

The Reformation and Rituals

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Abstract

The year 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. To mark the occasion, academic conferences have been held in all the Nordic countries, and books have been published on the history of the Reformation and the cultural significance of this major process of change. This article is an attempt to understand what happened in the area of ritual, which was of great importance both for the church as an institution and for the people. The main emphasis is on the situation in Norway, where most people were not prepared for these changes and desired them even less. Whereas Norwegian church historians have placed major emphasis on the fact that the Lutheran Reformation came as a response to “religious yearning” among the inhabitants, this article emphasizes the radical change that the Reformation entailed. The radical character of the transformation led to numerous and protracted processes and negotiations in the cultural sphere.

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Unlike the case in parts of Germany and some towns in Denmark and Sweden, the Lutheran Reformation came to Norway quite unexpectedly. In practice there was no one who desired such a radical change to the church as the Reformation entailed. This applied least of all to the population in general, who found themselves the objects and – it may be said – victims of a fundamental change in the premises for their life and their culture. There was little use of outright force when the changes were introduced, although that did happen occasionally. Instead there was a more explicit type of structural violence which meant that a number of institutions and functions that were of great significance for ordinary people were simply removed or redefined beyond recognition (Amundsen 2017a, 2017b).

If we use this conclusion as a starting point, it is natural to ask the following question: What did this sudden and unexpected change mean for the majority of the people, for their piety and in their everyday life? If we are to find an answer to this, we have to follow three lines: The first concerns who was responsible in practice for the introduction of the Lutheran Reforma-

tion, the second is about the liturgical and ritual changes, and the third is connected to the theme of piety and religious practice.

Assessments by Norwegian Church Historians

Lutheran church historians have for generations tried to present the matter differently. Among other things, they have searched for traces of interest in Lutheran doctrine in Norway before 1537, but these traces are wholly insignificant and had no relevance whatever for the way people in general related to the new situation. For example, some historians have pointed out that a few priests were preaching Lutheranism in Bergen from the end of the 1520s, and that there was a certain interest in Luther's teachings in the environment around the rebellious nobleman Vincens Lunge (1486–1536), who had his power centre in Bergen and in Trøndelag (Seierstad 1965a: 149ff). There have also been church historians who have tried to describe the introduction of Lutheranism in Norway and the rest of Scandinavia as a historically necessary response to an increasingly degenerate Roman Catholic church and a decline in piety. There are in fact no clear indications that this is a correct or balanced description. Even before the Reformation, of course, there were antagonisms, conflicts, and criticism against and between the different units of the complex institution that the Roman Catholic church constituted. But it had always been like that.

A good example of such opinions can be found in the church historian Andreas Seierstad (1890–1975), who had to admit in an anniversary article from 1937 that the Reformation in Norway – as in Finland and Iceland – was introduced by force from outside and from above, but “among people who are not spiritually awakened and not of age, such an educational drive need not appear like coercion” (Seierstad 1965a:143). In other words: Because the Norwegian people did not know any better, being brought up in true Lutheran Christianity was necessary. And Seierstad thought that what happened was not wholly unexpected. There was serious degeneration and depravity among priests and convent people, who were more concerned with satisfying their lusts and administering secular affairs than about tackling “the spiritual and ecclesiastical matters that ought to have been most important to them” (Seierstad 1965a:144). Seierstad was highly ideological in his outlook, and he was not alone in this. Several of his colleagues likewise assessed the Reformation from a Lutheran point of view.

If we turn to the sphere of pious practice, however, we find nothing to suggest any great decline in Norway in the time before the Reformation. Pilgrimages were a living tradition, people made donations to churches and monasteries, the cult of St Olav was flourishing, and new traditions of piety from the Continent also found their way here (Schumacher 2005). And even Andreas Seierstad in his day had to acknowledge that “the late medieval pe-

riod was in reality very religious” (Seierstad 1965a:146). But even if there was no broad desire for changes in the church in Norway, the Lutheran Reformation nevertheless happened as a political and organizational fact. It was for other reasons than any decline within the Roman Catholic church.

Who Implemented the Reformation in Norway?

There is no easy answer to the question of who introduced the Reformation in Norway. On one level it looks simple: As a result of the Lutheran prince Christian (1503–1559) winning the Danish civil war known as the Count’s Feud in 1536, a Lutheran church organization was introduced in Denmark. When he later ascended the throne as Christian III he also claimed Norway, and when he did become king of Norway, the change in the church was implemented at the highest political level. In practice this was not realized before 1537, when the Catholic archbishop, Olav Engelbrektsson (*c.* 1480–1538), fled the country on 1 April that year. The military and political power behind the existing church regime was thereby gone. The archbishop realized that the situation was moving towards a political and military confrontation that he could not win. The other Norwegian bishops were either sick, passive, or suffered military defeat in 1537. The Norwegian Council of the Realm was abolished by Christian III as king of Norway, and so the reform of the church was a political fact.

