 2013), 241.

The section included further descriptions regarding the symbolism and use of these altar linens, with the final clause noting that a papal decree ordered that ‘consecrated women or nuns must not touch the sacred vessels, such as the chalice or paten, or the sacred linens, that is the corporals’.²⁰ As these examples illustrate, the material culture relating to the celebration of the medieval mass was not only closely delineated but the purpose and symbolism of each item was carefully explained.

Luther attacked this highly legalistic and prescriptive approach towards worship and dismissed the ‘despotic’ demands of these canonists and liturgical writers. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), he compared the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* with the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, a text attributed to the Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite who lived in the late fifth or early sixth century.²¹ According to Luther, the latter merely described ‘certain churchly rites and [to] amuse himself with allegories without proving anything’; he made a similar accusation regarding Durande’s work, concluding that ‘such allegorical studies are for idle men’.²² For Luther, theologians should not devote their attention to allegories until they have ‘exhausted the legitimate and simple meaning of the Scripture’.²³ He also questioned the authority of these liturgical injunctions. While Luther did not object to the composition of such rites and ceremonies by churchmen, he rejected ‘the right to turn their opinions into articles of faith’. Asserting that ‘we refuse to be bound by such things as if they were necessary to salvation, which they are not’.²⁴

A similar stance can also be seen in *The Misuse of the Mass*, which was written in 1521 and published the following January. Luther criticised the Catholic Church for imposing ceremonial laws in matters that had not been instituted by Christ, such as in the celebration of the mass:

We do not condemn the practice of conducting sacrament with chasubles and other ceremonies, but we do condemn the idea that they are necessary and are made a matter of conscience, whereas all things Christ did not institute are optional, voluntary and unnecessary, and therefore also harmless.²⁵

Luther continued by arguing that by making ‘a sacrifice of the sacrament’, the Church had gone beyond mere ceremonies to change its character completely. The Church had acted ‘contrary to the word and example of Christ – something which even Christian freedom cannot excuse, since it is the most damnable idolatry and blasphemy’.²⁶

In his later works, Luther continued to express his hostility towards the Church’s prescriptive approach towards religious practices, together with the rules and regulations surrounding the conduct of rituals and the material culture of worship. In his commentary on Psalms 2 (1532), he criticised ‘legalistic worship’ and focusing on external ceremonies and matters, when ‘the form and nature of true religion is simple’.²⁷ Luther considered that the Catholics ‘when they teach about the worship, they only mean services chosen by themselves’.²⁸ The burgeoning demands and exponential growth of canon law was condemned in *On the Councils and the Church* (1539). Reflecting on external matters, such as the time and place of services, Luther observed that ‘The pope, to be sure, has scribbled the whole world full of books about these things and fashioned them into bonds, laws, rights, articles of faith, sin, and holiness

²⁰ Ibid., 243.

²¹ *WA*, 6: 562; *LW*, 36: 110.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *WA*, 6: 563; *LW*, 36: 111.

²⁵ *WA*, 8: 511; *LW*, 36: 168.

²⁶ *WA*, 8: 511; *LW*, 36: 168.

²⁷ *WA*, 40II: 301, 303; *LW*, 12: 85, 86.

²⁸ *WA*, 40II: 305; *LW*, 12: 88.

so that his decretal really deserves ... to be consigned to the fire'.²⁹ Luther compared the external aspects of public worship with a christening robe worn by a child for baptism; the robe was necessary but it did not sanctify or baptise the child. Furthermore, there needed to be moderation, so that the child was not smothered by these swaddling clothes. He concluded that 'similarly, moderation should also be observed in the use of ceremonies, lest they become a burden and a chore. They must remain so light that they are not felt.'³⁰

The volume of ecclesiastical laws and the penalties imposed on those who failed to heed these regulations also raised concern. Luther believed that this legal accumulation of restrictions could have a crushing effect on the Christian faithful. In his commentary on John's gospel, Luther condemned the papacy for the proliferation of ecclesiastical law:

They establish one ordinance after the other – countless ordinances, as we experienced to our sorrow at the time. Every year we had a new theologian, and these fools only plague the conscience. It was a serious offense, for example, merely to touch the corporal or the chalice. They made everything a mortal sin ... This was the necessary consequence of the legalistic rule of these teachers. Thus one law gave rise to many others; for individual cases are infinite, and each law grew into a hundred interpretations.³¹

Not only had the Catholic Church created this vast array of laws relating to conduct of worship, it was compounded in Luther's eyes by the definition of breaches of these regulations as a mortal sin. A decade earlier in *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, as part of his attack upon the conception of ordination as a sacrament and the priesthood as a separate estate, Luther had criticised the 'superstition [which] counts it a great crime if the laity touch either the bare chalice or the corporal'.³²

It was a matter of Christian freedom that the faithful should not be constrained by ecclesiastical laws, but they were free to make their own decisions regarding matters which had neither been commanded nor forbidden by God. Luther therefore condemned those who forbade aspects of religious practice which in his reading had been left to individual free choice by God. In his Lenten sermons preached in 1522, Luther asserted that 'things are matters of choice and must not be forbidden by anyone, and if they are forbidden, the forbidding is wrong, since it is contrary to God's ordinance'.³³ The following month, in his tract *Receiving both kinds in the Sacrament*, Luther further developed this concept of the freedom of the Christian in relation to the rituals and material culture of worship:

let the old practice continue. Let the mass be celebrated with consecrated vestments, with chants and all the usual ceremonies, in Latin, recognizing the fact that these are merely external matters which do not endanger the consciences of men. But besides that, through the sermon keep the consciences free, so the common man may learn that these things are done not because they have to be done that way or because it would be heresy to do them differently, as the nonsensical laws of the pope insist. For one must attack rigorously and roughly those tyrants who would ensnare and coerce by means of laws, in order that Christian freedom may remain intact.³⁴

²⁹ *WA*, 50, 650; *LW*, 41: 174

³⁰ *WA*, 50, 651; *LW*, 41: 175

³¹ *WA*, 33: 434–35; *LW*, 23: 273

³² *WA* 6: 566; *LW*, 36: 115–16.

