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# The Work for the People Reforming at People's Church?

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**Timo-Matti Haapiainen**

## **The Work for the People Reforming a People's Church?**

### **All belong...**

**"You all belong to the Church – in one way or another."** A captain of the Finnish Armed Forces said this, when he was calling reservists to an evening prayer, which was led by a reservist military chaplain. This is a strong picture of a folk church in action. More or less everyone is obliged to participate in the prayer – that is: liturgy – because everyone belongs to the church, in one way or another. Captain's point of view has some support. There is a saying: "Finland is so Lutheran country that even atheists are Lutheran atheists."

Traditionally, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, ELCF, and its liturgy have had an effect on most of the Finns. Baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals have been significant events and rites of initiation in the lives of the individuals and families lives.

The link between ELCF and Finnish way of living has been a two-way street. Christianity – especially in its Lutheran form – and ELCF have formed and reformed Finnish people. Church has taught people how to read and write and to know the substance of the Lutheran Catechism by heart. Bible and hymns have had a deep influence on literature, music and other arts. The Nordic welfare state ideology has grown from the ground that the Lutheran Christianity has essentially shaped.

On the other hand, Finnish national identity and culture have formed ELCF and its liturgy. For example, some feasts, like the Feast of the Annunciation, St. John's Day and Reformation Day take place in ELCF on Saturdays or Sundays close to the right days, not on the exact dates.<sup>1</sup> Other Christian churches in Finland have kept the right dates. Celebration on Saturdays and Sundays helps to avoid any disturbance that feasts and holidays might cause to the business, industry and other aspects of the society.

The aim of this presentation is to give a picture of the place of liturgy in the life of an old folk church and in its identity process. What is the role of the Christian liturgy in ELCF today? How could liturgy reform a folk church that is confronting all the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century?

First, we take a short ride through the history of ELCF as a folk church and look at its present situation. Recent statistics and studies give hints of the place of the liturgy in ELCF's life.

Second, I will present and analyse some recent documents of ELCF. What do they say about liturgy – explicitly or implicitly? On the one hand, these documents describe a future vision, on the other hand, they tell about the context in which they were born. They help us to see, where ELCF is and where it might go.

As a conclusion, I will say some words about the liturgy driven renewal and reformation in ELCF.

The focus will be on the effects of the liturgy on ecclesiology and identity process of ELCF. Folk church is a concept, which emphasizes the people as a subject or object of the church. From a certain point of view, also liturgical theology focuses on the people – the people of God, '*laos tou Theou*', the people of all peoples. Christian liturgy – *leitourgia* – is work for the people or people's work.<sup>2</sup> People participate in the life of the church and in God's mission through liturgy.

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<sup>1</sup> The changes began in 1950's. Epiphany and The Ascension Day are nowadays back on their right places, but there has been discussion about relocating them again.

<sup>2</sup> As Frank C. Senn writes: "[...] Christian liturgy as acts of rite and prayer instituted by Jesus the Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit in the history of the church is also the work of God (*opus Dei*), that in fact it is the work of God's people

## ELCF as a peoples's church

The concept 'folk church' or 'people's church' was invented in German protestant context by Friedrich Schleiermacher. He was influenced by German Idealism and Romanticism and understood 'folk' (*Volk*) as nations very essence. Folk church was for Schleiermacher a church through the people. After the times of Schleiermacher, there have been many other ways to understand folk church, for instance a church towards the people, a church of one people, a church for the people or a church of the people as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

The Finnish folk church has had essentially different periods. From 12th century until 1809, Finnish tribes were under Swedish rule. The church – first Catholic and after 16th Century Lutheran – was the church of the sovereigns and as such it was also a people's church, one church for all the people under one queen or king. The rule was *Cuius regio, eius religio* - whose realm, his or her religion.

