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BRYAN D. SPINKS



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## Author

Bryan D. Spinks is the Bishop F. Percy Goddard Professor Emeritus of Liturgical Studies and Pastoral Theology at Yale Divinity School, Yale Institute of Sacred Music and Berkely Divinity School at Yale.

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## Abstract

With the 500<sup>th</sup> year of the *Formula Missae* (1523) in 2023, and the approaching 500<sup>th</sup> of the *Deutsche Messe* (1526), it is an opportune time to revisit Luther's objections to the Roman *canon missae*, and to revisit the ancient Roman Eucharistic prayer in the light of more recent studies, and also to consider Luther's concept of gift in the light of present understanding of the term in Roman antiquity. With newer understandings, Luther's form and the Roman *canon missae* can co-exist in an ecumenical world as identity-markers.

## Keywords

Luther, Martin. *Formula Missae* (1523) | Luther Martin. *Deutsche Messe* (1526) | Roman Canon Missae | Reformation liturgical reform | Ecumenical dialogue

## Contextualizing Luther's *Formula Missae* 1523, *Deutsche Messe* 1526, and the Roman *Canon* *Missae*: then, now, and a modest ecumenical suggestion \*

BRYAN D. SPINKS

### *Introduction*

The year 2023 marked the five hundredth anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther's influential reform of the Western Mass, the *Formula Missae*, and 2026 will be the five hundredth anniversary of his vernacular rite, the *Deutsche Messe*. Both rites quickly became foundational for the Lutheran Churches in Germany and elsewhere. Both rites were Luther's "scriptural correctives" of the inherited liturgy, and particularly the *canon missae*, or canon of the mass. This paper revisits Luther's theological objections to the Roman Eucharistic Prayer, and then re-examines that *canon missae* in the light of some recent important studies. In the light of these studies, it will offer a modest suggestion on how in an ecumenical age, in the spirit of Lewis Carol's Dodo that all may win and have prizes, which might be helpful for Confessional Lutherans and more traditional Roman Catholics, but for others too. <sup>1</sup>

\* This paper is a heavily revised version of a lecture given at the Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana on November 6<sup>th</sup> 2023.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lewis CAROL, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, ch. 3: The Caucus Race and a Long Tale.

### *Luther's theological objections to the canon missae*

Addressing Nicholas Hausman in the preamble to his 1523 *Formula Missae (FM)*, Martin Luther wrote:

Therefore, most excellent Nicholas, since you have requested it so often, we shall deal with an evangelical form of saying mass (as it is called) and of administering communion.<sup>2</sup>

This “evangelical form” was somewhat overdue. In the 1520 *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther had listed three captivities of the mass, namely communion in one kind, making the doctrine of transubstantiation *de fide*, and the teaching that the mass was a sacrifice, the latter of which seemed supported and promoted in a number of places by the language of the *canon missae*.<sup>3</sup> This attack was renewed in 1521 in *The Misuse of the Mass*, and in addition to concepts of offering in the *canon missae*, Luther was nettled by the insistence that if the celebrant omitted the Latin word *enim* in *Hoc est enim corpus meum*, the Eucharist was regarded as invalid.<sup>4</sup> In *Receiving Both Kinds*, 1522, Luther had urged reform in these words:

The second step is for the priests who celebrate mass to avoid every word in the canon and the collects which refers to sacrifice. For this is not something that we are free to do or not to do, like the things mentioned in the preceding paragraph. It simply must and shall be done away with, no matter who takes offense. The priest, however, can probably avoid these words in such a way that the common man never realizes it and no offense is caused. But if anyone stubbornly refuses to avoid such words, let him do as he pleases and let him answer for himself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Martin LUTHER, *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg* (1523), in: LW 53, 15–40, here: 20.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ID., *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), in: LW 36, 5–126, here: 51.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ID., *The Misuse of the Mass* (1521), in: LW 36, 127–230, here: 164.

<sup>5</sup> ID., *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament* (1522), in: LW 36, 231–267, here: 254.

We should note that since the *canon missae* was recited silently, most people would be none the wiser if words were omitted or not.

Luther seems to have been somewhat annoyed by the fact that some took his advice and had already made their own changes. Kaspar Kantz, prior of the Carmelite brothers at Nordlingen and Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt at Wittenberg had celebrated German masses with much of the *canon missae* omitted. And, perhaps most troubling of all for Luther, Thomas Müntzer also authored a German mass which, together with his reform of the divine office, articulated Müntzer's apocalyptic desire for overturning the social order.<sup>6</sup> So it was that in 1523 Luther put forward the *FM* as an evangelical way to celebrate mass, though he made it clear that no one was compelled to follow this order of service.

As already noted, in *The Babylonian Captivity* Luther had expressed deep concern with the concept of transubstantiation, noting that he had observed that Pierre d'Ailly and other nominalists had argued that consubstantiation made better sense of both Aristotelian logic and plain common sense. However, Luther's main criticism of the *canon missae* was that it seemed to articulate a concept of sacrifice or offering which was, in Luther's understanding, a contradiction of Scripture. He wrote of this "third captivity":

Now there is yet a second stumbling block that must be removed, and this is much greater and the most dangerous of all. It is the common belief that the mass is a sacrifice, which is offered to God. Even the words of the canon seem to imply this when they speak of "these gifts, these presents, these holy sacrifices", and further on "this offering". Prayer is also made, in so many words "that the sacrifice may be accepted even as the sacrifice of Abel," etc. Hence Christ is termed "the sacrifice of the altar".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bryan D. SPINKS, *Evaluating Liturgical Continuity and Change at the Reformation. A Case Study of Thomas Müntzer, Martin Luther and Thomas Cranmer*, in: SCH(L) 35 (1999) 151–171; ID., *Evaluating Liturgies of the Reformation. The Limitations of the Comparative Methods of Baumstark*, in: Robert F. TAFT – Gabriele WINKLER (eds.), *Comparative Liturgy Fifty Years After Anton Baumstark (1872–1948)* (OCA 265), Rome 2002, 283–303.