³³ *WA* 10.3, 21–22; *LW*, 51: 79.

³⁴ *WA*, 10.II, 29; *LW*, 36: 254.

For Luther, the faithful should not be subjected to ecclesiastical laws that imposed upon them religious practices or forms of worship that were indifferent matters.

Luther's antipathy to the legalism of the late medieval Church focused, like that of earlier critics, on the proliferation of ecclesiastical laws but also the exceptional burden that this imposed on the faithful, which far exceeded the expectations placed on them by divine law. The ecclesiastical laws relating to the setting and material culture of worship conflicted with the freedom of a Christian to reach their own decisions regarding indifferent matters.

II

On 24 January 1522, the town council in Wittenberg published a church order which introduced liturgical changes to the celebration of the mass and outlawed begging, reassigning ecclesiastical revenues to a common chest to assist the poor. These regulations had been compiled by the magistrates in consultation with the university professors, especially Andreas Karlstadt and Philip Melancthon. The liturgy of the mass was simplified, the consecration now being delivered in German and with communion being administered in both kinds. The measure required the removal of altars and religious images from the churches to prevent idolatry.³⁵

The magistrates had introduced the church order in spite of Elector Frederick the Wise's decree, issued the previous month, against religious innovation and for the continuance of traditional forms of worship.³⁶ The church order was a response to the increasing religious agitation and unrest in Wittenberg. During Luther's absence, following his abduction after the Diet of Worms, Karlstadt and Gabriel Zwilling assumed a leading role in the town's religious affairs. Hostility towards the celebration of the mass and religious images in particular escalated in the university town. Although Luther had strongly criticised the Latin mass in his *On the Babylonian Captivity*, he had only proposed limited modifications to the liturgy. Practical changes to the mass were introduced during his absence from Wittenberg. These reforms began in late September 1521 with communicating in both kinds and culminated in the development of an evangelical mass, which was celebrated by Karlstadt on Christmas Day. After a short sermon, he administered communion without vestments, just reciting the words of consecration in German rather than Latin, omitting the remainder of the canon, and placing the host and the cup into the hands of the communicants.³⁷ It was in this context that the Wittenberg magistrates issued their church order with its liturgical changes, the removal of altars and images, and creation of a common chest for poor relief. Karlstadt's treatise *On the Removal of Images and that there should be no more beggars among Christians* was also published at the end of January or early February 1522.³⁸

³⁵ *Die Wittenberger und Leisniger Kastenordnung, 1522, 1523*, edited by Hans Lietzmann (Bonn, 1907), 4–6; Leppin, 'Kirchenausstattungen in territorialen Kirchenordnungen', 138–43; Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, vol. 2: *Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532* (Minneapolis, 1990), pp. 38–40; Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy. A Study in the Circulation of Ideas* (New York, 2011), 29; Thomas H. Schattauer, 'From Sacrifice to Supper: Eucharistic Practice in the Lutheran Reformation', in Lee Palmer Wandel (ed.), *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation* (Leiden, 2013), 212–13.

³⁶ Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 27, 29.

³⁷ Irmgard Pahl (ed.), *Coena Domini I die Abendmahlsliturgie der Reformationskirchen im 16. / 17. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 1983), pp. 7–8, 13; Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 15, 26–29; Thomas H. Schattauer, 'From Sacrifice to Supper: Eucharistic Practice in the Lutheran Reformation', in Lee Palmer Wandel (ed.), *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation* (Leiden, 2013), 212–13; Natalie Krentz, 'The Making of the Reformation. The Early Urban Reformation Between Continuity and Change', *Reformation & Renaissance Review*, 19 (2017), 41–42.

³⁸ *Die Wittenberger und Leisniger Kastenordnung*, 4–6; Andreas Karlstadt, *Von abtubung der bilder und das Keyn bedtler vnther den Christen seyn sollen, 1522, und die Wittenberger beutelordnung*, edited by Hans Lietzmann (Bonn, 1911); Andreas Karlstadt, 'On the Removal of Images and that there should be no more beggars among Christians', in *The Essential Karlstadt. Fifteen tracts by Andreas Bodenstein (Carlstadt) from Karlstadt*, translated and edited by E.J. Furcha (Waterloo,

These reforms angered the Elector but also divided the Wittenberg reformers, some of whom adopted a more conservative stance on images than Karlstadt.³⁹