The Catholic bishops were gradually replaced by so-called superintendents with much less power than their predecessors and under the direct control of the king; they were appointed by him, received their instructions from him, and were expected to defend the new church regime. These superintendents were supposed to be the agents for change in the new system (Imsen 1982). Their most important tasks included performing visitations and inspecting the local congregations. The purpose was to ensure that the new church doctrine was respected and that practices of piety and ritual were not explicitly contrary to the new regime. The new superintendents were a mixture of turncoats, opportunists, and convinced and schooled Lutherans. And it did not end with the transformation of the Catholic office of bishop into a royal Lutheran post as superintendent. The office of dean (*prost*) was retained, but deans were also supposed to spread the new doctrine and check that the Reformation was actually implemented. On paper, an efficient new ecclesiastical hierarchy on two levels was in place after a surprisingly short time. But this was not the whole reality.

As late as 1583, when the superintendent of the diocese of Oslo and Hamar – Jens Nielsen (1538–1600) – visited the parish of Bø in Telemark, he gave the congregation a long explanation of what a Lutheran visitation involved: the superintendent had to examine how the priests and the laity related to each other in behaviour and knowledge, he had to tell the congrega-

tion how they could “improve in religion”, and advise them to serve God and obey and serve the king. According to Jens Nielsen, this had been different under the papacy, when visitations were full of useless nonsense and rubbish, “firmations and other fantasies” (Erichsen 1898:17). This is interesting for several reasons. First of all, Jens Nielsen shows how he understood his role as supervisor and agent of change. He had to ensure that the laypeople adhered to the new doctrine and obeyed God and the king. Secondly, it is clear that it could still be envisaged – fifty years after the Reformation – that there were some among the common people who remembered how the Catholic bishops had visited them in a manifestation of splendour, power, and ritual. For Jens Nielsen it was thus important to point out that had had just been stuff and nonsense. But if everyone was convinced of this, why did he have to state it so clearly?

In many cases the reality must have been rather different from what the superintendents, the laws, and the king wanted it to be. For the local clergy had not been replaced. There simply was no one to replace them with. How the parish priest was supposed to act, what he should think and do, was not described in detail in the new legislation. This meant that negotiations with and adaptation to local conditions and expectations were necessary. The individual priest had to make a number of choices. And the circumstances of the priests varied greatly. A few of them had years of university studies behind them and were well able to follow the currents of the new age. But most of them had limited theoretical and theological schooling, and thus they had more than enough to do in their work with everyday pastoral matters and in the tension between new theological and judicial norms and their parishioners’ expectations of what a priest could and should do for them.

The Fate of the Monasteries after the Reformation

Another matter that the new church regime had to handle was the situation of the Catholic nuns and monks. The monasteries had already been considerably weakened as institutions in the 1520s and 1530s. Both Christian II (1481–1559) and Frederik I (1471–1533) had granted monastic property to secular owners, and many monasteries had ceased to function in practice because of fires and as a result of conflicts between king and church (Seierstad 1965a:145). In a few cases, however, the monks and nuns went on living in the monasteries during the first years after the Reformation. This was the case, for instance, with the Benedictine nuns of Gimsøy convent at Skien and Nonneseter convent in Oslo. Presumably it was difficult to find any reasonable livelihood, especially for elderly nuns. The monks, on the other hand, appear to have been forced out of their monasteries in the years 1536–1537.

What happened to the monks and nuns is something we know very little about. From having been people who concentrated on pious deeds, preaching, hospital activities, or learned studies, they ended up in practice on the roads or went back into the local communities they had previously served or dealt with. According to Lutheran thought, monastic life was not useful or Christian service, so they were probably encouraged to get married and earn their living like other people, responding to their Christian call in the everyday world instead. But the transition was scarcely simple and painless. In contrast to all the Catholic priests who remained in office, started families, and had a rectory and a regular income on which to live, the monks had nothing to fall back on. Perhaps they could make a living by helping people with writing or medical treatment, or perhaps some of them carried on religious protests in secret? They may have done things, for example, which the parish priests could not allow themselves to do, such as saying the occasional blessing or curse, curing a horse, or interceding with prayers to the Virgin Mary when asked.

The point here is that precisely because the Norwegian Reformation was introduced from outside and from above, the apparatus of change was imposed quickly at the top level, but at the local level there were no sweeping changes in the personnel or the organization. It was the men of the old regime who were expected to implement the changes, and the monasteries were emptied of people who still actively supported the old regime.