<sup>7</sup> LUTHER, *Babylonian Captivity*, in: LW 36, 51.

Similarly, in *The Misue of the Mass*, 1522, Luther wrote:

First, they throw up to us the secret mass, which they call the canon. In it there are the words: “these gifts, holy and unspotted sacrifices”, and further on “a holy offering, a pure offering, and an unspotted offering, etc”.<sup>8</sup>

Luther was extremely troubled by the theology that the mass could be offered for various things, that is, votive masses and requiem masses, but since the words of the *canon missae* were cited by his opponents in support, Luther quite naturally saw the concept of the eucharist as an offering which was articulated in the *canon missae* as a trojan horse.

### *Repudiating Biel*

As an Augustinian at Erfurt, in preparation for his ordination as a priest, Luther had studied Gabriel Biel’s *Exposition of the Canon of the Mass*. Biel has been described as the last representative of the scholastics, and as an influential proponent of nominalism. He had been trained in the *via antiqua* of Aquinas as well as the *via moderna* of Duns Scotus, though van Geest notes that Biel’s real teacher was Ockham.<sup>9</sup> Biel’s *Exposition of the Canon* is a cumbersome work, the modern edition spanning five volumes, and it was the result of a series of lectures which Biel had given at the University of Tübingen between 1485 and 1488.<sup>10</sup> He had lifted large sections from an earlier work of Eggeling Becker von Braunschweig written in the 1450s, but Biel also utilized other works such as that of Durandus of Mende, as well as the opinions of previous medieval scholastics. Van Geest’s comment that this work is characterized by “its striving for ency-

<sup>8</sup> Id., *Misuse of the Mass*, in: LW 36, 187.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Paul VAN GEEST, *Non sufficit, sed et necesse est se purgare ... Gabriel Biel’s Representation of the Intellect, the Will and Memory in his Canonis Missae Expositio*, in: ID. et al. (eds.), *Sanctifying Texts, Transforming Rituals. Encounters in Liturgical Studies. Essays in Honor of Gerard A. M. ROUWHORST* (Brill’s Studies in Catholic Theology 5), Leiden – Boston 2017, 123–150, here: 124.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Gabrielis Biel Canonis Missae Expositio*, 5 vols., ed. by Heiko A. OBERMAN – William J. COURTENAY, Wiesbaden 1963–1976.

clopedic exhaustiveness"<sup>11</sup> is an understatement. We should note, though, that Biel was amongst those who believed the human will could will the good, which places him amongst the Semipelagians of his day. Apart from its exceptional length, Biel's *Exposition* is exactly what we might expect – the use of allegory to explain how ritual acts symbolize events in the divine dispensation, a reiteration of consecration by recital of the words of institution resulting in transubstantiation, and the sacrificial character of the mass. Biel commented on the *Quam oblationem* petition in the *canon missae* as follows:

This is the third part of the third part of the main canon, in which, after the request for the acceptance of the sacrifice in general, and the benefits of the offerers, temporally and eternally, the perfection of the offering is requested as to the principle end, which is transubstantiation specifically, so that material food and drink become for us in truth the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

On the concept of sacrifice Biel wrote:

In the service of the Mass there is the same sacrifice and oblation [i. e. as the Cross], not by a repeated death but by the commemorative representation of the once suffered death. [...] Wherefore He suffered only once; and yet we daily present this memorial of His one death in this sacramental sacrifice. [...] The Mass is not of equal value with the passion and death of Christ as regards merit, because in the sacrifice of the Mass Christ does not again die, though His death, and therefore all its merit, is specially commemorated in it. [...] If the Mass were of equal value with the passion and death, then, as Christ suffered once only for the redemption of the whole world, so also one Mass would suffice for the redemption of all souls from

<sup>11</sup> VAN GEEST, *Non sufficit*, 131.

<sup>12</sup> BIEL, *Canonis Missae Expositio*, 33: "Hec est pars tertia tertie partis principalis canonis, in qua post petitionem acceptationis hostie generaliter, et commodorum sacrificantium temporaliter et eternaliter petitur perfectio oblationis quantum ad finem principalem, qui est transsubstantiatio specialiter ut scilicet ex esca et potu materialibus fiat nobis corpus et sanguis iesu christi domini nostri verum et verus." (OBERMAN – COURTENAY 1, 357), my translation.

the pains of purgatory, and for obtaining from God all good, which is not to be said.<sup>13</sup>

Biel also made the comment that the sacrifice of the mass must be constantly repeated because of human forgetfulness and ingratitude for the Eucharistic pledge of eternal glory.<sup>14</sup>

In his *Resolutiones* on the Leipzig disputation in 1519, Luther claimed that he had once shared the Semipelagian views that humanity could obtain grace by doing what lay in their natural power, which was the same position as Biel's.<sup>15</sup> Denis Janz argues that Luther's marginal notes on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (1509–1510), demonstrate that he still held a Semipelagian view at that date, but the shift took place in the glosses and scholia on the Psalms (1513–1516), where a new awareness of the Pauline and Augustinian understanding of human guilt and redemption is demonstrated.<sup>16</sup> The shift was complete by the time of his lectures on Romans in 1515–1516. His biblical studies had also caused him to question much of the scholastic method, and so in *The Babylonian Captivity*, Luther questioned not only some of the customs of the Church that