From the year 1809 until 1917, Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy in Russian Empire. Church was no more sovereigns' church. Russian Tsar was an Orthodox, but Finland was a Lutheran country. The times of Grand Duchy included national awakening as well as spiritual revivals. Lutheran – and because of it essentially Western – identity made Finland different from the rest of the Russian Empire. Lutheranism built Finnish identity and prepared Finland for the independence.

In the year 1869, new Church Act separated formally church and state. Evangelical-Lutheran church in Finland was no more a state church – although church and state have been close to each other even after the official separation. New Church Act deepened the folk church identity.

Finland got its independence in the year 1917, in the wake of the Russian socialist revolution. In the spring of the year 1918, civil war fragmented the young nation and its people. Church was a church for a divided people. Following decades brought people back together. Especially after the Second World War, folk church ideology was strong. ELCF was a church for the people as a whole.

During last decades, ELCF has faced new challenges. Many members, especially young adults, have left ELCF. Still about 70 per cent of the population belong to ELCF. However, recently in two parishes membership rate has declined under 50 per cent. For the first time in history, ELCF has not simple majority status everywhere in Finland and in every parish – although it is still the biggest religious community everywhere in Finland.

Ever growing migration has had some effects on ELCF. Obviously, the Lutheran folk church identity has caused some delay on adaptation to the new situation. Some of the other churches have been more open to the migration from the outset. However, there has been significant progress during most recent decades and especially during the ongoing refugee crisis ELCF has shown potential to react, help and learn rapidly.

ELCF still has a strong role in Finnish society. It has 4 million members, a public law status, church tax system, and government pays it for some services.<sup>4</sup> ELCF is still church towards and for the people as a whole, but nowadays the borders of the church differ essentially from people's borders. Not every Finn belongs to the church anymore – no matter, how one defines the belonging.

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only because it is the work of God." Senn 2010, 6. Senn, Frank C.: The People's Work. A Social History of the Liturgy. 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Karttunen 2015: 24-28.

[http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/DFDF3E405064A950C2257B080040C1B3/\\$FILE/The%20Two%20Folk%20Churches%20in%20Finland%20Overkoversio.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/DFDF3E405064A950C2257B080040C1B3/$FILE/The%20Two%20Folk%20Churches%20in%20Finland%20Overkoversio.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://evl.fi/uutishuone/tiedotteet/-/items/item/10402/Kirkon+jasenmaaran+kehitys+edellisvuoden+kaltaista>

## Role of Christian liturgy in ELCF – what do the statistics say?

What is the role of the liturgy in ELCF? ELCF has defined its mission in Church Act: “**preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments in accordance with the Lutheran confessions of faith as well as otherwise promoting the Christian message and neighbourly love**”.<sup>5</sup> One can see here a strong link to the Lutheran confession and tradition: the gospel should be rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered. According to the Order of the Church, every member should participate in worship, use means of grace and follow the Christian way of living. Children should be baptised and taught accordingly.<sup>6</sup>

How does this ideal actualise? Statistics<sup>7</sup> tell that possibility to participate in worship is an important reason for membership for approximately 40 per cent of members of ELCF. Services get higher numbers: church wedding 72 per cent, baptism 76 per cent and Christian funeral almost 80 per cent.

However, respect does not necessarily lead to high participation. Under 10 per cent of all Finns – not just the members of ELCF – worship in church at least once a month. Only 3 per cent do so weekly. About six out of ten Finns worship in a church less than once in a year or not at all.

Worship attendance has declined fast during last decades. In 1995, ELCF’s Sunday worships gathered altogether 5 million participants. In 2008, the number went under four million. The newest statistics are from the year 2015. In that year, there were 3.3 million participants. 2.3 million worshippers received the eucharist. The number is not remarkably high for a church with 4 million members.

Between years 2008 and 2013, the proportion of infants who were baptised in ELCF dropped from 84 to 75 per cent and the proportion of couples getting married in church also dropped, from 60 to 49 per cent. However, approximately 90-95 per cent of all deceased persons still have a church funeral. Although services are usually quite small gatherings, altogether they reach many people. During 2012-2015, only 7 per cent of Finns did not participate at all in services – baptism, wedding or funeral. Half of the Finns took part in these services once a year.

