

## CANTOR AND MINISTER IN A VALUE-CREATING WORSHIP<sup>1</sup>

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**SUMMARY.** The present study evaluates the current situation of Hungarian Reformed liturgy and worship. In the context of a consumer and information society the genuineness and relevance of Reformed ecclesiastical service becomes an ever-increasing challenge for our communities. The demands coming from the part of the believers and the traditional liturgical forms are in continuous dialectical relationship. One of the possibilities for renewal in this sense lies in the reestablishment of the relationship between the minister and the cantor or choir-leader of the congregation. In this sense, as the author argues, it is necessary to provide the student of theology with a substantial knowledge and culture of church music and hymns. The second part of the presentation offers a few solutions to the immediate challenges facing our church communities with the intent to preserve what is best of the tradition combined with contemporary answers to the spiritual needs of the believers.

**Keywords:** church music, liturgy, minister-training, church musician-training, worship

### 1. Value – Losing Society and Our Worship

The main part of our worship happens within the congregation and in the church or in a place with ecclesiastical function, yet it never does in an isolated location. A good number of phenomena, which occur from the surrounding society, compete with our worship and affect our congregation members and traditional worship occasions in an increasing pace and a stronger manner.

The range of the effects and techniques of communication is very wide and reaches almost everybody. This is the reason why we often face long expectation lists from the part of our modern-thinking parishioners. These are motivated by known or unknown social experiences, and the person thinks that if we could integrate another idea in worship, it would bring renewal. These impulses are exemplified even in literature, e.g. the framings from the books of Klaus Douglass, which are cheap modernist and conformist drafts about church music...

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In order to express myself more clearly it is enough to mention a number of labels, which belong to the society of the last century, and confront them as representing a past era with our own traditional worship. This can lead us to contemplate about the worship of the future. If we think it through deeply, we will find not only the features, which should be rejected, or are not receivable, but we find self-criticism compelling for the duties, the interlocking and the importance of the interdependence of the church musician and the minister. We should preserve and enrich the values which are entrusted to us in the era of value-losses.

Every label made me ask a question:

### **Consumer Society – Consumer-Supplier Worship?**

In a consumer society everything can be bought, everything can be purchased.

The agencies which organise family ceremonies are multiplying. These agencies, besides filming possibilities, with the help of intimate scenes and accessories, accompanied by intimate texts and music offer their programs at important stages of human life. In a consumer society the disposable things, the throwaways are typical.

Upon what does this bring our attention? On the issue that more and more will come to worship with this sort of ‘consumer’ thinking. The believers being the customers, who ever often seek a facility-guaranteeing church, want to chip on liturgy, on matter, on “cast and person”. Sometimes this is rivalry-based, so they want something “extra” after an earlier faith-experience. I did not even mention the issue that all these are unbiblical, cannot be accomplished within Reformed understanding and do not fit into liturgical freedom.

Nevertheless, in this wish for change is it not there a hidden message about the fact that our services are not attractive or inspiring enough? Are they inconsumable because of being extremely old-fashioned or modernist, using pointless archaisms, being either too minister-centred or far too colloquial? Are they inconsumable because of their dry, illogical, dogmatic or drastically evangelizing, sanctified and Canaanite language? Are we disposable, because our worship does not attract, does not call to learn, to celebrate in faith yet another time?

*We therefore need a more nutritious worship, which is indispensable, which can recall and await us to celebrate in front of God.*

### **Information Society – How Genuine Is Our Worship?**

We live in the world of immeasurable amount of information that has a changeable quality, doubtful authenticity and impossible to be controlled. On the one hand it is a very approaching and tiresome problem to select the basically

important information, which should outtalk the cacophony and shout louder than the others. On the other hand, that which is the over-writing information, which weakens the essence, we can peel off, because it has just a wrapping function.

The “information” divulged during the worship is not different. If the information, the Word, is hidden, ambiguous, and surrounded by a lot of “garnish” elaborately present in liturgy and preaching, the authenticity of the worship is lost. Nothing may cover the main information, so that should be smashing, unambiguous and clearly stated. Every liturgical element that surrounds should serve the enhancing, the induction, and the “get through”, instead of imposing and covering or masking. The liturgical elements which surround the preaching should set up a “resonance space”, which serve the spreading of the “kerygma”.