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 27: "In officio autem misse idem sacrificium est et oblatio, non per iteratam mortem, sed per mortis semel passe rememorativam representationem [...]. Unde et semel tantum passus est, et tamen quotidie mortis illus unice memoriam in hoc sacramentali sacrificio representamus [...]. Ex quo certum est quod missa non equivalet passioni et morti christi quantum ad meritum, quia in misse sacrificio christus non iterum moritur, licet mors eius (unde omne neritum) specialius in eo commemoretur [...]. Alioquin sicut christus semel tantum passus est ad totius mundi redemptionem, ita et una missa sufficeret pro redemptione animarum omnium ab omnibus penis purgatorii, et ad impetrationem totius boni; quod tamen decendum non est" (OBERMAN – COURTENAY 1, 357). English translation taken from Darwell STONE, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol.1, Eugene/OR 2006, 390 f.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ibid, 53: "Merito autem ac congrue agitur hec chrisi memoria in ecclesia, propter multiplex malum evitandum quod incurrimus ex oblatione dei ac suorum beneficiorum" (OBERMAN – COURTENAY 2, 334).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Denis R. JANZ, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism. A Study in Theological Anthropology*, Waterloo, Ontario 1983, 10, citing Luther's Works, WA 2, 401, ll. 22–27.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. JANZ, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism*.



seemed to contradict Scripture, such as communion in one kind only, but he was also critical of scholastic debates and definitions of real presence, and particularly the idea that the mass was a sacrifice offered by the church to obtain certain favors from God.<sup>17</sup> Luther's soteriology is brilliantly set forth in his hymn, *Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice*.<sup>18</sup> It was the grasp of God's pure unmerited grace that caused Luther to attack the *canon missae* since its liturgical language seemed to support that the Church was offering something in order to complete Christ's redemption. Ultimately, therefore, the *canon missae* had to be jettisoned. Luther wrote:

When now they throw up to us their canon, let us cry out the way they do: You do not understand the canon; it has to be interpreted. Who will render a decision in this quarrel and contention? If they say: The words of the canon are clear and manifest and need no glosses, then we in return also say: The words of the gospel are clear and need no glosses. [...] We say that the canon, because it is a human word and work, shall yield to the gospel and give place to the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

### *Luther's Reforms of the canon missae*

Luther viewed the mass as sacrament and gift from God, and as I have argued in detail in an earlier study, his *FM* gave brilliant liturgical expression to justification by faith through grace, though Oswald Bayer's *promissio* and *fides* is an equally useful hermeneutic.<sup>20</sup> Luther did not do "a hatchet job" on the *canon missae* (a view propagated by many, originating

<sup>17</sup> Cf. LUTHER, *Babylonian Captivity*, in: LW 36, 51 f.

<sup>18</sup> *Nun freut euch, lieben Christen*, in: LW 53, 219 f. Cf. Oswald BAYER, *Martin Luther's Theology. A Contemporary Interpretation* [trans. by Thomas H. TRAPP], Grand Rapids 2008, 217–219.

<sup>19</sup> LUTHER, *Misuse of the Mass*, in: LW 36, 185.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Bryan D. SPINKS, *Luther's Liturgical Criteria and His Reform of the Canon of the Mass* (GLS 30), Bramcote 1982 [reprint with a Foreword by John T. PLESS, Sidney Montana 2021]. Cf. ID., *Do This in Remembrance of Me. The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day*, London 2013, 246–253; Oswald BAYER, *Martin Luther's Theology, passim*. For the contribution and limitations of Vilmos Vajta's work, see SPINKS, *Luther's Liturgical Criteria*, 18–20.

with Brilioth) but rather, replaced it.<sup>21</sup> He retained *sursum corda* and a preface, and then suggested that the words of institution be intoned to the same intonation as the Lord's Prayer. Then should come the Sanctus and Benedictus, with the elevation of the bread and cup. In place of a sung preface and Sanctus, and a silent *canon missae*, Luther provided for a sung preface, sung institution narrative, and sung Sanctus and Benedictus. Since frequently the choir was still singing the Sanctus when the celebrant had raced through the silent *canon missae*, no one would have noticed anything missing, but would have noted the innovation of the chanting of the institution narrative.<sup>22</sup> In *The Misuse of the Mass* Luther wrote:

For if you ask: What is the gospel? You can give no better answer than in these words of the New Testament, namely, that Christ gave his body and poured out his blood for us for the forgiveness of sins. [...] these words, as a short summary of the whole gospel, are to be taught and instilled into every Christian's heart, so that he may contemplate them continuously and without ceasing, and with them exercise, strengthen, and sustain his faith in Christ, especially when he goes to the sacrament.<sup>23</sup>

Elsewhere he stated that "Everything depends on these words. Every Christian should and must know them and hold them fast."<sup>24</sup>

Many would adopt Luther's *FM* as their pattern for the mass, though in what might be called more conservative areas, such as Nuremberg and later in Sweden, some other features from the old mass were retained.

Luther's *FM* was in Latin, as was his reform of the daily office, and he argued that this was partly for the sake of teaching the youth the international language of learning. In 1526 he published the *Deutsche Messe* (*DM*) which was more of a paraphrase than a translation. Luther was critical of attempts to render the Latin for a word for word German text. The 1526 work needs to be seen in a broader context. Luther had written:

<sup>21</sup> Cf. SPINKS, Luther's Liturgical Criteria, 7–20.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Martin LUTHER, *Formula Missae* (1523), in: LW 53, 15–46, here: 27 f., cf. 31: "All that matters is that the Words of Institution should be kept intact and that everything should be done by faith."

<sup>23</sup> Id., *Misuse of the Mass*, in: LW 36, 183.

<sup>24</sup> Id., *The Adoration of the Sacrament* (1523), in: LW 36, 275–304, here: 277.

I would gladly have a German mass today. I am also occupied with it. But I would very much like it to have a true German character. For to translate the Latin text and retain the Latin tone and notes has my sanction, though it doesn't sound polished or well done. Both the text and notes, accents, melody, and manner of rendering ought to grow out of the true mother tongue and its inflections, otherwise [...] it becomes an imitation, in the manner of the apes.<sup>25</sup>

He had found a particular German theological tradition in the *Theologica Germanica*, and in his address to the nobility of the German nation, he made constant reference to the German nation, the German people, German customs, German territory, and German land. As others have demonstrated, Luther built on the rising tide of German nationalism, which saw the Emperor and the Pope as unwelcome influences in German affairs.<sup>26</sup> "We Germans", Luther wrote, "are nothing but Germans, and will remain Germans."<sup>27</sup> A similar concern is found in his comments on Psalm 101:2.<sup>28</sup> In Luther's mind, the 1526 *DM* was a sixteenth century acculturated or contextualized mass specifically for the German nation, characterized by its paraphrases. In place of the *sursum corda*, a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer was provided, followed by an admonition or exhortation, and then the words of institution were to be chanted to the Gospel intonation – making clearer that these words are a summary of the Gospel. A German paraphrase or trope of the Sanctus was provided, though Luther also provided for some variations, including separate administration moments for the bread and the wine. Many of the Southern cities and states would adopt and adapt this vernacular form.