Statistics give rather a clear picture: liturgy does not touch members of ELCF too often, although especially services are respected and significant. There is a clear tension between ideals and practice.

## Three documents

The need for reform is explicitly or implicitly present in many recent documents of ELCF. I introduce shortly three of them.

A strategy document *A Church of Encounter* was published in 2014. It gives guidelines to ELCF until the year 2020.

A report on the future called *The Church’s Role in a Multicultural Society* was published also in 2014. Document describes trends that shape tomorrow culturally and draws some theological outlines for an intercultural church.

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<sup>5</sup> Church Act 1054/1993, Section 2. CA7 ”congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.” <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php>

<sup>6</sup> The Order of the Church, first chapter, fifth paragraph.

<sup>7</sup> I use two sources: Haastettu kirkko – Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko vuosina 2008–2011 (Porvoo, 2012) and web-page <https://www.kirkontutkimuskeskus.fi/>

The hymnal supplement was published last year. On the one hand, the hymnal supplement concludes an era of hymn singing in ELCF. It includes some already beloved hymns and as such, it represents the genuine people's work, a reform that is already done. On the other hand, hymnal supplement offers new hymns and helps to build a new culture of hymn singing.

The aim is to find out, what is the role of the liturgy – people's work or work for the people – in these documents. How does liturgy form and reform the ecclesiology and identity of a folk church.

## A Church of Encounter

*A Church of Encounter – Guidelines for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland until 2020* consists of a short, card-like version that includes central points, and a longer booklet. You can find a translation in English in Internet.<sup>8</sup> There are also versions in Finnish, Swedish, Northern Sami and French.

ELCF as a whole has had strategies from 1980's. Strategies have been an answer to the challenges caused by phenomena like modernization and secularization. Dean of the Espoo diocese Kai Peltonen has studied the strategies of ELCF. He argues, that self-conservation of a folk church has played a strong role in the strategies.<sup>9</sup> In other words, reactive dimension has been remarkable. Mission based proaction has had a minor role. What about *A Church of Encounter*? Is it a reactive or proactive document?

*A Church of Encounter* includes mission, values, vision and four focal points. Document tries to avoid traditional strategy jargon to make a clear distinction between business strategies and guidelines for a church – that is a distinction between business and community.

The document was processed with wide participation. People's work and local ownership was emphasized in the process. The responsible working group listened to the experts, read statistics and other data. Central points were tested and crowdsourced in social media and in face to face encounters. Church council and General synod gave their input. The idea was to have as realistic picture of ELCF as possible and to recognize both megatrends and weak signals.

The task of the church according to *A Church of Encounter* is: **"The church calls people to be in fellowship with God and encourages them to care for their neighbours and all of God's creation."** In the core of this definition are relations 1) between God and human beings, 2) between people and 3) between creation and humankind. Liturgy is not mentioned explicitly, but one can sense the importance of fellowship, 'koinonia', which is the basic element of liturgically motivated ecclesiology. One can also notice the basic dynamics of the liturgy: God calls, gathers, forms and sends his people.

Values of *A Church of Encounter* are: faith, hope and love – Biblical values. This carries a significant message: The Holy scriptures are a source that is common to all members of ELCF and Christians all over the world. The word and sacraments constitute the church. Values go back to basics, '*ad fontes*'.

The vision for the year 2020 is:

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<sup>8</sup> <http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/sp?open&cid=Content2656A1>

<sup>9</sup> Peltonen, Kai: Kaikki kansankirkon puolesta. Todellisuuden sosiaalinen rakentuminen ja Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon strategiat. 2014.

**A member of the parish experiences faith in God as a resource, and an increasing number consider their connection to the church as an essential element of their lives.**

**The parish is a community of trust that brings different people together, and the message of the church is heard and has influence in all areas of society.**

Once again, relations and community are in the focus. Parish is a community of different persons, unity in variety. Vision includes both the personal experience and the whole community. The challenge of Western individualism is taken into account as well as the vision of the church as a community.