*In the world of apocryphal phrases and advertisement-slogans the genuine worship holds the future.*

### **Secular Society – How Can We Bring Back the Extruded, Estranged Holy?**

Desecration became secularism. In 1968 Vilmos Vajta defined this phenomenon:

*“Secularism is the idealisation of the world, which means inhuman terror, because it makes the tangible world absolute, so in this way it properly denies what the world really is. There are trends of taking ecclesiastical stands against the trend of secularization, when the totalitarian demand of the church stands against the totalitarian demand of the world.”<sup>3</sup>*

*“The totalitarian regimes of the new age saw an archenemy in religion, because the way it linked man to God, it drew man out from under the totalitarian control of the state and of the party. Religion can present a danger in the same way for “modern” fascisms, including consuming, administration, or modern science. Religion brings man out from under the clench of another human being. This is possible only when religion lives its basic identity: it leads people to God without any lurking thought, and it helps them in their orientation within in the world. This is why the heart of the Christian Creed is the love of God and love of the neighbour, both without seeking someone’s own good. (Mk 12, 28–34). This remains the greatest aim for Christian churches amidst changing circumstances: with God’s calling power we have to organize evangelical communities, which are close both to God and the others.”<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Vajta, Vilmos, *Worship in our secular world*, in: *Amíg időnk van*, EPMSz Basel-Budapest 1998, p. 76

<sup>4</sup> Zulehner, P. M., *Igen a vallásra – nem az egyházra? Az egyház a holnap multikulturális társadalmában*, (*Yes for the Religion – No for the Church? The Church in the Multicultural of Tomorrow Society*), in: *Az egyház a 21. században (The Church in the 21. Century)*, Ed. Manfred Kock, Kálvin Kiadó, Budapest, 2004, p. 18

We live in an unholy world, which wants to make more and more people believe by more and more appealing forms, that for the man of the 21st century it is natural to think that “nothing is sacred”. The manifold self-righteousness of the weak Christianity urges and reassures the group of the unholy. Christianity can become strong only if it will ravel from itself all the self-righteousness in the cleaning presence of Holy God, and pass through the stations of devotion...

The worship should be a way-making to the Holy God.

### **Society of Communication – Can the Monologue-Type Service Be Preserved?**

The arsenal of communication skills is present with a wide range of offers. Communication systems are working in the world of globalisation. The distances became small, and the speed of the dialogue is unbelievable. If we remain the church of “text-misery”, clinging to the one-way, monologue-type Word-service, there is no doubt that less and less people will give us attention. Being God’s communication channel, we seem to have become rusty or stuffy.

The service cannot be immune to the situation of the congregation; it has to answer in any situation rapidly and efficiently with the reaction of the Word.

### **Society of Excitement – Dry, Burnt-Out, Excitement-Free Worship?**

The market economy brings about the society of excitement.<sup>5</sup> The members of our congregations are surrounded by supermarkets and show-business centres, which are the churches of the society of excitement. The range of excitement-products becomes wider and wider. They arrive with funding, marketing and creativity.

In front of our believers, who live in an excitement-ruled society, our dry, burnt-out, excitement-free worship unveils rapidly. *If we want to change this, we need the field of the power of the Holy Spirit, which can create an unequalled atmosphere within our services.*

What do these phenomena warn us about? Should we compete with them? Should we worry? If we read the labels of the society at the turn of the century, as being typical of this age, and if we compare their general “message”, their working-mechanisms with the expectations sent towards the church services, and comparing it with our understanding of worship, we realise that we cannot pass them unnoticed.

## **2. Minister and Church Music**

Every church era has its own difficulties, and there are certainly other problems which overpower us, yet we cannot pretend that the tasks related to our worship are not important. The time and the content of the service is the

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<sup>5</sup> Concerning the analysis of excitement-society. G. Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft*. Kulturosoziologie der Gegenwart, Frankfurt/M – New York, 1993

large area that is public, our doors are widely open, and anybody can come in and can collect experiences about our faith, life, and teaching and about their external manifestation.

That is why for me this is an extensively public affair, moreover: it is the key problem of our church. With what kind of awareness and self-devotion do the organisers of ecclesiastical life perform their leadership?