The king's only means to bring about a new ecclesiastic regime was thus a combination of military and political power, agents of change who saw a personal benefit in backing the king, and the introduction of new legislation. For Norway the latter would take a very long time. In Denmark the necessary legislation was introduced quickly (the Church Ordinance came in Latin in 1537, in Danish in 1539, and in its final form in 1542), but it paid no attention whatever to the situation in Norway. One consequence of this was that the old Norwegian church laws remained in use for rather a long time (Kolsrud 1917:93–98). The balance between old and new laws, in other words, was tricky.

Distinctive Norwegian Conditions

Despite this, the leaders of the Lutheran church in Copenhagen were aware that the situation in Norway was different from that in Denmark. Exactly how it differed is not so easy to pin down, but much of it had to do with the fact that Norway was geographically far bigger than Denmark, but more sparsely populated and with a different social composition. This made ecclesiastical and political control harder to enforce. It is possible that the leaders in Copenhagen also imagined that Norwegian peasants and fishermen were “wilder” than their Danish counterparts. From 1537 onwards,

their watchword in Norway was thus that the authorities should use “caution and reason” to reform the Norwegian people into Lutherans, as Christian III wrote to the feudal lord Eske Bille (1480–1552) of Bergenhus Castle in the year of the Reformation (Seierstad 1965b:162).

It would take as much as seventy years before Norway received an ecclesiastical law of its own. When it was finally approved by King Christian IV (1577–1648) in 1607, the differences from the Danish Church Ordinance of 1539 were actually very modest. More interesting is the proposal drawn up by the Norwegian superintendents in 1604. Here we find more details that tell us something about the “Norwegian differentness”, as viewed through the eyes of the Lutheran church regime. We shall return to some of these below.

Again we must return to the question of who actually implemented the Lutheran Reformation in Norway. In practice it was all the Roman Catholic parish priests and deans who remained in office, some of them for many decades after 1537. We may assume that they did not oppose the new religion. Nor did their external conditions change very much. The priests retained their income from the rectory and its properties; the king had no other way to pay the clergy. It was thus the local priests who were left holding the Reformation. So what happened to these priests as a consequence of the coup in 1536–1537?

They remained in office, but they were encouraged to marry. And it looks as if many of them actually did so. They thereby accomplished in the local community one of the new religion’s important ideals, namely, the Christian household. This meant that the priest and his family had to be good examples for all the parishioners in performing the religious call: they had to serve God in their given social functions as husband, housewife, children, or servants (Amundsen 1990a). This did not mean, however, that the Lutheran parish priests became “democratic”; they were to be role models and exempted from control by their parishioners. For example, they retained their own courts, they were counted as a separate social group with distinctive codes, with their own honour and – as regards their ecclesiastical office – the right to make settlements among themselves without intervention from the parishioners or any other local civil authorities (Amundsen 1993).

The local priests also retained their status as knowledgeable scholars. They could read, they could sing the mass, they knew the laws, they had spiritual insight, and they had power over souls in that they could speak on behalf of Our Lord. They still held St Peter’s keys to heaven. The local clergy thus had their social and cultural capital intact, as the representatives of the church that most people encountered and related to.

Cultural Revolution and Cultural Encounter

This introduction is intended as a presentation of the political, social, and cultural conditions for the introduction of the Lutheran Reformation in Norway. The situation was in fact rather unusual: the Reformation was implemented in Norway as a result of a political coup in Denmark, and the organizational possibilities and ideological support had weak support among the population affected by the coup. How then is it possible to understand this as a historical change?

It may be fruitful to see the change in a dual perspective, as both “cultural revolution” and “cultural encounter”. “Cultural revolution” here means attempts by the elite to change people’s behaviour and mentality in a radical, poorly prepared, and all-embracing manner. The theme here is change, with the emphasis on how prohibitions and directives, control, punishment, and incentives tried to establish norms and motivation for radical transformation. “Cultural encounter” means, if anything, the opposite process, namely, how the Reformation brought new groups into play with and against each other. When the Reformation was imposed by the prince, the consequence was that the Lutheran nobility, the feudal lords, the town councils, and the state officials became loyal servants of the civil authorities. At the same time these groups had to relate to and also negotiate with peasant farmers and the rest of the common people. This raises the question of how radical the Reformation actually was, what the conditions for it were, and – not least – how much time was needed to implement cultural changes in reality. The latter question makes it necessary to follow some lines all the way down to the folk traditions collected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which perhaps tell a different story about both cultural revolution and cultural encounter.

The cultural revolution and the cultural encounter had one important common denominator, and that was the church rituals. Through rituals associated with the sacraments of the church, and through rituals related to everyday life, the Roman Catholic church had established an intricate system by which divine grace and power were conveyed and communicated to the people. Baptism, confirmation or firmation (*ferming*), holy communion, confession, marriage, the ordination of priests, and extreme unction – these were the seven sacraments involving rituals that most people – perhaps with the exception of ordination – had a practical and everyday relationship to. In addition there were all the rituals – known as sacramentals – associated with the power of the clergy, on behalf of the church, to dispense grace or set limits to evil: inaugurations and benedictions of people and livestock, houses, homes, crops and food, and cursing witchcraft, disease, evil, bad will, and other menacing negative forces. These were rituals which to some degree could also be performed by lay people. In practice the sum of all these the rituals embraced the whole human life-world.