Luther returned to Wittenberg in early March 1522 and later that month preached the Lenten or *Invocavit* sermons. In this series of eight sermons delivered on consecutive days, Luther responded to the recent events in the town. The sermons were published the following year and as their title indicates they dealt ‘briefly with the masses, images, both kinds in the sacrament, eating [of meats], and private confession, etc.’ Undoubtedly the sermon which has received the most attention related to the use of images; it had been published separately soon after the sermons were delivered and went through seven further editions that year.⁴⁰ Nonetheless across all the sermons we see Luther explaining his position with regard to ceremonies and the material culture of worship, which he regarded as being *adiaphora* or indifferent matters. Furthermore, the sermons also stressed that the importance of not imposing particular positions on what were indifferent matters; they should ‘not make liberty a law’.⁴¹

In the *Invocavit* sermons, Luther was obliged to adopt a position which attacked the extremism of Karlstadt while upholding the distinction between the evangelical faith and Catholicism. Although Luther also regarded such religious practices and aspects of liturgical material culture as indifferent matters or *adiaphora*, this did not mean he was uninterested in these issues; he felt obliged to respond to what he regarded as Karlstadt’s fanaticism.⁴² Luther made a distinction between ‘the things which are “musts”, which are necessary and must be done, things which must be so and not otherwise ... For all works and things, which are either commanded or forbidden by God and thus have been instituted by the supreme Majesty, are “musts”’.⁴³ Besides those matters ordered by God, Luther argued that there were also ‘things which are not necessary, but are left to our free choice by God and which we may keep or not, such as whether a person should marry or not, or whether monks and nuns should leave the cloisters. These things are matters of choice and must not be forbidden by any one.’⁴⁴ Luther emphasised that in considering such matters ‘you should take this attitude: if you can keep to it without burdensomeness, then keep it; but it must not be made a general law; everyone must be free.’⁴⁵ There were certain aspects of worship that are commanded by God but other matters relating to ceremonies and ecclesiastical material culture were not divinely ordained.

Images fell within this category of indifferent matters or *adiaphora*. Luther preached in the Lenten sermons that images ‘are unnecessary, and we are free to have them or not, although it would be much better if we did not have them at all. I am not partial to them.’⁴⁶ The following day, he argued that ‘images are neither here nor there, neither evil nor good, we may have them or not, as we please.’⁴⁷ Pointing to the eighth-century Byzantine controversy over images, Luther claimed that this related to a desire ‘to make a “must” out of that which is free’, that is to establish particular rules relating to the use of images when it is a matter of Christian freedom as to whether or not they should be permitted. He deployed a series of biblical examples to illustrate to the congregation that images *per se* were not wrong but it was the worship of images that was condemned by the scriptures.⁴⁸ Luther summarised this in his next sermon: ‘on the

Ontario, 1995), 100–28; Neil R. Leroux, “‘In the Christian City of Wittenberg’: Karlstadt’s Tract on Images and Begging”, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34 (2003), 73–105; Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts*, 9–11.

³⁹ Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 27, 29–30.

⁴⁰ Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts*, 13.

⁴¹ *WA*, 10.3: 24; *LW*, 51:81.

⁴² Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 30; Bryan Spinks, *Luther’s Liturgical Criteria and his Reform of the Canon of the Mass*, Grove Liturgical Study No. 30 (Bramcote, 1982), 13.

⁴³ *WA*, 10.3: 21; *LW*, 51: 79.

⁴⁴ *WA*, 10.3: 22; *LW*, 51: 79.

⁴⁵ *WA*, 10.3: 21; *LW*, 51: 79.

⁴⁶ *WA*, 10.3: 26; *LW*, 51: 81.

⁴⁷ *WA*, 10.3, 35; *LW*, 51: 86.

⁴⁸ *WA*, 10.3: 27; *LW*, 51: 82.

subject of images in particular, we saw that they ought to be abolished when they are worshipped; otherwise not,—although because of the abuses they give rise to, I wish they were everywhere abolished.’⁴⁹

Despite favouring the removal of images, Luther condemned those who ‘rush, create an uproar, break down altars and overthrow images’.⁵⁰ Iconoclasm not only usurped the role of the authorities, it was also regarded as being counterproductive. Violent actions only served to entrench opinions about images. Rather ‘it should have been preached that images were nothing and that no service is done to God by erecting them; then they would have fallen all by themselves’.⁵¹ Images are not therefore deserving of attention, they should be ignored and, ultimately, will be overthrown not by human actions but through the preaching of the Word of God.

Three years later in *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the matter of Images and Sacraments* (1525) Luther developed this argument further: ‘I approached the task of destroying images by first tearing them out of the heart through God’s Word and making them worthless and despised ... For when they are no longer in the heart, they can do no harm when seen with the eyes.’⁵² For Luther, ‘the matter of images is a minor and an external thing’;⁵³ they are *adiaphora*. In responding to Karlstadt’s hostility towards them, he argued ‘according to the law of Moses no other images are forbidden than an image of God which one worships. A crucifix, on the other hand, or any other holy image is not forbidden’.⁵⁴

While reiterating that images should continue to be tolerated in places of worship because their presence was not contrary to God’s commandments, Luther was also concerned to ensure that a new Protestant form of legalism did not emerge to determine the material culture of worship. In *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Luther particularly attacked ‘the murderous spirits’ who portrayed the retention of images as sinful, ensnaring the conscience with laws in matters of *adiaphora*. Karlstadt was portrayed as being no better than the Papacy, for seeking to ‘capture’ souls and consciences ‘with laws and burden them with sin without good cause’.⁵⁵ In particular Luther proclaimed:

I say and declare that no one is obligated to break violently images even of God, but everything is free, and one does not sin if he does not break them without violence. One is obliged, however, to destroy them with the Word of God, that is not with the law in a Karlstadtian manner, but with the Gospel. This means to instruct and enlighten the conscience that it is idolatry to worship them, or to trust in them, since one is to trust alone in Christ. Beyond this let the external matters take their course. God grant that they may be destroyed, become dilapidated or that they remain. It is all the same and makes no difference, just as when the poison has been removed from the snake.