A Church of Encounter has four focal points:

**We emphasise the message of the church**

**Encounter has meaning**

**We love our neighbours**

**We value membership**

ELCF has an obvious membership crisis with declining membership rates. However, focal points do not begin with the crisis of declining numbers but with the mission. Document says: **"Local phenomena, such as the development of worship life and new approaches that speak to modern people, serve to enhance commitment to the church."** Membership and commitment grow from the main root of the church.

The long version of the document says:

**The renewable church is a spiritual community: The church is a community founded on the word of God and the sacraments. The Christian message and sacraments bring God's mercy and love into the lives of people. God brings people into fellowship with himself and others without regard to human boundaries.**

**Christian responsibility and service arise from the mystery passed on through God's word and sacraments. The church has always been challenged to unite daily reality with the word and sacraments.**

**The renewal of the church is essentially the work of God. The church is called to common prayer and to cry out for help from the Holy Spirit.**

The Christian Liturgy is in the heart of renewal: the Word and sacraments gather people into fellowship and send people into mission for the sake of the world. The authentic renewal is work of the Holy Spirit.

*A Church of Encounter* does not mention folk church or people's church. Instead of people as an ethnic or national concept it seems to emphasize term 'people' in the framework of the church as people of God, '*laos tou Theou*'. A people with a mission:

**The mission of the church is the mission of all its members. The administration of the sacraments and primary responsibility for preaching belong to the duties of the church's ordained pastors. Everything else is basically the work of the community, although for**

**centuries the church has been organised in such a way as to emphasise the position of its paid employees.**

The importance of the laity is clear. Implicitly, some critique for employee-centered mindset, silos and hierarchies is present. Document builds on the Body of Christ -theology: **"The Bible describes the church as the body of Christ. As members of the church we belong to a living entity. Each member is different, but plays an essential part in the whole."** Liturgy is work for the people, and every member is different from others. Church is one, because Christ is one, but this unity includes a wide variety. *A Church of Encounter* emphasizes the unity and the lack of uniformity.

On the other hand, members need support and guidance: **"We support Christian growth in all phases of life. All the children of our parishioners are baptised."** In many churches, this last point could sound odd. In ELCF, many members do not bring their children to baptism. In Helsinki, under half of the children of the members are baptised. Some adults want to recognize child's autonomy to decide herself. For some, baptism is insignificant. Some people cannot find potential godparents. In ecumenical families, children may be baptised in some other church. Whatever is the reason, there is a clear need for reform, re-evangelization and basic baptismal teaching in ELCF.

To conclude, *A Church of Encounter* is something else than a strategy for self-conservation of a folk church. It articulates the challenges of today but it does not focus on reactive solutions. It emphasizes the constant mission and identity of the church that grows from the liturgy.

## **Report on the future**

The report on the future *The Church's Role in a Multicultural Society - Report on the future of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland* reads the signs of the times and tries to anticipate the future. The aim of the document

**is to look courageously towards the future and support the renewal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, so that it can be equipped to respond to the challenges of the future as a church that is faithful to the one who sends it and serve people beyond the constraints of cultural boundaries.**

The title of the document includes the concept 'multicultural society'. In fact, the document goes further. It draws outlines for an intercultural church. God's creation and God's commands in the beginning of Genesis produce cultural varieties. When creation – humankind included – is fruitful, increases in number and fills the earth, new unique individuals and persons, new cultural models, new ways to cope with conditions, new languages and other varieties will exist inevitably.<sup>10</sup>

The fall of the humanity has broken and breaks connectedness between cultures and individuals. The church is sent to transcend boundaries and to build bridges instead of walls:

**The Revelation of John describes the community of the saved which includes people from all lands, nations, and tribes, and which speaks all languages (Revelation 7:9 NRSV). Revelation describes the New Jerusalem, which contains all the "glory and honour of the**

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:28.