The rituals performed inside the church buildings were likewise of many types and had different functions. The priests, of course, had the responsibility for holding the various services (still called masses in Norwegian), but lay people could also perform rituals at the church's side altars and during the actual masses, for example saying prayers and making the sign of the cross. These ritual acts gave ordinary people things to do during the holy masses, and put them in contact with the saints of the church to whom the side altars were dedicated. Saints represented an extensive religious and ritual repertoire for believers: they were examples, they gave protection in different life situations, and they interceded in heaven on behalf of the faithful. And the images of the saints were important identifications of the church's message.

This shows that a complex relationship had been built up during the Middle Ages between rituals, norms, and beliefs, and this relationship described how God related to and dispensed his grace on people.

The Break

Most of this ritual apparatus and repertoire disappeared as a consequence of the Lutheran Reformation. The number of sacraments was reduced from seven to two (baptism and communion), all the sacramentals were abolished, and veneration and rituals connected to saints and side altars were prohibited. The Lutheran rhetoric expended a great deal of energy explaining how important it was to break with "tradition" and everything in the church's teaching and rituals that had no explicit foundation in scripture. The work of reform involved eliminating abuses and misunderstandings that popes and bishops had accumulated over the centuries. But in reality this was about something much bigger; it was a matter of changing the premises for the relationship between God and mankind. Divine grace was no longer understood as a substance or force that the sacraments and sacramentals transferred to the believers. Strictly speaking, believers did not need rituals at all. Many of the old rituals were quickly defined as unnecessary or pernicious.

Even though there were important theological and liturgical changes to *baptism* and *communion*, most people managed to perceive continuity from the past. The same probably applied to *confession*. I cannot find any traces of people calling for or missing the sacrament of *confirmation*. Yet the superintendent Jens Nielsen, as late as the 1580s, had to tell the congregations that it was just stuff and nonsense.

When *marriage* was no longer a sacrament, however, it looks as if this created considerable uncertainty, and in part indifference, among people. The superintendent in the diocese of Oslo and Hamar, Frans Berg (1504–1591), therefore issued a severe letter to the priests in the diocese in 1571,

warning that they must put an end to the decay that had set in. No couples were to be allowed to go to bed together and enter into matrimony before the banns had been read from the pulpit and they were formally married at the church door. What often happened now, Frans Berg wrote, was that couples said yes to each other in the evening and immediately went to bed together. He did not know of any place in either Germany or Denmark where the like occurred, and now it had to be stopped (Erichsen 1898:7)! Frans Berg was not the only church superintendent who complained about this development, but it was not until the 1580s that the formal demand came to put an end to this abuse (Baklid 2015:126ff).

Relating to the Dead

Administering the last rites to dying persons disappeared completely as a ritual, but it must have had an even stronger effect that the Lutheran priests – who before the Reformation had been central figures in a series of ritual acts before and during the funeral – appeared to have vanished from most actions to do with *death and burial*. The relationship between the living and the dead had been an important topic, both theologically and in practice, before the Reformation. The souls of the dead ended up in Purgatory, where they were to be cleansed of their sins. The living should show respect for the dead and concern for their fate in the afterlife (Duffy 1992:338ff, 348ff). One expression of this respect was the requiem masses where the priest prayed for the dead soul during its time in Purgatory. The dead, for their part, became models for the living: through their happy fate they showed the cycle that all believers followed from birth and death to eternal bliss in Heaven (Amundsen 2001:10ff). The actual sacrament associated with death – extreme unction – involved the priest anointing the dying person with holy oil, a final grant of divine grace before the soul set off on the journey to Purgatory. In addition the priest said prayers, made the sign of the cross, and held a vigil over the dying person. After death came, the priest and lay people gathered around the deceased and held a wake where toasts were drunk to the departed soul as a last send-off. As soon as the person died, moreover, the church bells were rung to mark the start of the journey of the soul. Many rituals were also performed with the dead body and the grave (Amundsen 1991:106f).

Martin Luther rejected the doctrine of Purgatory and the notion that there was any way to influence the fate of the dead. His was a radically new idea as regards both theology and ritual. Anything that could evoke any other belief was regarded as an “abuse”. The Lutheran church therefore abolished all the central rituals associated with death and burial, with not much to take their place (Amundsen 1991:107f). Lutheran church law stipulated that the sole duty of the new clergy was to throw earth on the coffin. The Church Or-

dinance from 1539 actually had to require priests to continue officiating at funerals. To underline that the old death rituals had no sacramental significance, some priests may have gone so far as to stay away from anything that had to do with funerals. The Church Ordinance and other new ecclesiastical laws insisted that burial observances were not intended for the sake of the dead. No one should believe that it was possible to affect the fate of the dead soul in the afterlife. The church bells were rung, not to assist the soul of the deceased but “to awaken the living”. The priest, for his part, was supposed to preach penitence and repentance to the survivors (Rørdam 1883:85).