Now I say this to keep the conscience free from mischievous laws and fictitious sins, and not because I would defend images.⁵⁶

Through arguing that certain aspects of ecclesiastical material culture and ceremonies were *adiaphora*, Luther sought to challenge the views of Karlstadt, Zwingli and other radical reformers. In the Lenten sermons and *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Luther argued that he was not defending the use of images and rituals, as he personally did not consider they were an important aspect of the setting for worship. However, as their presence was not contrary to God’s commandments,

⁴⁹ *WA*, 10.3: 30–31; *LW*, 51: 84.

⁵⁰ *WA*, 10.3: 29; *LW*, 51: 83.

⁵¹ *WA*, 10.3: 29; *LW*, 51: 83.

⁵² *WA*, 18:67; *LW*, 40: 84.

⁵³ *WA*, 18:73; *LW*, 40: 90.

⁵⁴ *WA*, 18:68; *LW*, 40: 85–86.

⁵⁵ *WA*, 18:68, 73; *LW*, 40: 85, 90–91.

⁵⁶ *WA*, 18:73–74; *LW*, 40: 91.

he opposed efforts to define them as sinful. Through the true preaching of the Word of God, their role in worship would diminish and, ultimately, disappear.⁵⁷

Towards the end of his life, Luther discussed another aspect of worship that he regarded as *adiaphora* but on which he had resisted the attacks and challenges of Karlstadt and others to outlaw the practice. This concerned the elevation of the host.⁵⁸ Luther responded to the objections of the ‘blustering and jolting’ of Karlstadt to retaining the elevation of the host in the following terms:

Now when I saw such a mad spirit raving against us without cause and saw that he wanted to make a sin for us – and such an abominable sin – even though it was no sin nor could it be, I decided that in opposition to, in defiance of, and to the chagrin of this same devil I would retain the elevation which I was nonetheless inclined to drop in opposition to the papists. For I did not want to permit, and still will not permit, the devil to teach me how to arrange or determine something in our church.⁵⁹

Luther went on to argue that:

I wanted to have it regarded as a free choice (even as it is a free matter and must be that), in which no sin could take place, whether one upheld it or dropped it ... For whatever is free, that is, neither commanded nor prohibited, by which one can neither sin nor gain merit, this should be in our control as something subject to our reason so that we might employ it or not employ it, uphold it or drop it, according to our pleasure and need, without sinning and endangering our conscience’.⁶⁰

The elevation was therefore *adiaphora* and not ‘such a grave, great and horrible sin, as Karlstadt’s spirit wanted it to be’.⁶¹ It was a matter of Christian freedom as to whether this ritual was employed but just as importantly Luther opposed the new legalism of Karlstadt’s approach that sought to compel the abolition of an indifferent matter.

III

Luther had criticised the material culture of worship in 1516 and writing to the faithful at Halle in 1527, he condemned the abuses of the papacy. Masses which once ‘may have been right and proper’ had become ‘a blasphemous circus to the detriment of faith’.⁶² He questioned, given that ‘all the churchly ornaments and religious customs in the service may once have been good but now since they have been so shamefully and openly misused and made into a disgrace to God, why should we continue with them any longer?’⁶³ Three years later in his *Admonition concerning the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord* (1530), Luther decried how Catholics

have pretended to bestow great honour upon the sacrament by placing it in a golden, exquisite monstrance, by saying that it should be handled in golden chalices and patens and by especially anointing the fingers of the priests with ointment; you have used costly

⁵⁷ *WA*, 18:73-74; *LW*, 40: 91.

⁵⁸ Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 15, 18–19, 29, 31, 33.

⁵⁹ *WA*, 54: 164; *LW*, 38: 315.

⁶⁰ *WA*, 54: 165; *LW*, 38: 316.

⁶¹ *WA*, 54: 165; *LW*, 38: 316.

⁶² *WA*, 23, 419–21; *LW*, 43: 159.

⁶³ *WA*, 23, 419–21; *LW*, 43: 159.

corporals, eucharistic vestments, and altar cloths, a tablet, candles, and flags along with various processions and songs, as if much depended on these.⁶⁴

In this tract, Luther did not denounce the material culture of the mass *per se* but the fact that the meaning of Christ's institution had been altered by the Church so that the mass had come to be seen as a sacrifice. Luther concluded 'How they do everything in excess in quite an intolerable and repulsive way!' However, he did not condemn the use of the liturgical plate.

The German Reformer considered that there were sound pastoral reasons for keeping certain ceremonies and aspects of the material culture of worship. As these had neither been commanded nor condemned by God, it was a matter of Christian freedom as to whether or not they were retained. In the Lenten sermons, while discussing the Catholic Church's rules on fasting, Luther had explained the importance of maintaining such religious practices:

there are some who are still weak in faith, who ought to be instructed, and who would gladly believe as we do. But their ignorance prevents them ... Towards such well-meaning people we must assume an entirely different attitude from that which we assume toward the stubborn. We must bear patiently with these people and not use our liberty; since it brings no peril or harm to body or soul; in fact, it is rather salutary, and we are doing our brothers and sisters a great disservice besides. But if we use our liberty unnecessarily, and deliberately cause offense to our neighbour, we drive away the very one who in time would come to our faith.⁶⁵

Luther was arguing that although the freedom of individual Christians meant that they could repudiate and remove ceremonies and objects considered to be *adiaphora*, there was the risk that in doing so they might alienate others who might be brought in time to the true faith.