It is a complex and difficult task indeed to sketch the profile of a competent minister, as it is shown by the study of Karl Barth as well.<sup>6</sup> I think there is a long way ahead of us before arriving there, but in my opinion we have to live up to such high standards. If we intend to identify ourselves with Barth's thoughts, we need a change in our mindset and we have to accept a fundamental statement. My fundamental statement is: The picture of a minister which derives from the training of pastors in a wedged situation, should not be idealised. We have to dare to acknowledge the consequences, we have to bequeath what is long lasting, and we have to dare to guess, to create the new image of the pastor, who has good manners, taste and erudition.

This essay aims to emphasize one feature: the importance of musical education in a pastor's life. Before we deepen in the theme of our title, I have to distance myself from three things:

1. I do not follow the Western–European and Anglo–Saxon point of view, which denies the place of musical education in pastoral training.
2. I cannot say that – just as it is in the Baptist pastoral training – the whole hymn-book is well known at the entrance exam, so the becoming pastor will meet church music at a lot higher level during his/her training. At the Reformed Theological entrance exam the non-trainable voice and tone-deafness is not a disqualifying reason. To that effect we may remember that both bishop Ravasz and bishop Révész were famous for being tone-deaf, thus they respected the National Anthem only by standing up.
3. I cannot accept the newly inherited expectation from the lately ended era that we have to elect such a minister who can be the musical leader in the congregation. Even more, it is expected that the minister should do everything. He/she must ring the bells, the organ and the guitar at youth meetings. He/she should shuttle between the pulpit and the organ – balcony or Moses' seat and the electric organ. Certainly, it adds to the chaos when the minister is playing the Jolly Joker.

In my understanding the theological training can do the most for ministers' musical education,

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<sup>6</sup> Barth, K., *Le ministère du pasteur* 7-8. See: Tőkés István, In: *Református Szemle*, 1976/3, p. 214

- if those theology students, who do not have musical talent, are not forced to practice at the keyboard;
- if it does not make the students hate church music because of their certain failures, but stands for the values of the church music and shows its beauty by experience;
- if concerning the lack of musical education we formulate honest and harsh criticisms;
- if in theological training the knowledge of the whole content of the hymnbook is required;
- if by the teaching and deepening of theology of Reformed service we create in the servant a certain liturgical sensitivity, with which he/she will feel at home at traditional occasions and in leading liturgies created by new situations, and his theological "akribeia" does not bargain about the unworthy milieu for the Creator, the Saviour and the Sanctifying God, but searches for solutions until he/she can provide the believers with a God-worthy singing;
- if during his/her training for the service, among the educational aims there appear the competence-borders of the minister in the worship towards both God and believers.

I definitely think that it is the minister's responsibility for the collective singing to fulfil its mission of adoration and glorification within the act of worship, to live the mystery of fellowship, and as the organic part of the worship he/she should provide the primary form of congregational activity.

Only a minister who knows his/her competence-borders can be a really responsible creator of good order within community worship. This is how his stewardship can expand to the area of church music. He/she is the best steward if he/she chooses colleagues for this work.

In a former essay, where I enumerate the parts of our church, which need to be reformed, I stated:

*"We are proud of the idea of the universal priesthood, but how can we synchronise it with our general "Ein-Mann-System"? This may derive from a long agony: there is no adequate person to help the minister. But can come from a conscious repression also: the minister does not want any help and closeness from the volunteering congregation members. Is there any point then to train religion-teachers, cantors, deacons and church workers? Is there a general acceptance of the laic service in our church?"<sup>7</sup>*

One of the main teachings of the pastoral training of the close past inspires us to dare to separate the functions in church and congregation, we should not allow to concentrate the functions for the ministers, because the totalitarian role of the minister will suppress every project that will come from the congregation members, which will kill the activity of the congregation in a

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<sup>7</sup> Fekete, Károly, *Mit jelent ma a reformáció népéhez tartozni?*, Keresztyén nevelés, 1997/7, p. 6  
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short time. While the minister will totally be tired of this totalitarian work, he/she will also be totally alone. The cantor should become again one of the basic members of the church team (or organ player, teacher and so on...), who can be from a theological point of view a lay member, but in his/her own area is still a professional. Knowing this, the minister has the duty to fight against dilettantism in church music in his congregation and church. The responsibility in organising the worship does not decrease, but the accomplishment and implementation of the service do not burden only him/her. To get this change through we have to achieve the minister's education in music.