The effect must have been powerful. The whole religious and moral universe that tied the living and the dead in a form of eternal community of fate was suddenly torn apart as the living and the dead were separated and all the rituals and external forms associated with this community were removed through the Lutheran Reformation. A large share of the churches’ economy, and the design and decoration of the church buildings, had been a part of this community of fate. For centuries there had been donations of land, altars, liturgical objects, and church interiors as reflections of the moral duty the living had for the dead. In one blow, the value of these investments and actions was reduced to nothing.

The Saints

Yet another important set of rituals and moral and religious identifications was formally removed with the Lutheran Reformation, and that was connected to the saints. The act of venerating and performing ritual acts in front of images of holy persons and altars dedicated to them was also rejected by Lutheran doctrine. Divine grace, according to Lutheran thought, was not transmitted by such external objects. Lutheranism did not wholly dismiss the idea that pious dead persons could serve as religious and moral examples, but neither saints from the early days of the church nor saints from the Bible story (Mary, Joseph, Anne, etc.) communicated anything over and above this. Saints’ images and altars were removed from the churches or neutralized in Norway, although there are not many sources to inform us of how this happened.

Here the reformers evidently tried to proceed carefully, following the strategy already drawn up by Christian III: things were to change, but not in such a way as to provoke general uproar. A couple of examples can show how this happened.

In 1557 the diocese of Bergen acquired a new superintendent, Jens Pedersen Schjelderup (c. 1510–1582). He was a pupil of one of the foremost Danish Lutheran theologians of the century, Niels Hemmingsen (1513–1600). As a result of these influences Schjelderup was profoundly sceptical of all external forms that could disturb the true faith. The nobleman and

councillor of the realm Jørgen Lykke (1515–1583), during a diet of the nobility in Bergen in 1568, had asked Schjelderup to have some “idolatrour images and statues” removed from the cathedral in the city. The weight attached to Lykke’s words can be explained by the fact that he was a man with close connections to the royal family. This led to a major conflict with the urban authorities, who felt that these fine sculptures graced the cathedral. Schjelderup finally had his way. After the matter was concluded he published a small book where he argued that it was a correct and important strategy to remove images and sculptures that could be a reminder or a continuation of old rituals and old beliefs (Gilje & Rasmussen 2002:155–164; Lindøe 2000). The superintendent emphasized that images and statues did not mediate any contact with the divine, and that they were dangerous because they encouraged “abuse”. Schjelderup claimed that there were many “old women and crones” who literally worshipped the images in Bergen, and that was the most important reason why they had to be removed. They were not just finery and adornment, but represented “abuse”.

This case tells us a great deal. It was not until slightly more than a generation after the implementation of the Reformation that a Lutheran superintendent tried to remove the last traces of Roman Catholic piety. The images and sculptures had been allowed to remain in Bergen Cathedral that long, and there had been believers who venerated them as if the Reformation had never happened. The opposition from the local authorities in Bergen is harder to interpret. They scarcely argued that the veneration of the images was correct, but they pleaded that at least their aesthetic and economic value should be respected. The case also shows us a Lutheran superintendent who is pressured from above to discharge his duties, and this simultaneously gave him a chance to implement his own opinions: Schjelderup was not only following orders, but also agreed with them.

Yet even if the superintendent thought that images and sculptures should be removed from all the churches in the diocese, this case appears to have remained an internal drama concerning Bergen alone. The churches in western Norway were allowed to retain many of their pre-Reformation interior adornment even after the events of the 1570s.

The other example concerns Trondheim Cathedral, the most central sacred place in Norway and the power centre of the Catholic church in this part of Christendom. In figural, material, and symbolic terms it was associated with St Olav, whose body was kept on the high altar of the cathedral. St Olav’s shrine contained the most important relics in Norway, which made it a major place of pilgrimage. People had been coming to this holy place for centuries to do penance for their sins and to be healed of their diseases (Seierstad 1930; Daae 1879:61–66). Quite soon after the Reformation St Olav’s reliquary casket was confiscated, melted down, and sent to Copenhagen. But this material greed was one thing, another was that the new au-

thorities did not simply take the opportunity to remove Olav's body. Archbishop Olav Engelbrektsson had taken St Olav's casket to his castle at Stenviksholm, but even after the plundering of the casket, the king's body appears to have been left in place. The new authorities were thus reluctant to go the whole way and destroy the remains of the saint-king. In 1564 the king's body was "buried" in the cathedral, but in a clearly marked grave. Many people came to this burial place, and again Councillor Jørgen Lykke appeared. In 1568 he also visited Trondheim, held a diet of the nobility there, and gave orders to fill the saint's tomb with earth to put a stop to all the visits and "abuses" (Lysaker 1973:16–23).