**nations" (Revelation 21:26 NRSV). God's kingdom can accommodate all nations and the best achievements of human culture.**

Vision from The Revelation of John is a liturgical vision, a vision of worship. It is anamnesis of the future.<sup>11</sup> Liturgy builds on both God's works in history and God's work in the future. Church is both a community of memory and an eschatological community.<sup>12</sup>

The document emphasizes the role of worship: **"At the core of the church is a connectedness that becomes visible through worship"**. Document adapts the fourfold model of *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture*.<sup>13</sup> The model works as a basis for the model of relations between the Church and culture: whole church is transcultural, contextual, countercultural and intercultural. The liturgical ecclesiology has a prominent role here. The liturgy has a deep and decisive effect on the identity of the whole church.

The work of the church is linked with God's own mission, *missio Dei*:

**When the church is true to its calling to proclaim the gospel, it sees what Christ's work signifies for new situations. The missional church encounters a reality in which Christ is already present. The church finds traces of the Word imprinted in creation and recognises the prior work of the Holy Spirit.**

In mission, the church learns to know Christ and the works of the Holy Spirit. Church has to reach out and follow Christ. Christ sends and calls to follow him.

When document is talking about hospitality, it refers straight to the nucleus of the Christian liturgy: **"Christian hospitality should eliminate feelings of otherness and lead us towards equality and companionship – and literally towards the breaking of bread together (Latin *cum pane*, 'with bread')."** The church as a community of eucharist emphasizes the idea of connectedness.

The report on the future urges ELCF to change: **"Change in society and religiosity present a challenge to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, which has traditionally relied on different understandings of the national folk church and civic religion."** National folk church represents the past. The future needs something else: **"The national folk church should become a church of folk from many nations."**

### **The hymnal supplement**

Until now, I have presented two more or less theoretical documents. Third document represents praxis. Last year, ELCF got two hymnal supplements, one for the hymnal in Finnish and another one for the hymnal in Swedish. I will focus on the hymnal supplement with Finnish as a primary language.

In 2010, General Synod gave Church Council a task to prepare hymnal supplements to the hymnals published in 1980's. The hymnal supplements were to be relevant in multi-cultural, widely secularized and urban society. The music and lyrics should be able to form contact points between people and liturgy.

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<sup>11</sup> About the anamnesis of the future see for example Kärkkäinen 2002, 98. Veli-Matti: An Introduction to Ecclesiology. Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives. Downers Grove, Illinois 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Anneli Vartiainen has studied ELCF as a community of memory:  
<https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/136102/kirkkomu.pdf?sequence=1>

<sup>13</sup> See for example Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity. Geneva, 1996.

Hymnal supplement's forewords begin with a quote from the Book of Revelation, chapter 7, verses 9-10 – verses already referred in the report on the future:

**After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> They cried out in a loud voice, saying,**

**“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (NRSV)**

Quote has focus on the liturgy for all the peoples, not just one of them. The hymnal supplement shares the vision of the report on the future. In every local assembly, universal church is present.

Traditionally, Finnish hymnals have been mostly monolingual. They have been hymnals for a folk church that shares the borders of the people. New hymnal supplements break this tradition. There are altogether over 20 languages represented in supplements. In the supplement with Finnish as a primary language, there are 12 languages represented.

In the hymnal supplement, some languages, like Swedish and Sami languages, are domestic languages. The role of the Sami languages in the hymnal supplement is worth for a closer look. Samis are the only indigenous people in European Union. Samis have traditionally lived in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. In history, in all these countries, authorities and individuals have often oppressed Samis and their languages and culture.

There are two hymns from Samis in the hymnal supplement. The lyrics of these hymns originate from Sápmi – that is the cultural region traditionally inhabited by the Sami people in Northern Finland. Lyrics represent contextual Sami theology and reflect the Sami culture and spirituality. Melodies – however – come from Geneva and Finnish North-Savonia.