### **3. Church Music – Part of the Minister's Professional Education**

We can say that the direct importance of the minister's professional education is in practical theology, because he can use this knowledge in practical problems. His knowledge in church music and his insight will help his sermon, his catechetical, pastoral, and congregation-building work as well as to fulfil his/her liturgical work.

For this reason during the education of the ministers, the curriculum of church music classes is the hymnbook ordered by the Synod, where the musical knowledge will be given concentrically alongside the songs. In church music classes, they have to learn, compensating the tragically bad high school music teaching, to reach basic level of tonic sol-fa, by which the student of theology can learn the songs properly. We should consider Luther's saying in *Table talk*: *"It is very important to keep music in schools. A teacher should be able to sing, or I do not appreciate him at all, the young theologians are not worthy to become preachers, unless they have learned and exercised the singing in schools."*

The well-placed song has an important function within the liturgical service of a minister and it completes and crowns organically his preaching, so knowing of the whole songbook is essential. Thus he/she has to know the songbook in its content, in its form, both theologically and musically.

During the teaching of church music we have to reach the goal of knowing the songbooks for children and youth, which are indispensable in catechetical work. Linked to this, we have to make the minister sensible in pondering the new songs from musical, literal and aesthetical point of view, and he/she has the responsibility to decide whether the song is dogmatically acceptable. At the same time we have to teach the methodology of music-teaching.

The teaching of liturgy can strengthen the Christian identity and can lead to the experience of the good taste of worship. Also, it can help the team of theology students to form a liturgical workshop and search for new types of service. The base of this is the sensibility for liturgy. It is a general aim to awaken the exigency of a student in church music, which will teach the becoming pastor about the symbolic, art, aesthetical, craft-historical and economical value of the church organ, the use of which should be worthy of its liturgical designation.

#### 4. Church Music – Part of the General Education and Theological Preparation of a Minister

Meditation as part of the ministerial work is saved in many ways. A cure against flat conduct, spiritual mediocrity, emptiness and burn-out is the deepening in music. The minister for the sake of his/her "refill" is able to stand up against cheap practices, against boredom and passivity with the help of a seriously fought meditation. We have to eliminate our purist outlook, our desolate patterns. We have to use everything against poverty in stimulus and thoughtlessness, in order to motivate the pastors. It is no shame in finding and using the crutches: the world of the words, music, picture, thus giving room for free associations.

Musical meditation can be very important every year before and during church feasts, when there are many services and we find harder the message without deepening. In this period music can help deepen the meaning of the feast. A proper music in this time is worth gold. Church music as spiritual food and spiritual experience is important for a minister, because it enhances his/her inner spiritual attitude and inner strength. See Luther's testimony: "*Music often enkindled and moved me to get in the mood to preach.*"

The mother tongue of church music can serve as a "connecting tissue". The liturgy-teaching in pastoral training has to make the new generation ready for a duty with actual importance, because the exercising of the liturgy and the extent of church identity is interlinked. Manfred Josuttis brings attention towards the issue of letting the liturgy be known; exercising the liturgy, making it to be part of life gives to the minister, to the choir leader and catechism teacher an important pedagogical task. The liturgical mentality must be shaped in childhood, because in liturgy there is a special behaviour-sequence, which formed to a natural, almost instinctual action can be owned by the person who is growing up.<sup>8</sup> "*Between the motivation of searching for identity and redefinition we can unambiguously identify a triple hunger inside outside of the church: hunger for transcendence, hunger for mystique, and hunger for fellowship.*"<sup>9</sup>

Music, as opposed to anthropocentrism and individualism reminds us of the objective content of the liturgy. A theologically well trained minister, having a comprehensive knowledge and positive critique should plead freely and bravely for the following ideas:

- to call something unprepared as being "spontaneous" or "free-spirited" is a mockery of the Theology of the Spirit;