<sup>25</sup> Id., The German Mass and Order of Service (1526), in: LW 53, 51–90, here: 54.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Joachim WHALEY, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, vol. 1: From Maximilian to the Peace of Westphalia, 1493–1648, Oxford 2012; Gabriele HAUG-MORITZ, *The Holy Roman Empire, the Schmalkald League, and the Idea of Confessional Nation-Building*, in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 152 (2008) 427–439.

<sup>27</sup> Martin LUTHER, *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524), in: LW 45, 339–378, here: 372.

<sup>28</sup> Id., *Psalm 101*, in: LW 13, 145–224, here: 218, cf. 219: "Christ help us Germans!"

### *The canon missae in some recent studies*

Biel's *Exposition* of the *canon missae* may have been an encyclopaedic *tour de force* in the fifteenth century, but by the standards of contemporary liturgical scholarship, it is not an exposition at all, but a work of scholastic eisegesis. It is not so much about the *canon missae*, as about how the *canon missae* was interpreted by the late medieval theologians and liturgical commentators. Luther accepted the eisegesis, and so he attacked the *canon missae*. Something of his response is seen in his work of 1525, *The Abomination of the Secret Mass*, where he ridiculed the logic of the *canon missae*.<sup>29</sup> Neither Biel's *Exposition*, nor Luther's critique would be regarded as "scholarly" in contemporary liturgical scholarship. This is because, although in many ways the *canon missae* remains an enigma, more recent studies shed a little more light on its possible origins and rationale.<sup>30</sup>

Much of the Roman *canon missae* is mirrored in the use of Milan as witnessed by Ambrose in *De Sacramentis*, which is dated c. 390. Ambrose claimed to follow Rome in most things,<sup>31</sup> and we should probably think of Ambrose's quotation as a parallel to the Roman prayer rather than simply as an early Roman version of the *canon missae*. Zwingli, in his attack on the *canon missae* decided to sideline this witness by questioning Ambrosian authorship,<sup>32</sup> a view not shared by serious scholars now. Ambrose's witness to a prayer very similar to the Roman *canon missae* means that this Eucharistic prayer was in existence by the end of the fourth century, and therefore the *canon missae* could neither have explicitly taught nor explicitly denied later explanations of eucharistic presence. Further-

<sup>29</sup> Cf. ID., *The Abomination of the Secret Mass* (1525), in: LW 36, 309–328.

<sup>30</sup> For a recent overview, see Uwe M. LANG, *The Roman Mass. From Early Christian Origins to Tridentine Reform*, Cambridge 2021, 110–131. See also Juliette DAY, *Interpreting the Origins of the Roman Canon*, in: EAD. (ed.), *Studia Patristica*, vol. 71: Including papers presented at the Conferences on Early Roman Liturgy to 600 (14.11.2009 and 27.02.2010) at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford, UK, Leuven 2014, 53–67.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. AMBROSE, *Sacr.*, 3,5 and 4,21–27, quoted in Edward YARNOLD, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation. Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century*, Slough 1972, 122. 136–140.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Hyldrich ZWINGLI, *De Canone Missae Epicheiresis* (1523) (*Corpus Reformatorum* 89, 566 f.; EGLI – FINSLER).

more, its sacrificial terminology belongs to fourth century cultural norms, and not to late medieval theologies of eucharistic sacrifice. When in 1963, Vincent L. Kennedy wrote: “The Canon of the Mass has, as its nucleus, the recital of the institution of the Blessed Eucharist; this essential feature has not varied from apostolic times and is common to all liturgies”<sup>33</sup>, for current scholarly opinion, he could not have been more misleading. It is perhaps important to note that Ambrose witnesses to the institution narrative as being part of the *canon missae*. We have evidence of the use of the narrative in the Eucharistic Prayer in the *Barcelona Papyrus* and in *Sarapion* (both Egyptian) but like Ambrose, they are both fourth century.<sup>34</sup> Paul Bradshaw has argued that when earlier writers such as Justin Martyr refer to the narrative, it is in a catechetical context, and not as a part of the Eucharistic Prayer, in which he has been followed by Maxwell Johnson, and the present writer.<sup>35</sup> There is no clear indisputable evidence that prior to the fourth century the institution narrative was recited in Eucharistic Prayers. In current scholarly debate, the East Syrian anaphora of *Addai and Mari* is usually dated c. third century, and is the oldest Eucharistic Prayer still in use, and it famously has no institution narrative, but simply a reference to “the example which is from you”<sup>36</sup>. It seems to date from a time when the Church did what the Lord told it to do without having to remind the Lord and itself each time why it was doing it. In 2001, much to the consternation of some traditionalists, the Vatican recognized the full validity of the anaphora of *Addai and Mari*, even though it has no words of institution.<sup>37</sup> The witness of the *Didache* together with

<sup>33</sup> Vincent L. KENNEDY, *The Saints of the Canon of the Mass*, Rome 1963, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Nathan P. CHASE, *The Anaphoral Tradition in the “Barcelona Papyrus”* (StTT 53), Turnhout 2023; Maxwell E. JOHNSON, *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis. A Literary, Liturgical and Theological Analysis* (OCA 249), Rome 1995.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Paul F. BRADSHAW, *Eucharistic Origins*. Revised Edition, Eugene/OR 2023, 16 f.; Maxwell E. JOHNSON, *Martyrs and the Mass. The Interpolation of the Narrative of Institution into the Anaphora*, in: *Worship* 87 (2013) 2–22; Bryan D. SPINKS, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 52–67.