The tolerance of indifferent matters for the benefit of those who were less inclined to accept the religious reforms was taken further by Luther when he discussed the material culture of worship in his liturgical reforms. Two weeks after his return to Wittenberg, on 17 March 1522, Luther advised his friend Nicholas Hausmann, the pastor at Zwickau, not to 'permit any innovations either on the basis of a common resolution or by force. Only with the Word are those things to be fought ... with the Word they are to be overthrown, with the Word they are to be destroyed'.⁶⁶ At the end of that month, Luther commented that he had advised Duke John Frederick of Saxony not to 'introduce anything new if this could not be done without giving offense to those weak in faith'.⁶⁷

The following year, Luther expressed anxiety about making innovations to the setting of worship in his *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg* (1523): 'I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one'; he admitted that 'I must bear with them, unless I want to let the gospel itself be denied to the people'.⁶⁸ In this new liturgical form for Wittenberg's parish church, Luther's intention was not 'to abolish the liturgical service of God' completely but 'to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use'.⁶⁹ This liturgy retained 'the external additions of vestments, vessels, candles, and palls, of organs and all the music, and of images'.⁷⁰ On matters such as vestments, Luther again reasserted the importance of Christian freedom when it came to

⁶⁴ *WA*, 30II: 608; *LW*, 38: 114.

⁶⁵ *WA*, 10.3: 38; *LW*, 51: 87.

⁶⁶ *WA*, Br 2, 474; *LW*, 48: 401.

⁶⁷ *WA*, Br 2: 489–90; *LW*, 49: 3–4.

⁶⁸ *WA*, 12, 205; *LW*, 53: 19.

⁶⁹ *WA*, 12, 206; *LW*, 53: 20.

⁷⁰ *WA*, 12, 208; *LW*, 53: 22.

adiaphora: 'We permit them to be used in freedom, as long as people refrain from ostentation and pomp. For you are not more acceptable for consecrating in vestments. Nor are you less acceptable for consecrating without vestments'.⁷¹ Three years later in his *German Mass*, Luther commented that on Sundays: 'we retain the vestments, altar, and candles until they are used up or we are pleased to make a change. But we do not oppose anyone who would do otherwise.'⁷²

The continuation of existing practices rather than adapting to the new order of things had been considered by Luther in his sermons on St Paul's epistle to the Galatians published in 1519. In his introduction, Luther discussed the subject of the epistle, which was the preservation of some of the Jewish ceremonial laws in the churches of Judaea.

The apostles observed these practices, not as being necessary but as being permissible and as doing no harm to those who place their trust for salvation, not in these things themselves but Jesus Christ. For to those who believe in Christ whatever things are enjoined or forbidden in the way of external ceremonies and bodily righteousness are all pure, *adiaphora*, and are permissible, except insofar as the believers are willing to subject themselves to these things of their own accord or for the sake of love.⁷³

Luther's commentary pointed out that while some of the apostles continued the old ceremonies with the Jews, Paul and Barnabas 'sometimes did them, and sometimes they did not do them – in order to show that these deeds were simply *adiaphora*.'⁷⁴ Luther revisited Galatians in 1535 when he took a slightly more nuanced view, that it remained a matter of indifference if the apostles continued to follow Jewish laws, such as those that applied to diet. However, if this was done 'for the sake of conscience [it] is a denial of Christ and the destruction of the Gospel'.⁷⁵ Although Luther did not draw any parallels between the continued acceptance of Jewish religious practice by the apostles and surviving traditional Catholic ceremonies, which had not been proscribed, it might be regarded as providing some biblical legitimacy for them.

IV

Luther had challenged the radical changes to the ritual of the mass in his Lenten sermons, he nonetheless sought to reform the existing liturgy.⁷⁶ When in late October 1523, he informed Hausmann, who had made several requests for a form of worship, his intention to publish a liturgy for the celebration of the mass, revising the canon and 'some of the ungodly prayers', he emphasised that it was unnecessary 'to alter the rest of the ritual, together with the vestments, altars and holy vessels, since they can be used in a godly way and since one cannot live in the church of God without ceremonies'.⁷⁷

Luther also wanted to retain some liturgical music, observing that 'the chants in the Sunday masses and vespers [should] be retained; they are quite good and are taken from Scripture', although some other elements, such as the antiphons and responsories, should not be sung until they could be cleansed of the 'filth' that they contained.⁷⁸ However, music was not *adiaphora*, according to Luther, it was created as a gift from God to mankind; it was not a human invention. True worship included the vocal singing of praises to God, but he acknowledged the

⁷¹ *WA*, 12, 214–15; *LW*, 53: 31.

⁷² *WA*, 19: 80; *LW*, 53: 69.

⁷³ *WA*, 2: 451; *LW*, 27: 161–62.

⁷⁴ *WA* 2: 478; *LW*, 27: 202.

⁷⁵ *WA*, 40.I: 211; *LW*, 26: 118.