These two examples clearly show that acts of Catholic piety and pre-Lutheran rituals did not let themselves be abolished just because the Reformation had been implemented in Norway. The church historian Andreas Seierstad's claim that "the people had so little spiritual independence and so little personal engagement in the question of religion that the new religion was not a provocation to them" seems completely meaningless (Seierstad 1965b:163). It was rather the other way around: many people stuck to the old ways and took advantage of the possibilities that still existed, to maintain their faith and their rituals. The speed with which church interiors and saints' relics were cleaned out appears to have been due to renewed pressure from above – one generation after the Lutheran Reformation had been formally introduced.

This pressure persisted, and demands for control from the church superintendents were intensified.

The Reactions

In Bergen it was "old women and crones" who actively venerated the images and sculptures in Bergen Cathedral. We know less about who visited St Olav's grave in Trondheim. Around 1570 the "old believers" lost many of their places of refuge from the increasingly suspicious civil and ecclesiastical authorities. These had formerly been patient and followed Christian III's instructions to proceed with caution. But that ended, and the grip was tightened. During the reign of Frederik II and with Councillor Jørgen Lykke taking action, heavy pressure was imposed on the superintendents in Norway to put an end to the old religion.

The superintendent in Bergen, Jens Schjelderup, was keen to associate "the old piety" with "old women and crones". This was a rhetorical device to show that it was only the uneducated and the inarticulate who stuck to the old ways. Things were not as simple as that, of course, but it worked well as an argument with King Frederik II.

It need hardly be said that the Lutheran rulers and superintendents were not concerned about preserving the historical remains of the Roman

Catholic church or documenting the rather massive resistance provoked by the Lutheran Reformation among so many people. Despite this, some sources are preserved with evidence of intensive and vehement symbolic protest.

We can begin with some concrete examples. In the 1550s a couple of peasants on the west side of Oslo Fjord claimed to be Saints Olav and Nicholas, and the message they proclaimed was that Saturdays should still be a holy day in honour of the Virgin Mary. The authorities reacted forcefully against these men, who were burnt at the stake as heretics (Daae 1879:79f). In the 1570s a woman in Skiptvet, east of Oslo Fjord, had visions in which she saw the Virgin Mary seated on her heavenly throne and asking the people in her district to maintain the old faith. The senior judge in Oslo, Nils Stub (died 1580), sent the woman home with orders to desist. And she was to be whipped (Huitfeldt-Kaas 1895:50f)! There is a great deal to suggest that these three individuals were just the tip of the iceberg of concerted opposition to the new regime which – as they quite correctly observed – had imposed a new religion on them. They did not believe the new rulers who claimed that they had merely accomplished a reform but had not broken with the Christianity that the subjects had known until then. Of course the subjects were right, but those in power prevailed.

The woman in Skiptvet and the men on the other side of the fjord were easy to deal with – it took only a burning at the stake and a sound whipping. What was more important historically was the slow, silent resistance. We shall look at a few more examples.

It was naturally impossible in one swoop to remove people's beliefs in Purgatory, in the soul being cleansed after death, and in the responsibility of the living for the dead. The strength of these beliefs is obvious from the "Dream Poem", *Draumkvedet*. This visionary poem first became known to the Norwegian public in the mid nineteenth century. It tells of the farmer Olav Åsteson and his journey through the realm of the dead, where he sees sinners being punished and the virtuous receiving their reward. This is set in the time before the final settlement of accounts on Judgement Day, when the archangel St Michael undertakes the last judgement of souls according to their merits and deeds (Bø & Myhren 2002:7–35). There is no consensus on how old *Draumkvedet* is. It has mostly been assumed to date back to the Middle Ages (Bø 1975; cf. Amundsen 1999a:89ff), but a theory that is equally as interesting is that it was composed after the Reformation to preserve the old faith (Johannesen 1993; cf. Alver 1971). Whatever the truth, *Draumkvedet* was sung right up until the nineteenth century without being corrected by the Lutheran rejection of Purgatory.

Draumkvedet is an indication that it was precisely beliefs and rituals connected with death and burial that were most difficult to reform in a Lutheran

direction. It was also in this area that the new church refrained from interfering longest, and confined themselves to requiring priests to throw earth on the coffin. This was to ensure that no one was buried in the cemetery without the priest knowing about it. In addition, priests were expected to use the occasion to preach the word of God to the bereaved.