<sup>36</sup> English translation taken from Bryan D. SPINKS, *Addai and Mari – The Anaphora of the Apostles. A Text for Students*, Bramcote 1980, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Robert F. TAFT, *Mass Without the Consecration? The Historic Agree-*

the evidence collected by Andrew McGowan suggest that in the first three centuries, the term “Eucharist” referred to Christian meals which did not all commemorate the Last Supper.<sup>38</sup> It may be that the narrative came to be added to Eucharistic Prayers both as the canon of Scripture became widely accepted, and in order to phase out (or prohibit!) those other religious meals as Eucharists.

No anaphora prior to the Reformation quotes a word for word scriptural version of the Last Supper – they all use paraphrases. Edward Ratcliff demonstrated many decades ago that the narrative of the Roman *canon missae* is mostly based on the text of the Gospel of St. Matthew.<sup>39</sup> Luther was annoyed by the insertion of the word *enim*, because as a Renaissance scholar, he knew it was not in the Greek or in the Vulgate. He commented: “But they have added the little word ‘enim’, and they say it means the same as ‘truly’”.<sup>40</sup> However, had Luther had access to some of the Old Latin manuscripts associated with North Africa, which is regarded as the home of liturgical Latin, he would have seen that *enim* is used in the Old Latin of St. Matthew’s narrative,<sup>41</sup> and so for its users it was indeed scriptural. It is no accident that the *canon missae* is sometimes referred to as “Romano-African”.

Dominic Serra has argued that in the earliest manuscripts of the *canon missae*, there is a comma before the narrative, which later gets omitted. The comma, he argues, shows the proper syntax of the narrative,

ment on the Eucharist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001, in: *Worship* 77 (2003) 482–509; Predrag BUKOVEC, Die vielen Einsetzungsberichte von Addai und Mari, in: *OCP* 85 (2018) 5–22.

<sup>38</sup> For the broader use of Eucharist, see Andrew MCGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharists. Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals*, Oxford 1999, and most recently, Alistair C. STEWART, *Breaking Bread. The Emergence of Eucharist and Agape in Early Christian Communities*, Grand Rapids 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Edward C. RATCLIFF, ‘The Institution Narrative of the Roman “Canon Missae”. Its Beginnings and Early Background’, in: *id.*, *Liturgical Studies*, ed. by Arthur H. COURATIN – David H. TRIPP, London 1976, 49–65.

<sup>40</sup> Martin LUTHER, *The Abomination of the Secret Mass* (1523), in: *LW* 36, 307–328, here: 319.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Edgar S. BUCHANAN, *The Four Gospels from the Codex Veronensis*, Oxford 1911, 52.

and that the narrative's inclusion was not originally conceived of as specifically a consecration narrative, but rather, as a warrant for the celebration of the rite.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the narrative as part of the Eucharistic prayer seems to be a fourth century development, and in the Roman context, was probably a warrant for the *Quam oblationem* petition, and certainly not a formula that taught transubstantiation or indeed, any other explicit explanation of presence; to suggest otherwise is to read later theologies back into the fourth century. Ambrose certainly gave special emphasis to the words of institution as being consecratory, but this is *Ambrose's theology*, and although he may not have been alone in this belief, it is not the unflinching natural sense of the earliest syntax of the Roman *canon missae*.

However, for Luther explanations for consecration were not ultimately the main problem, and in his engagement with Zwingli and subsequently with other "fanatics", he too would resort to philosophical categories to defend a real presence in, with and under the elements. For Luther, the main problem was the language of offering and oblation, which seemed to undermine Scripture's *sola fide*. Here we encounter a problem of the difference in the use of Scripture in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, and how sixteenth century Renaissance scholars approached Scripture. Whereas for Luther, the Last Supper narratives and the Pauline teaching in Romans were foundational, Matthew Olver has argued that for the Roman *canon missae*, it is a particular understanding of the Epistle to the Hebrews that is paramount, particularly the "Sacrifice of Praise".<sup>43</sup> In a culture still indebted to Platonism, the earthly reflected a heavenly reality. The eucharistic celebration was interpreted in the light of Hebrews, and not Pauline teaching in Romans. Olver notes that the terms *haec dona, haec munera, haec sancta sacrificia illibata* which along with *hostia* and *oblatio* are all from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and he argues that the compilers used this terminology in an attempt to borrow and appropriate

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Dominic E. SERRA, The Roman Canon. The Theological Significance of its Structure and Syntax, in: EO 20 (2001) 91–128.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Matthew OLVER, Hoc Est Sacrificium Laudis. The Influence of Hebrews on the Origin, Structure, and Theology of the Roman Canon Missae [unpubl. PhD dissertation Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI], 2018, to be published by Brepols.

scriptural language in order to broaden the terminology for the eucharistic offering through biblical idioms.<sup>44</sup> Olver writes:

Given that Jesus offered up *preces supplicationesque*, the use of Heb 5:7 would be an indication that the redactors understood the action of the eucharist – praise, prayer, material offering of bread and wine – to somehow be one with that of Christ who offered both praise and prayer to the Father, along with the material offering of his body.<sup>45</sup>

The compiler(s) no doubt believed the prayer was scriptural. The unscriptural designation of Melchizedek as “high priest” does have some support in the Targums, and may be a pointer the antiquity of this section of the anaphora.<sup>46</sup> Usually exact citations of Scripture in anaphoras point to later correction.