⁷⁶ *WA*, 12: 206; *LW*, 53: 20.

⁷⁷ *WA*, Br 3: 184; *LW*, 49: 55–56.

⁷⁸ *WA*, 12: 37; *LW*, 53: 13–14

development of instrumental music.⁷⁹ In 1523, Luther also wished that there were ‘as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass’.⁸⁰ The following year, writing to Hausmann, Luther lamented that he ‘lacked a talent for music’ which was required to write a German Mass.⁸¹ In spite of the inclusion of vernacular hymns within the *German Mass*, there appears to have been limited enthusiasm for congregational singing in Wittenberg.⁸²

In reforming the liturgy, Luther did not want to replace the legalistic approach of Catholicism by prescribing a new form of worship for evangelical use. This reticence and concern can be seen in his comments in *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg* in 1523 and his *German Mass* three years later in 1526. In the final section of the Latin *Order of Mass*, Luther emphasised that this form was not to be imposed on other communities:

This much, excellent Nicholas [Hausmann], I have for you in writing about the rites and ceremonies which we either already have instituted in our Wittenberg church or expect to introduce, Christ willing, at an early date. If this example pleases you and others, you may imitate it. If not, we will gladly yield to your inspiration and are prepared to accept corrections from you or from others.⁸³

The following year, Luther wrote to Hausmann ruling out calling ‘a council of our party for establishing unity in the ceremonies’ due to the political situation as well as his scepticism about the effectiveness of church councils. Furthermore, Luther argued that congregations should not be compelled to follow a certain order ‘by decrees of councils, which are soon converted into laws and snares for souls’. In external matters, congregations could either follow one another voluntarily or be permitted their own customs.⁸⁴ Similar sentiments were expressed in the opening lines of Luther’s preface to the German Mass in 1526:

I would kindly and for God’s sake request all those who see this order of service or desire to follow it: Do not make it a rigid law to bind or entangle anyone’s conscience, but use it in Christian liberty as long, when, where, and how you find it to be practical and useful. For this is being published not as though we meant to lord it over anyone else, or to legislate for him, but because of the widespread demands for German masses and services.⁸⁵

Luther acknowledged that there were other acceptable liturgies and clearly stated: ‘I do not propose that all of Germany should uniformly follow our Wittenberg order’.⁸⁶ His German mass was not to be imposed on the people; the ceremonies and material culture of worship remained *adiaphora*, in which there remained the Christian freedom to choose what was appropriate.

V

⁷⁹ Robin A Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music. Principles and Implications* (Grand Rapids, 2007), 69–70; Irwin, ‘Music and the Doctrine of Adiaphora’, 158–59; Joyce Irwin, *Neither Voice nor Heart Alone. German Lutheran Theology of Music in the Age of the Baroque* (New York, 1993), 11–12.

⁸⁰ *WA*, 12:218; *LW*, 53: 36.

⁸¹ *WA*, Br 3, 373; *LW*, 49:90

⁸² Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism. Choir, Congregation, and Conflict* (Oxford, 2004), 14–15. See also Robin A. Leaver, *The Whole Church Sings. Congregational Singing in Luther’s Wittenberg* (Grand Rapids, 2017).

⁸³ *WA*, 12: 219–20; *LW*, 53: 39.

⁸⁴ *WA*, Br 3: 373–74; *LW*, 49: 90–91.

⁸⁵ *WA*, 19: 72; *LW*, 53: 61.

⁸⁶ *WA*, 19: 73; *LW*, 53: 62.

In spite of arguing that the ceremonies and material culture of worship should not be prescribed, there was an inherent danger in allowing some the freedom to determine their own forms of worship. Luther had warned in *The Freedom of a Christian* against those extremists who wanted ‘to show that they are free men and Christians only by despising and finding fault with ceremonies, traditions and human laws’ but neglected ‘the weightier things which are necessary to salvation’.⁸⁷ Luther had condemned the liturgical changes that Karlstadt has implemented in Wittenberg during his absence and referred to his ‘monstrosities’ at Orlamünde, which included the destruction of images and abolition of ecclesiastical vestments, accusing him of ‘an untamed desire for glory’.⁸⁸ There had been a proliferation of German masses and services during the early 1520s, for which Luther acknowledged that there was a widespread demand, but he was cautious about ‘the great variety of new masses, for everyone makes his own order of service’.⁸⁹ In the preface to his own German mass, Luther condemned those who have ‘no more than an itch to produce something novel so that they might shine before men as leading lights, rather than being ordinary teachers – as is always the case with Christian liberty: very few use it for the glory of God and the good of their neighbour; most use it for their own advantage and pleasure’.⁹⁰ Christian freedom was permissible in relation to *adiaphora*, but only up to a point.