Some non-Sami people wanted to get also traditional Sami-music – joiks – or new music influenced by this tradition to the hymnal supplement. However, traditional Sami music is not widely used in worship. Samis wanted to include generally used and beloved hymns that can serve the ever-growing number of Sami people living outside Sápmi. Now the hymnal supplement includes two hymns that are significant for Sami community – not Sami-like melodies without real connection to the liturgical life of Sami people. The hymnal supplement supports local significance and people's integrity – and gives a wider picture of the reality than narrow folk church ideology gives.

Hospitality and accessibility are other roots for multilingualism in hymnal supplement. The growing migration in Finland increases the need for globally known Christian hymns and songs. Hymns with language understandable enough are needed to reach people with a weak link to Christianity. Themes and language have to be inclusive. The hymnal supplement offers a variety of languages, genres and topics. On the other hand, hospitable and accessible hymnal supplement does more than offers points of contact for people with different backgrounds. It forms singing assemblies to notice variety and the global nature of the Christianity.

**The reform is done – not written**

The decisive question is how all the good ideas and theories turn into a reality. How do these documents support people's work that is also work for the people? And how does this liturgical renewal reform the old folk church?

Experience has shown that solid theology joined with strong role of the laity can renew assemblies and parishes and through that have a deep effect on whole ELCF. Since 1980's Tuomasmessu or St Thomas Mass has paved way for both liturgical and communal renewal in ELCF. The role of the laity is strong in St Thomas Mass. In the original St Thomas Mass community in Helsinki, it takes weekly about 50 to 70 volunteers – laity and ordained people – to prepare a mass. Liturgy is rich with symbols, music connects tradition with contemporary genres and the role of the laity is decisive. Prayer of intercession after confession and absolution is important part of St Thomas Mass. People can just sit in the pew or wander around in the church, sing, meditate and write their own prayers at the prayer altars. Those who want to can pray together with one of the prayer assistants. Anointment with oil is available.

Persistent people's work in ELCF has led to reactions on the official level. Between the years 2011-2013 42 parishes of ELCF took part in developing worship project called Tiellä – På väg, that is 'on the way' in Finnish and in Swedish. In fact, the Finnish wording has a double meaning. 'Tiellä' means also 'in the way of something'. The project supported parishes that are on the way and it helped to see, what is in the way of development.

The initiative for the project came from General Synod, and project was organised as a strategic project by Church council.

Developing worship as a process brought people together. Parishes were encouraged to engage both all kinds of employees and the laity to the process. Parishes came together often. In some meetings, parishes of one diocese shared their experiences; some meetings were for all parishes involved in the project. Vicars had two exclusive seminars. Coming together and sharing ideas, questions and good practices was the nature of developing worship -project and it had an effect. Team-based orientation to worship life and the role of the laity strengthened in many parishes as well as liturgical identity of parishes.

The project got crucial support from the U.S.A. and ELCA. Bishop Robert Rimbo's visit to Finland in 2012 inspired and encouraged parishes to take further steps. The books of bishop Rimbo, Timothy J. Wengert, Gail Ramshaw, Gordon Lathrop, Frank C. Senn and many other American authors were studied carefully. You gave us ideas how to be an authentically Lutheran church in the world of changes and how to develop worship life that matters. I want to thank you for your contribution and the unity between you and us. Thank you.

Conclusive conference of the project took place in Seinäjoki in 2014. It was open to everyone, not exclusively members of the parishes involved in Tiellä – På väg. Conference was a success and it got successors. In 2015, a group with people from the parishes of Tiellä – På väg -project organized first worship conference with new concept in Jyväskylä with 530 participants and in March this year, another one took place in Oulu with 950 participants. In Jyväskylä, two thirds of the participants were employees. The role of the laity showed growth in Oulu: almost half of the participants were laypeople. The name of these conferences is Jaetut eväät, which can be translated 'Shared supply' or 'Shared bread'. Worship and sharing the central things matter. That can reform a folk church.