This was evidently not enough for most people. The ringing of church bells to mark deaths and funerals was an important part of the Catholic death rituals. Long after the Reformation, priests were heard to complain that the old custom of ringing the church bells as soon as a person died was virtually impossible to eradicate. The draft of a Norwegian church ordinance from 1604 condemns this use of the bells. It is “idolatrous” and an expression of heresy and error, because people believe that as soon as death strikes, one can ring “the soul into Heaven: and thereby make an immensely long fuss”. The bishops therefore wanted the bells to be rung only when the deceased was being carried to the grave. This formulation was indeed included in the Norwegian ordinance of 1607 (Kolsrud 1917:79; *Kirkeordinansen* 1985: 55r–v).

Lutherans tested a new interpretation, namely, that the ringing was supposed to awaken the living to repentance, not to accompany the dead person through Purgatory (Fæhn 1994:149). But it was questioned whether this was enough to change people’s attitudes to the matter. And while the ringing of the church bells was perhaps stopped in its old form, in many places the requiem bells were an important part of the funeral ritual. As late as the nineteenth century there were many who believed that the sound of the church bells at a funeral was an expression that the dead person was in bliss, that he or she had “fared well” (Amundsen 1998:60ff). And although extreme unction disappeared with the Reformation, people could attach great importance to communion as the last supper – a sign that the dead person departed in bliss. It was customary to summon the priest to a person who was seriously ill, but many people waited until it was obvious that death was close at hand. At the same time, nineteenth-century Norwegian folk tradition is full of beliefs about omens and signs observed in connection with a death, indicating whether the dead person was blessed or not (Amundsen 1990b:7ff. Hodne 1980:23–40).

Another ritual that incensed the Lutheran legislators was connected to the old tradition of watching over the body until the funeral. Before the Reformation this was a ritualization of the responsibility of the living for the dead person’s soul, and it was one of the ritual acts with the deceased for which the priest was responsible. People held a vigil over the corpse, which was treated with respect and provided with everything necessary for the journey through Purgatory. Lutheran priests stayed away from wakes because they were associated with theological notions that they wished to combat, but this did not stop people from holding wakes. There were many legal prohibitions

of this “objectionable practice”, which was viewed as an excuse for drunkenness, festivity, and ungodliness. The Norwegian church ordinance of 1607 forbade such “feasts, banquets, drunkenness, games, craziness, just like pagans, those who never considered the Christian outlook on death” (Fæhn 1994:149; *Kirkeordinansen* 1985:54v–55r). By their very existence these prohibitions demonstrate the powerlessness of the Lutherans. The words of the ordinance are strong, singling out wakes as an example of Norwegian religious error.

It still did not help: wakes remained common in many parts of Norway until well into the nineteenth century. The priests were still often absent, but those who had the responsibility for the rituals tended to be parish clerks, schoolteachers, or masters of ceremonies who were experienced and locally trusted. The ritualization was obvious and strict: candles were lit, hymnbooks were distributed, verses were sung, toasts were drunk for the “welfare” of the deceased, and people provided for the dead person to the best of their ability (Christiansen 1968; Hodne 1980:69ff).

These examples make the picture clearer: the protests against a new church that wanted to eradicate any notions to do with the moral and religious interaction between the living and the dead led the peasantry to privatize the old rituals, assuming responsibility themselves for handing them down. When the new regime removed the possibility to communicate about the fate of the dead, it must have been perceived as a significant, unwanted, and painful change (Duffy 1992:8). Much of the motivation to make use of the new church’s services for the dead disappeared. For a long time after the Reformation, at any rate, there were complaints that many people did not seek help from the clergy for death and burial. The priests for their part began to complain that many people “drag their dead into the earth as if they were beasts” (Amundsen 1991:111f). Even as late as the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, complaints could be heard about peasants arranging their funerals themselves, thus leaving the clergy unaware of what had happened (Høgset 1990).

From Sacramentals to Magic

One last point that may be worth looking at has to do with the repertoire of ecclesiastical rituals that were called sacramentals. As we saw above, they were abolished by the Reformation – at least on paper. Of course this did not mean that people’s everyday needs for prayer and other religious protection against attack from evil forces disappeared. The Lutheran clergy was not officially supposed to have anything to do with this. There is a great deal to suggest, however, that individual priests nevertheless had a certain repertoire of rituals and formulae that could be used in such situations. We have already mentioned the fate of the Catholic monks and nuns. It is not im-

plausible to imagine that they too continued the pre-Reformation sacramental traditions. They had access to ritual books and oral tradition, and many of them were no doubt trusted by the local people.