The study by Christiaan Kappes suggests that a core of the *canon missae* may have been composed by or reflected the teaching of Lactantius of Rome and Lactantius’s own indebtedness to the writings of Varro and Seneca.<sup>47</sup> It represents a Stoic reading of scripture. Furthermore, most religious meals in the classical period were associated with an offering to the deities, and thus even the *Didache*, which never associates its Eucharist with the passion or the Last Supper, sees its Eucharist as an offering in fulfillment of Malachi 1:11<sup>48</sup>. “Sacrifice” is not defined because in the culture there was no need to. Particularly in Roman culture reciprocity was integral to religious and social occasions, and “offering” was a duty.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 308 f.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>46</sup> See Roger LA DÉAUT, *Le titre de Summus Sacerdos donné a Melchisédech est-il d’origine juive?*, in: RSR 50 (1962) 222–229.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Christiaan KAPPES, *Lactantius and Creation of the Roman Canon for Imperial Liturgy*, in: QL 100 (2020) 84–137. Less convincing is his reconstruction of an earlier text.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Didache* 14, quoted in Paul F. BRADSHAW – Maxwell E. JOHNSON, *Prayers of the Eucharist. Early and Reformed*, originally by Ronald C. D. JASPER – Geoffrey J. CUMING (ACC 94), Collegeville 2019, 242–246.

<sup>49</sup> See the discussion by Andrew MCGOWAN, *Eucharist and Sacrifice. Cultic Tradition and Transformation in Early Christian Ritual Meals*, in: Matthias KLINGHARDT – Hal TAUSSIG (eds.), *Meals and Religious Identity in Early Christianity* (TANZ 56), Tübingen 2012, 191–206.



The common terms for such gifts were *donum* and *munus* – both used in the Roman *canon missae*.<sup>50</sup> When bread and wine were made and brought by the laity, they were indeed gifts, some of which the deacons (or Archdeacon) selected for the celebration.

### *John M. G. Barclay on gift-reciprocity in Paul's letter to the Romans, and implications for understanding the canon missae*

Although Robert Kolb has claimed that the study of John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, vindicates Luther, Kolb seems to have missed the nuanced point that Barclay makes about the original context and understanding of gift in the first century and in Paul's specific context in the Epistle to the Romans.<sup>51</sup> Barclay writes:

[T]hroughout this book, we have been suspicious of the modern (Western) ideal of the "pure" gift, which is supposedly given without strings attached. We have been able to make sense of the fact that a gift can be *unconditional* (free of prior conditions regarding the recipient) without also being *unconditional* (free of expectations that the recipient will offer some "return"). Paul has provided a parade example of this phenomenon, since he simultaneously emphasizes the incongruity of grace and the expectation that those who are "under grace" (and wholly refashioned by it) will be re-oriented in the obedience of faith. What has seemed in the modern world a paradoxical phenomenon – that a "free" gift can also be obliging – is entirely comprehensible in ancient terms.<sup>52</sup>

The compilers of all classical Eucharistic prayers seem to have regarded the "do this in remembrance" as a reciprocal obligation, and since it was a religious meal, it was therefore an offering. It was not conceived of as being Pelagian. Alec Ryrie has commented of Protestant piety:

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Neil COFFEE, Gifts and giving, Roman', in: Oxford Classical Dictionary. [↗](#)

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Robert KOLB, Current Perspectives on Luther's Biblical Interpretation, in: Lutheran Quarterly 36 (2022) 249–267.

<sup>52</sup> John M. G. BARCLAY, Paul and the Gift, Grand Rapids 2015, 562 f.

True prayer, it was generally acknowledged, was neither a human “work” nor a human response to God’s work. Rather, it was itself God’s work, drawing devotees into intimacy with himself.<sup>53</sup>

The same could be argued for the intention of the Roman *canon missae*. Barclay notes that in Greek culture, *charis* (gift) is frequently linked to the return favour of *eucharistia* (thanksgiving).<sup>54</sup> In Latin culture, Barclay notes:

Giving (*do, dona, praesto, tribuo, confero*) place the recipient in debt: *obligor* and *debeo* are regularly used to acknowledge the gift, which is returned (*redo, refero*) in a variety of forms, not least in gratitude (*gratias ago, gratiam habeo*).<sup>55</sup>

Luther made a sharp dichotomy between the terms “mass and prayer”, “sacrament and work”, and “testament and sacrifice” in a manner that classical culture did not.<sup>56</sup> Neither was the concept of asking for things at the Eucharist simply a Roman view. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote that “after the spiritual sacrifice has been perfected, the bloodless worship” the Eucharistic Prayer in Jerusalem then called upon God through that “sacrifice of propitiation”, for help for the living and then the departed.<sup>57</sup> The classical world took to heart John 14:13, and at the Eucharist asked for many things in Jesus’s name, as well as following Philippians 4:6: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving (*μετὰ εὐχαριστίας; cum gratiarum actione*) let your requests be known to God”. In “everything”, said Paul, and for many in the classical world, this included in the recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer over bread and wine.

<sup>53</sup> Alec RYRIE, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, Oxford 2013, 101.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. BARCLAY, *Paul and the Gift*, 577.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. LUTHER, *Babylonian Captivity*, in: LW 36, 56.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Myst. cat.* 5, in: Paul F. BRADSHAW – Maxwell E. JOHNSON (eds.), *Prayers of the Eucharist. Early and Reformed. Texts translated and edited with Introductions, originally by R. C. D. JASPER – G. J. CUMING*, Collegeville 2019, 138.