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<sup>8</sup> Josuttis, Manfred, *Der Weg in das Leben*; and also: Dobszay, L., *Gyermekliturgia? (Children Liturgy?)*, In: *Új ember (New Man)*, 1997.X. 26., "*Jegyzetek a liturgiához (Notice to the Liturgy)*"

<sup>9</sup> Hafenscher, Károly, *A keresztény istentisztelet (The Christian Religious Service)*, In: *Egyházzenei Füzetek (Church Music Books)*, 1/7, Budapest, 1999, p. 10



- he/she has to see clearly that the maniacal uniformity and the disorder are just two opposite poles, so he prepares for a well-conceived reform of the liturgy, where preaching and communion, the Calvinist heritage, the liturgical treasure from home and the ecumenical aspiration come together;
- he/she knows well that the intention and the will of church politics – as church history can show us – cannot be an agent which forms a sane liturgy;
- he shows his/her respect towards the church music experts;
- as a congregation-interest seeking pastor, he/she elaborates a church-music leader-friendly and organ player-respecting ecclesiastical leadership.

In Luther's opinion music has a triple function: *movere* – it moves you from your dead point, lifts you from your bad mood, delectates you (*delectare*) and teaches you (*docere*), because there is order in music. What can music teach the pastor, who takes up the concern of a congregation from occasion to occasion? Let us see a couple of examples, how can music give impulses and teach pastors. It teaches the sense of forms, the counterpoint among thoughts–feelings–forms, proportions, the possibility of theme-migration, the richness of variations, the skills for improvisation, the complementarities between free and set parts, makes analogies, helps the religious thought-association, forewarns our emotional needs, develops our style. It is an instrument for ecumenical communication, enhances the empathy because it grows the sensibility. The training in music can be the support of living a value-oriented ministerial life, so we do not fall in the trap of being musical-omnivorous or having a musical malnutrition. One should develop the sense of recognizing the musical kitsch and keeping distance from snobbism.

## **5. A Number of Common Problems for Church Musician and Minister**

### **5.1. Church Musician and Minister Together Can Oppose the Still General “*Ein – Mann – System*” Idea in the Reformed Church More Effectively**

“*Ein – Mann – System*” – so the minister knows everything and he does everything in the congregation. One of the great lessons of the near past in pastoral training is that we should dare to keep the functions in the church divided. We should not let the ministerial duties concentrate, because the totalitarian role of a minister will suppress every initiative coming from the part of the participants at the worship, and this will annul every congregational activity within a short time. Until the moment when the minister will be outworn by this totalitarian role, his loneliness will also be total.

When a minister in a congregation knows his professional boundaries, he will really be responsible and will work for the good order of the church occasions. He will be the best care-taker if he chooses a well trained co-worker. The new church musician has to be an important member of the team, who

works in the congregation, who can be a lay person, but still a professional in his/her field. Considering this, the minister has to fight against dilettantism in church music in the congregation. The minister's responsibility in worship does not decrease, but the realization and the working-out is not only his/her burden.

### **5.2. Church Musician and Minister Can stand for the Spiritual Training of All Generations a Lot More Effectively.**

What does surround us? What does impregnate us from the present Hungarian society? The approach of slackness, a massive frugality, heartless crudity, juicy hit-like slobbery, newly rich sophomore, video-idiotism, little reading experience, minimal knowledge of arts, unimaginative thinking, emotional blockage, general boredom, work-avoiding dishonesty and sloth, choosing the easier way etc. This is a complex set of misery, seems like an impossibly cleanable mush-mountain if we think about the spiritual training of the new generation. A chapter in Christian Moller's book about congregation building is: *Crying for spirituality*. He declares:

*"I am absolutely sure that is in the crying for spirituality, as weak as it is, it stands for not only a demand, but a necessity, from which many young people suffer. They feel that this consumer-approach of the world gets further and further from the invisible world, which hides behind the things, and what becomes more and more unreachable."*

Music can help find another way, which leads to the Lord of the Values.