One example of how the tradition of sacramentals continued to have a life and a function after the Reformation is known as *Vinjoboken*, a manuscript that was found during the demolition of the old church in Vinje in Telemark in 1796. The manuscript contains texts ranging from hymns to the Virgin Mary and genealogical data to medical advice and charms used in veterinary and human medicine. The charms often invoke saints, Christian symbols, and liturgical prayers, and in one case also an evil spirit. Much of the matter is practical instructions for the use of herbs and other remedies from nature. Closer study has shown that the contents were written down in the 1480s, most likely in clerical circles. At any rate, the only known owner of the book, Hans Larensson (?-?), was a priest in Telemark in the 1480s and 1490s. Presumably these texts represent a repertoire that was not untypical of rural Catholic priests in this period, and the knowledge naturally did not disappear with the Reformation. It is interesting that the manuscript remained in Vinje after Hans Larensson died. Even though we do not know anything about who owned it or how it was used, it is not improbable that it was among the papers handed down from one parish priest to the next until it was stowed away under the floor of the church, perhaps not very long before 1796 (Garstein 1993:22f.43).

There are occasional examples showing how Lutheran priests in the time after the Reformation may have transformed and used similar medical, magical, or benedictory formulae and rituals. In the official archive left by the parish priest of Flesberg 1689–1705, Claus Jochumsen Hintz (1641–1705), who was otherwise known as a learned Latin scholar and a good and orderly state servant, there is a text that can be interpreted as a Lutheran variant of a benediction that the priest said when the cattle were sent to the mountain pastures for the summer (Flatin 1917:93f):

Prayer in the summer for the livestock and cattle driven to the wild forests to gather their fodder etc.

O eternal God, creator and preserver of all creatures; thou who helpst and feedest man and beast, and providest for small birds, and dost not let any sparrow fall to the earth without thy will and knowledge, thou who carest for cows, calves, sheep, and other livestock, and who lettest grass and hay grow to feed them. We entrust to thee all our livestock, both large and small, O gracious God and father of mercy, to protect all our livestock from wild and harmful animals, bears and wolves! Preserve them from the Devil's magic, and all people's evil eyes, and let our livestock and cattle (: which we have now driven out in this wild land): thrive and benefit, and not hurt each other, for the sake of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem among the livestock, and was laid there in the manger on hay and straw, and in the young lambs he has designated and declared to us poor people his own offering. Hear, Lord, and heed our prayer and entreaty!!

Such texts and practices among the first generations of Lutheran priests were part of the background reality to the many folk legends about priests who knew more than the Lord's Prayer, who owned the Black Book, the sixth and seventh book of Moses, and could generally control the Devil and all evil forces (Eriksen 1992). Such clerical practices were not unproblematic, but it was not until the eighteenth century with its pietism and enlightenment that leading theologians seriously tried to prevent this by describing it as magic and superstition (Amundsen 1999b).

Some Concluding Perspectives

These final examples show that not even the rituals and ritual practices that were officially abolished by the Reformation automatically disappeared. There was some creative reinterpretation on the part of the laity, with partial support from the clergy. But how far the local priests went in following this folk creativity is harder to ascertain.

The Lutheran Reformation in Norway involved a wish on the part of the authorities to bring about a new understanding of human life and the ecclesiastical rituals associated with it. There is much to suggest, however, that the changes were not willingly accepted, and especially that ordinary people assumed control over what had officially disappeared. "Folk religion gradually began to become private," as the church historian Jan Schumacher puts it (Schumacher 2005:162).

Regardless of what the new ecclesiastic authorities imposed in the way of ritual revision and reduction, new scope was opened for interpretation, where continuity could be as common as discontinuity. It was not a total break, because the changes presupposed and almost confirmed the past. In many ways it is correct to say that a cultural revolution took place with the introduction of the Lutheran Reformation. Yet many of the external forms from the old days persisted. The English anthropologist Paul Connerton (1940–) has pointed out how revolutions develop new rituals, but simultaneously often copy the ritual language of the old regime. The new rituals can thereby involuntarily confirm the old ones (Connerton 1989:6ff). The rituals of the Lutheran Reformation sought to establish a distance from the Roman Catholic church, but the new and the old rituals still talked to each other, as it were. Without a knowledge of the old rituals, the new ones are meaningless; the revolution presupposed a knowledge of the time before the break. The break was only obvious to those who remembered and understood the past. This gave room for reinterpretations – of both new and old rituals.

These reinterpretations had their most important foothold among ordinary people, those who rarely had a voice in the contemporary source material. The pressure from below made itself felt so strongly that the Reforma-

tion, rather than representing a complete break in the field of ritual, established arenas and strategies for negotiation between the laity and the Lutheran clergy. This interaction was perhaps not challenged until the coming of the more totalitarian spiritual ideas of the eighteenth century – pietism and enlightenment – when the theological and ecclesiastical struggle against folk religiosity was heightened in earnest, and when increasingly forceful measures were taken to deny the value of this religiosity (cf. Malmstedt 2002).

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