Luther’s concern with regard to indifferent matters was not limited to the possible innovations of religious radicals but also the challenges that diversity of religious practice might pose for the confused or those who were still to be converted to the true faith. The deregulation of worship, that stemmed from the concept of the freedom of a Christian, had caused anxiety about the correct forms of worship during the 1520s.⁹¹ Writing to the Livonian ministers at Tartu in 1525, Luther argued that some uniformity in doctrine and religious practice was necessary to avoid confusion amongst the faithful. There needed to be a middle way between the restriction of Christian freedom through imposing laws and not having any restrictions:

those who devise and ordain universal customs and orders get so wrapped up in them that they make them into dictatorial laws opposed to the freedom of faith. But those who ordain and establish nothing succeed only in creating as many factions as there are heads to the detriment of ... Christian harmony and unity.⁹²

Luther therefore called upon these ministers to reach ‘a common decision about these external matters, so that there will be one uniform practice throughout your district instead of disorder – one thing being done here and another there – lest the common people get confused and discouraged’.⁹³

As well as avoiding confusion, some uniformity relating to the ritual and material culture of worship was also regarded as being helpful for encouraging ‘those who are still becoming Christians or need to be strengthened’. In his first commentary on Galatians Luther observed that Paul and Barnabas had continued to observe Jewish ceremonies, even though they were not enjoined to do so, ‘in order to win the Jews’.⁹⁴ Even in Wittenberg, the service needed to be for all the townspeople, ‘among whom are many who do not believe and are not yet Christians’.⁹⁵ Rather than leaving the shape and form of worship in each church to Christian freedom, Luther argued that ‘it would be well if the service in every principality would be held in the same manner and of the order observed in a given city would also be followed by the surrounding towns and

⁸⁷ *WA*, 7: 69; *LW*, 31: 372.

⁸⁸ See above, 000; *WA*, Br 3: 254; *LW*, 49: 72–73.

⁸⁹ *WA*, 19: 72; *LW*, 53: 61.

⁹⁰ *WA*, 19: 72; *LW*, 53: 61.

⁹¹ Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 65.

⁹² *WA*, 18: 417–18; *LW*, 53: 46.

⁹³ *WA*, 18: 419; *LW*, 53: 47.

⁹⁴ *WA*, 2:478; *LW*, 27: 202.

⁹⁵ *WA*, 19: 74; *LW*, 53: 63.

villages’.⁹⁶ He regarded this as being ‘essential especially for the immature and the young who must be trained and educated in Scripture and God’s Word daily’.⁹⁷ Luther added: ‘And if it would help matters along, I would have all the bells pealing, and all the organs playing, and have everything ring that could make a sound’.⁹⁸

Luther’s concern for visual conformity in religious practice led him in the 1540s to drop the elevation of the host from the German mass. He explained:

the sole reason why we are discontinuing the elevation is because nearly all of the churches have given it up for a long time already. Consequently, we wanted to agree with them and not practice something distinctive in a matter that in itself was open and could be retained or discontinued without endangering the conscience.⁹⁹

Although the ritual was considered to be *adiaphora*, Luther compromised on Christian freedom for the sake of regional uniformity. Nonetheless, he went on to argue:

If you come to a place where they still observe the elevation, you should not be offended nor should you condemn them, but accept it because it is taking place without sinning and without endangering the conscience. Perhaps they are as yet not able to change it. Nevertheless, it is of course desirable and makes a better impression if one agrees about this matter in all churches.¹⁰⁰

Luther acknowledged that there were also practical considerations that made it appropriate to regulate some aspects of worship, even with regard to indifferent matters. Preaching at the inauguration of the new chapel at Torgau in 1544, Luther considered the significance of the Sabbath being Sunday or gathering in a particular building for services. He concluded that Christians were not bound to external matters, such as which day was the Sabbath but had the freedom to make their own decisions.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, this should not be applied in the interests of the individual but for the whole congregation:

if everyone were to start something new as he pleased, changing days, hours and places this would not be right ... Rather everyone should agree in these things, make themselves ready, and come together to hear God’s Word and to respond to him by calling upon him together, praying for every kind of need, and thanking him for benefits received. If this cannot be done under [one] roof or in the church, then let it be done outdoors or wherever there is room.¹⁰²

In *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), Luther had been more specific about the need for certain ceremonies and church furnishings for worship even though they were to be regarded as *adiaphora*.

the church has other externals that do not sanctify it either in body or soul, nor were they instituted or commanded by God; but ... they are outwardly necessary or useful, proper and good – for instance certain holidays and certain hours, forenoon or afternoon, set aside for preaching and praying, or the use of a church building or house, altar, pulpit,

⁹⁶ *WA*, 19: 73; *LW*, 53: 62.

⁹⁷ *WA*, 19: 73; *LW*, 53: 62.

⁹⁸ *WA*, 19: 73; *LW*, 53: 62.

⁹⁹ *WA*, 54:165; *LW*, 38: 316–17.

¹⁰⁰ *WA*, 54:166; *LW*, 38: 319.

¹⁰¹ *WA*, 49: 591–92; *LW*, 51: 335–36.

¹⁰² *WA*, 49: 592; *LW*, 51: 336.

baptismal font, candlesticks, candles, bells, priestly vestments, and the like. These things have no more than their natural effects ... To be sure, Christians could be and remain sanctified even without these items, even if they were to preach on the street, outside a building, without a pulpit, if absolution were pronounced and the sacrament administered without an altar, and if baptism were performed without a font – as happens daily that for special reasons sermons are preached and baptisms and sacraments administered in the home. But for the sake of children and simple folk, it is a fine thing and conducive to good order to have a definite time, place, and hour to which people can adapt themselves and where they may assemble.¹⁰³

Luther argued that there should be a balance between established religious practice and Christian freedom regarding indifferent matters, which meant that the legalistic approach towards worship similar to that of the Catholic Church should not be adopted:

And no one should (as no Christian does) ignore such order without a cause, out of mere pride or just to create disorder, but one should join in observing such order for the sake of the multitude, or at least not disrupt or hinder it, for that would be acting contrary to love and friendliness.