### **5.3. Church Musician and Minister Can Stand against the Miracle-Deficit of the Reformed Worship, Which Threatens with Spiritual Drying up**

The Protestantism after Illumination with its rationalizing nature derogated the faith in miracles, took away its consoling character. In the time of Reformation the first question and answer of the Catechism from Heidelberg stated clearly, what is our only consolation in our life and death, and the Christological Trinitarian answer shows a series of miracles which are done by God to proclaim His ownership over us. Reformation showed the Living God, as God and owner of the miraculous possibilities, who helps his owned people by His deeds, that in front of super human powers God does not give up. God stands over the earthly-human laws, so the new and danger – bringing future that burdens over the man's shoulder, is bearable. The eras that get further from the Reformation made grown-ups the men, who had faith in miracles and had faith in miracles. The sleeking rationalism curtailed grown-ups of the happy world of imagination, what belongs to children, who thinks that there is no impossibility, no incomprehensible, no preposterous, because miracle naturally exists. The rationalized worship and the rationalized faith brought spiritual drying up. This is the reason why is desperately needed that the worship would get back its spiritual filling. Church music has to obtain a new and important role in this work.

#### **5.4. Church Musician and Minister Can More Efficiently Stand against the Trimmed Art-Demand of the Reformed Worship, which Could Give Protection for Possible Frugality**

The peeled Reformed church did not become a more appropriate place for waking up the feeling of devotion. The deadly incomplete or false is alarming. The apology is ready “this is all I can do”, “this is ok, and we live in the countryside”. There is no such excuse for aesthetical frugality, like “we have a Puritan approach”, because during the historically Puritan times the noble simplicity left behind beautiful churches, artful organs, church insides of high standards. Puritans still knew: they serve God’s high standards if they do everything for the high standards of the service. This very precious Puritan thinking should not be distorted.

Simplicity does not exclude, but attracts high standards. Here the exigent church music has to have its own place.

#### **5.5. Church Musician and Minister Can More Efficiently Fight for the Freeing, Release-Communicating Character of Reformed Worship, Which Emphasizes Better the Pardon-Announcement**

Reformation strengthened the clerical–religious rigor. Calvin-researcher Max Weber stated among others “the whole lifestyle [...] was put to the stranglehold of restrictions” by Protestantism. The rigor pleaded by Calvin extended to the whole lifestyle, the weekdays and holidays. The instrument of emotionally emphasized remorse, which could be finished period by period, ceased. The demand for processing, the demand for mercy is all-important for our churchgoing people. Besides, by the music and the musical parts, the calling for emotional liberation and comfort should be heard.

#### **5.6. Church Musician and Minister Can More Efficiently Stand against the Lack of Rituals in the Reformed Worship, Which Should not Result in Lack of Channelled Worship.**

The ritual is a kind of worship, which we live by all our senses. The Protestant person started to attend church not only for worshipping God, for praying and singing together, but for devotional, religious orientation. Until the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries the church became a classroom, worship became a place where useful information can be assumed. Something was lost again from the essence of the worship, although the experience of meeting the Holy God is a person’s inner and deepest need. Living transcendence means something special, a kind of common latch onto God’s service. Close to God, in common worship we can overcome our anxieties and ourselves. The common prayer, singing, the ritual, the festivity and beauty of the scenery generate devotion, which through all these will help personal empathy. The rationally rooted worship dispossessed its believers of these collective experiences, which liberate us from our doubts.

Manfred Josuttis<sup>10</sup> deals with the importance of liturgy bringing forth the importance of rituals. In Josuttis' opinion the meaning of the liturgy stands in bringing out from society to the world of the holy. He notices that the big disadvantage of the Protestant worship is that is too rational, accurately set, nothing unexpected can happen during it. Advantage is that there is no place for magic towards God and manipulation towards people. At the same time, the Protestant worship is poor in symbols. The symbols of music can help a lot this situation.

One must learn the celebration and learn to celebrate – so states the mostly German liturgical literature of the near past. Worship is the framework of man meeting God, it is not a manipulated experience, not a heavenly show, but the Saint arrives into the human world. The triumph of the greater, the totally different, the demanding God who counts on me also – whose majesty makes me kneel. What worship and what an encounter this is!

Church musician and pastor should join forces for this aim by all means in order to fulfil their value-creating work amongst all circumstances for the greater glory of God!

(Translated from Hungarian by Edit Somfalvi)

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<sup>10</sup> Josuttis, Manfred, *Die Einführung in das Leben*, Gütersloh. (1996), 2004, pp. 85–101