In addition, the Roman *canon missae* used Roman legal language and it used forms of address commonly used for the emperor to address God.<sup>58</sup> Its list of saints, which fluctuated as the *canon* spread through the Western Church, were originally those associated with Roman sanctity and martyrdom, perhaps encouraged by the Old Latin reading of Romans 12:13 (*memoriis sanctorum communicantes*), as sharing the memories of the saints.<sup>59</sup> Kappes's ultimate suggestion is that the core of the Roman *canon missae* was adapted specifically for the Eucharist at the Roman Imperial Court in the fourth century. In other words, what Luther did in the *DM* – finding a German idiom for a German culture – the successive compilers did with the *canon missae* for the Imperial Court in Rome. To use Luther's words, the *canon missae* does seem to have grown out of the true mother tongue and its inflections. If the recent studies of Serra, Olver and Kappes are correct, and the insights of Barclay are accepted, then the *canon missae* was both cultural and location specific. It was never envisaged as becoming the sole Eucharistic Prayer of the Western medieval Church. Its pronounced concept of offering was appropriate for its particular imperial setting. Not to offer the gifts would be as rude as being invited to a meal today and not taking a hostess gift – which might include wine, even though the host and hostess will probably already have wine. Once divorced from its original context and cultural norms, the language of offering in the *canon missae* was ripe for entirely new and alien connotations and unfortunate theologies. Cajetan was aware of the force of Luther's attacks, and he would argue that the liturgy understands the Eucharist not only as a memorial of Christ's offering, but a spiritual modality of the offering itself, but this too, is to read back into the canon a theology that was never articulated at the time of its composition.<sup>60</sup> However, late medieval eisegesis and the reading of transubstantiation back into the *canon missae*, and more importantly, for a Lutheran context, promoting votive sacrifices, all completely detached from the original cultural setting

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ralph A. KEIFER, *The Unity of the Roman Canon. An Examination of its Unique Structure*, in: *StLi* 11 (1976) 39–58.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. LANG, *The Roman Mass*, 117.

<sup>60</sup> See Reginald M. LYNCH, *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae and the Eucharistic Sacrifice in the Early Modern Period (Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology)*, Oxford, 2023 for Cajetan.

does not alter the original intention of the *canon missae* to speak through Scripture to and through Roman Imperial culture and language.

### *A modest Ecumenical suggestion: older forms as “Identity-Markers”*

C. S. Lewis, in one of the Chronicles of Narnia books, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, recounts how Aslan tells Lucy that no one is ever told what *would have happened*, because we only have *what did happen*. Nevertheless, we still like to ask the question.

Luther saw the Roman *canon missae* as diametrically opposed to the theology of the Epistle to the Romans. But what would he have thought had he had before him all the Gallican and Hispanic Eucharistic Prayers, the three Eastern Orthodox Prayers, all eighty plus Syrian Orthodox anaphoras, that of the Armenian Church, and those of the East Syrian and Ethiopian Orthodox, and even the *Didache* – where with one accord they regard the Eucharist as in some sense an offering? Would Luther have indicted the whole of the Christian tradition? It is not only a Lutheran question – it is also an Ecumenical question. There are Roman Catholics who are adamant that Luther’s reforms are defective, and equally there are Confessional Lutherans who regard the Roman *canon missae* and the new Eucharistic Prayers as Pelagian.<sup>61</sup>

In the Anglican tradition, Anglo-Catholics want to offer at the eucharistic table, and the American Episcopal Church does, because it had the language of offering in its 1789 *Book of Common Prayer*. Anglican Evangelicals object to the term “to offer” the elements, as do many protestant bodies. An Anglican compromise in some recent Eucharistic Prayers has been to use the words “place before”, or “set before” God the bread and wine. Those who know Greek, Latin and Syriac are fully aware that “set before”, “bring before”, “place before”, and “offer” and “sacrifice” are all synonyms in those languages. On the question of Eucharist and Sacrifice in an Anglican context the late Bishop Kenneth Stevenson and the present author wrote:

<sup>61</sup> Some of these are discussed in detail in SPINKS, *Luther’s Liturgical Criteria*.

All that we do in [Christ's] Name is in, with and through the one obedient and victorious Christ, who is now before the Father in eternity. Eternity is outside space-time, yet all our language is space- and time-bound. Thus, whether we do this in memory or remembrance, or celebrate, or bring before, or plead the sacrifice, re-present, or offer (all of which expressions and ideas are found in the classical divines), the eucharistic action is performed by an eschatological community in Christ at a moment when time and eternity become one in the presence of God. In this context, "we offer this bread and cup" is no more or less legitimate than "with this bread and this cup we do as our Saviour commanded".<sup>62</sup>

Whatever the tradition, all do in fact set before or place before or bring before, bread and wine. I know of no Church which assembles for the Eucharist, and provides no bread and wine, expecting God to rain them down miraculously like manna and quails from the heavens. That does not happen, but unlike the early centuries, today we buy the elements from Church suppliers, and they are rarely from local labor and donation, and so they seem less as gifts but more like commodities provided. However, whether the bread and wine have been produced by the congregants or purchased on their behalf, they are ultimately gifts of God, as also are our voices and our very lives. The Byzantine anaphora of St. John Chrysostom has these words before "offering the reasonable and bloodless service": "offering to you your own from your own, in all and for all", which safeguards from any attempt to construe the Eucharistic offering – bread, wine, the human voice and selves – as Pelagian.

In the revisions of the mass after Vatican II, Rome added new Eucharistic Prayers to its revised missal, and after considerable debate, the decision was taken to retain the old Roman *canon missae* with only minor change. It is not the most frequently chosen prayer of many clergy, suggesting many do not regard it as the ideal Eucharistic Prayer. In many ways its inclusion might be regarded as an identity-marker, witnessing to continuity as well as change. A similar situation pertains in the Church of England. The 1662 Prayer Book is still available for use, and some of its

<sup>62</sup> Kenneth STEVENSON – Bryan SPINKS, *Offering and Sacrifice*, in: David R. HOLETON (ed.), *Revising the Eucharist. Groundwork for the Anglican Communion* (Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 27), Bramcote 1994 [reprint (Gorgias Liturgical Studies 28), Piscataway/NJ 2009], 54 f., here: 55.

material has been incorporated into *Common Worship 2000*. However, the latter has a whole number of new Eucharistic Prayers – continuity and change. Although Anglicans and Roman Catholics, with good intentions, tried to provide an institution narrative for editions of *Addai and Mari*, the Church of the East continues to use its most ancient anaphora alongside those of *Theodore the Interpreter* and *Nestorius*, the two latter having the narrative.<sup>63</sup>