Nevertheless, there should be freedom here: for instance if we are unable, because of an emergency or another significant reason, to preach at six or seven, at twelve or one o'clock, on Sunday or Monday, in the choir of St Peter's, one may preach at a different hour, day or place, just as long as one does not confuse the people, but properly apprises them of such a change. These matters are purely external (as far as time, place and persons are concerned) and may be regulated entirely by reason to which they are altogether subject.¹⁰⁴

He concluded that: 'everything must be conducted peacefully and in order, and yet there must be freedom if time, person or other reasons demand a change'.¹⁰⁵

V

From this close reading of what Luther actually said regarding the ceremonies and material culture of worship, the survival of aspects of pre-Reformation worship appears to have been purely due his perception of them as indifferent matters, *adiaphora*. In reality, the situation was far more nuanced and represented Luther's attempt to focus on what he believed to be the essential issues surrounding worship. He opposed the ecclesiastical laws that determined the character and form of late medieval piety and worship, but also sought to ensure that this was not replaced by a new Protestant form of legalism, something which he accused Karlstadt of introducing with his liturgical reforms. Luther, therefore avoided providing clear instructions for the faithful regarding the appropriate appearance of a place of worship and the performance of services. He did not seek to impose on others the forms of worship devised for Wittenberg. It was a matter of Christian freedom, whether or not past religious practices that had neither been ordained nor condemned by God were still employed by congregations. Although the retention of images as well as the elevation of the host certainly did not accord with Luther's own position on such matters, they were regarded as *adiaphora*. As such practices had not been prescribed or proscribed by God, it did not matter whether or not they continued. Their retention meant that

¹⁰³ *WA*, 50, 649; *LW*, 41: 173.

¹⁰⁴ *WA*, 50, 649-650; *LW*, 41: 173-74.

¹⁰⁵ *WA*, 50, 650; *LW*, 41: 174.

those less committed to religious change were not alienated by dramatic alterations to the form and setting of worship. It was anticipated and hoped that preaching the Word of God would bring about the conversion of those less convinced of Luther's teaching and eventually such religious practices would fade away. In spite of advocating religious freedom with respect to *adiaphora*, Luther recognised that some limits or regulation was necessary, for example, in organising weekly services.

That these aspects of late medieval piety did not disappear but remained to be witnessed by the English merchants and travellers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not solely due to Luther's position on indifferent matters. It was also related to the disputes over *adiaphora* that erupted during the 1550s and 1560s. After the defeat of the Lutheran princes at the battle of Muhlberg in 1547, the imposition of the Interim of Augsburg, which limited evangelical religious practice, divided the movement. The compromises made by Philipp Melanchthon and the Wittenberg theologians to preserve what they could of the Lutheran evangelical programme was opposed by Matthias Flaccius Illyricus and the Gnesio-Lutherans, who claimed that Luther's teachings had been abandoned. At the heart of these disputes was the claim to Lutheran orthodoxy and what could or could not be regarded as *adiaphora*.¹⁰⁶ The arguments and disputes of the Adiaphorist controversy ushered in a change from the way Luther had regarded indifferent matters. For Luther, there is a sense that the need for *adiaphora* in worship was transitory; the pre-Reformation ceremonies and material culture of worship would diminish over the years. It was necessary only until such time as those who were uncertain could be brought to the true faith.

The fractures in the Lutheran movement after 1548 were visible in the material culture and setting for worship. The Interim had instructed that altars, paintings and images be retained in places of worship. In the regions that opposed the Interim, churches were stripped of their surviving altarpieces and religious statues to demonstrate that they remained true to Luther's legacy rather Catholicism. Furthermore, the removal of altarpieces meant that the minister could face the congregation during the German Mass as the Reformer had intended. Elsewhere the retention of altarpieces and images, even some new commissions, indicated a more moderate response from those who argued that such matters were *adiaphora* and did not compromise their worshipping God.¹⁰⁷ With the rise of the Reformed faith within the empire in the later sixteenth century, the material culture of worship distinguished Lutheran from Reformed places of worship. The principle of *adiaphora* had come to be a marker of confessional identity.¹⁰⁸ The increasing confessional importance of the visual appearance of church interiors represented a more nuanced stance on indifferent matters. It raises the question whether after 1548, *adiaphora* ceased to be a matter of indifference.

¹⁰⁶ See Heal, *A Magnificent Faith*, 50–52; Irene Dingel, 'The Culture of Conflict in the Controversies leading to the Formula of Concord (1548–1580)', in Robert Kolb (ed.), *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675* (Leiden, 2008), 34–39; Irene Dingel, Jan Martin Lies and Hans-Otto Schneider (eds), *Der Adiaphoristische Streit (1548–1560)* (Göttingen, 2012); Markus Friedrich, 'Orthodoxy and Variation: The Role of Adiaphorism in Early Modern Protestantism', in Randolph C. Head and Daniel Christensen (eds), *Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies in Early Modern German Culture. Order and Creativity, 1550–1750* (Leiden, 2007), 45–68; Sdzuji, *Adiaphorie und Kunst*, 127–71.

¹⁰⁷ Heal, *A Magnificent Faith*, 52, 55–57.

¹⁰⁸ Heal, "Better Papist than Calvinist", 584–609; Wetter, "On Sundays for the laity ... we allow mass vestments, altars and candles to remain", 165–95.