Confessional Lutherans might continue to include a version (and in the vernacular rather than Latin) of the *FM*, mainly as an identity-marker, though Sweden might well use the rite of Olavus Petri.<sup>64</sup> It makes less sense to attempt to include the *DM* outside a German culture, since Luther authored it for a German-speaking culture. Today's equivalent is a form suitable for each language and culture, though attempts at "contextualization" can run the risk of deifying cultural fashions that may be quite alien to the Gospel.<sup>65</sup>

In previous debate, some Confessional Lutherans have voiced an opinion that the institution narrative should not be contained in a prayer addressed to God, but it should always be in a context addressed to the Church.<sup>66</sup> It seems therefore that one solution for Confessional Lutherans might be to chant the narrative to the Gospel tone and then pray a Eucharistic Prayer, indicating *promissio* and *fides*. Precedents would be the Presbyterian tradition in the Church of Scotland,<sup>67</sup> and (though obviously

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Bryan D. SPINKS, *Prayers from the East*, Pastoral Press, Washington, DC 1993.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Eric E. YELVERTON, *The Mass in Sweden* (HBS 57), London 1920.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Bryan D. SPINKS, *Christian Worship or Cultural Incantations?*, in: *StLi 12* (1977) 1–19. Aidan Kavanagh argued that inculturation happens (because of the educational, cultural and social mindset of liturgical revisers) without anyone having to agonize consciously about it. Cf. Aidan KAVANAGH, *Liturgical Inculturation. Looking to the Future*, in: *StLi 20* (1990) 95–106.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Oliver K. OLSON, *Contemporary Trends in Liturgy viewed from the Perspective of Classical Lutheran Theology*, in: *Lutheran Quarterly 26* (1974) 110–157; Gottfried G. KRODEL, *The Great Thanksgiving of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. It is the Christians' Supper and not the Lord's Supper* (The Cresset. Occasional Paper 1), Valparaiso 1976.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Common Order*, Edinburgh 1994. For fuller discussion, see Bryan D. SPINKS, *Scottish Presbyterian Worship. Proposals for Organic Change*,

not the narrative) *Addai and Mari*. Another possibility might be to have a Eucharistic Prayer that includes the narrative. A distinction could be made between the chant used for the prayer, or to say the prayer, and to have a different chant for the narrative, in the Gospel tone. The feasibility of the first of these suggestions would be for musicians to work out. Keeping the identity-markers allows churches to pursue new routes in an ecumenical spirit as well as to acknowledge contemporary understanding of liturgical history, without losing or surrendering their liturgical roots. That some Lutherans and Roman Catholics can agree on Eucharist and Sacrifice is illustrated by the 1967 agreement:

Further, the Catholic affirmations that the church “offers Christ” in the mass has in the course of the last half century been increasingly explained in terms which answer Lutheran fears that this detracts from the full sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice. The members of the body of Christ are united through Christ with God and with one another in such a way that they become participants in his worship, his self-offering, his sacrifice to the Father. Through this union between Christ and Christians, the eucharistic assembly “offers Christ” by consenting in the power of the Holy Spirit to be offered by him to the Father. Apart from Christ we have no gifts, no worship, no sacrifice of our own to offer to God. All we can plead is Christ, the sacrificial lamb and victim whom the Father himself has given us.<sup>68</sup>

Of course, with most agreed statements, there are always those in the respective churches who will see such agreements as a betrayal, and perhaps that is why liturgical identity-markers can be an important reassurance that nothing is being surrendered, but new things are being gained.<sup>69</sup>

History often exposes dogmatic statements for what they are. When the Vatican recognized the validity of *Addai and Mari*, it did not then re-write its own Eucharistic Prayers to omit the narrative, and neither did it incorporate *Addai and Mari* into its own use. It was a question of honest recognition of an ancient tradition based on the historical facts as we in-

1843 to the Present Day, Edinburgh 2020, 226–235.

<sup>68</sup> LUTHERAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE IN THE USA, *The Eucharist. A Lutheran-Roman Catholic Statement* (October 1, 1967), n. 1,2,b). [↗](#)

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Stephen B. SOURS, *Whose Sacrifice is the Eucharist? The Offering of Christ and His Church in Catholic and Methodist Theology*, Washington, DC 2024.

terpet them at present, and an ecumenical spirit in the light of that history. This honest recognition of history can be a real problem for those who take strong dogmatic positions. A position that invalidates a Eucharist which does not have the words of institution, or, as in the past, when some Roman Catholic theologians objected to the forms in some of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church anaphoras, would ultimately imply that there were no valid eucharists between the Last Supper and the emergence of the inclusion of the narrative in the fourth century. Such a position denies the historical picture as we understand it currently and it defies common rational thought. This paper is not advocating the use of the Roman *canon missae* by other Churches – it had a specific cultural setting, and both that culture and setting no longer exists. The paper does suggest that neither the views of late medieval scholastics nor of Luther are helpful in assessing this ancient prayer today; its intended theology is not what either side at the Reformation read into it. Luther's *FM* still stands as a brilliant expression of sixteenth century understanding of justification by faith through grace, or Bayer's *promissio* and *fides*. Our present understanding of the history, as well as our theological methodologies, are different, and allow us to appreciate the scriptural concern in Luther's reforms, as well as to recognize the scriptural intent of the *canon missae*. Of course, the historian must always have the humility to admit that tomorrow, or in ten years' time, or sometime in the future, documents or fragments may come to light that will change the current picture which would require a assessment. Liturgists are all too aware that only the Triune God has prescience.



## *Abbreviations*

DM	Deutsche Messe
EO	Ecclesia orans
FM	Formula Missae
GLS	Grove Liturgical Study
LW	Luther's Works. American Edition, 83 vols.
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
QL	Questions Liturgiques
RSR	Recherches de Science Religieuse
SCH(L)	Studies in Church History. Ecclesiastical History Society (London)
StLi	Studia Liturgica
StTT	Studia Traditionis Theologiae. Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter

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