

***In the Language of the People: A Case Study of  
An Order of Mass and Communion  
for the Church at Wittenberg, 1523<sup>1</sup>***

**Dr. Martin Luther**

Commentary by Dr. Linda Borecki

Grace and peace in Christ to the venerable Doctor Nicholas Hausmann, bishop of the church in Zwickau, saint in Christ, from Martin Luther.

**Comment:** Close friend to Luther, Hausmann was a pastor in Zwickau, a site of great civil and religious foment in the 1520's. The two friends gave strong encouragement to one another through frequent letters. Luther's "Order of Mass and Communion," known as the *Formula missae*, is recorded in this letter.

Until now I have only used books and sermons to wean the hearts of people from their godless regard for ceremonial; for I believed it would be a Christian and helpful thing if I could prompt a peaceful removal of the abomination which Satan set up in the holy place through the man of sin [Matt. 24:15; II Thess. 2:3-4]. Therefore, I have used neither authority nor pressure. Nor did I make any innovations. For I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one, and more so because of the fickle and fastidious spirits who rush in like unclean swine without faith or reason, and who delight only in novelty and tire of it as quickly, when it has worn off. Such people are a nuisance even in other affairs, but in spiritual matters, they are absolutely unbearable. Nonetheless, at the risk of bursting with anger, I must bear with them, unless I want to let the gospel itself be denied to the people.

**Comment:** Luther began writing and discussing worship reform in 1521, in the treatise *The Abuse of the Mass*. The service order here outlines reforms, still in Latin, recently introduced at Wittenberg University. A service translated completely into the "vulgar" (common) language of German, the "German folk mass," was first introduced October, 1525.

But since there is hope now that the hearts of many have been enlightened and strengthened by the grace of God, and since the cause of the kingdom of Christ demands that at long last offenses should be removed from it, we must dare something in the name of Christ. For it is right that we should provide at least for a few, lest by our desire to

**Comment:** Luther taught and worshiped with hundreds of university students, yet continually shows concern for the common worshiper in the pew. He believed teaching the principles of worship precedes changing the rites themselves. In another letter, to pastors in Lübeck, Luther reinforces his point, "Adequate reform of ungodly rites will come of itself, however, as soon as the fundamentals of our teaching, having been successfully communicated, have taken root in devout hearts." LW 49:263

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg, 1523," in *Liturgy and Hymns* (ed. Ulrich St. Leupold; trans. Paul Zeller Strodach; vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 19-40.

detach ourselves from the frivolous faddism of some people, we provide for nobody, or by our fear of ultimately offending others, we endorse their universally held abominations.

Therefore, most excellent Nicholas, since you have requested it so often, we will deal with an evangelical form of saying mass (as it is called) and of administering communion. And we will so deal with it that we shall no longer rule hearts by teaching alone, but we will put our hand to it and put the revision into practice in the public administration of communion, not wishing, however, to prejudice others against adopting and following a different order. Indeed, we heartily beg in the name of Christ that if in time something better should be revealed to them, they would tell us to be silent, so that by a common effort we may aid the common cause.

**Comment:** Latin *pia*: "evangelical," meaning "in accordance with the Gospel." Luther uses the term "evangelical" throughout this letter in this broad sense. Luther historian Paul Speratus translated the word simply as "Christian."

**Comment:** "mass": The Christian service of Holy Communion

We therefore first assert: It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use. We cannot deny that the mass, i.e., the communion of bread and wine, is a rite divinely instituted by Christ himself and that was observed first by Christ and then by the apostles, quite simply and evangelically without any additions. But in the course of time so many human inventions were added to it that nothing except the names of the mass and communion has come down to us.

**Comment:** a succinct summary of Luther's purpose in revising the worship service. This paragraph has been quoted in successive generations by worship conservationists and innovators alike.

Now the additions of the early fathers who, it is reported, softly prayed one or two Psalms before blessing the bread and wine are commendable. Athanasius and Cyprian are supposed to be some of these. Those who added the Kyrie eleison also did well. We read that under Basil the Great, the Kyrie eleison was in common use by all the people. The reading of the Epistles and Gospels is necessary, too. Only it is wrong to read them in a language the common people do not understand. Later, when chanting began, the Psalms were changed into the introit; the Angelic Hymn *Gloria in Excelsis: et in terra*

**Comment:** While many Early Church (first five centuries of Christianity) orders and liturgical writings were not discovered until centuries later, Luther was nonetheless familiar with Early Church Patristic writers, or "Fathers." Athanasius (d. 373), Cyprian (d. 258), Basil (d. 379).

**Comment:** Greek, "Lord, have mercy" – originally sung as the response at the prayers of the people, later moved to the beginning of the mass as a processional piece.

**Comment:** Luther is noting that 'all the people' – the gathered worshipers and not just the choir – sang the Kyrie.

**Comment:** Luther makes his case for worship "in the language of the people."

**Comment:** Latin, "enter." A Psalm was sung responsively between two groups (solo and choir or two choirs) as an entrance piece for clergy and deacons. Added by the sixth century.

**Comment:** Latin, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace," an exuberant hymn of praise based on the Angels' announcement of Christ's birth, Luke 2.

*pax*, the gradual, the alleluias, the Nicene Creed, the Sanctus, the Agnus Dei, and the *communio* were added. All of these are unobjectionable, especially the ones that are sung *de tempore* or on Sundays. For these days by themselves testify to ancient purity, the canon excepted.

But when everyone felt free to add or change at will and when the tyranny of priestly greed and pride entered in, then our wicked kings, i.e., the bishops and pastors, began to erect those altars to the images of Baal and all gods in the Lord's temple. Then it was that wicked King Ahaz removed the brazen altar and erected another copied from one in Damascus. What I am speaking of is the canon, that abominable concoction drawn from everyone's sewer and cesspool. The mass became a sacrifice. Offertories and mercenary collects were added. Sequences and proses were inserted in the Sanctus and the Gloria in Excelsis. Whereupon the mass began to be a priestly monopoly devouring the wealth of the whole world and engulfing it – as with an apocalyptic plague – with a host of rich, lazy, powerful, lascivious, and corrupt celibates. Thus came the masses for the departed, for journeys, for prosperity – but who can even name the causes for which the mass was made a sacrifice?

Nor do they cease to enlarge the canon even today: now it is for these feasts, then for others; now these *actiones* then other *communicantes* are adopted – not to mention the commemoration of the living and the dead. And there is no end of it yet. And what shall I say of the external additions of vestments, vessels, candles, and pall, of organs and all the music, and of images? There was scarcely a craft in all the world that did not depend on the mass for a large part of its business.

All these have been tolerated and – with the gospel revealing so many abominations – they can be tolerated until they can be completely removed. In the meanwhile we shall prove all things and hold fast what is good [1 Thess. 5:21]. But in this book we are not going to prove again that the mass is neither a sacrifice nor a good

**Comment:** Latin *gradus*, likely referring to having been sung from the steps before the altar. Early Church: Psalms sung responsively between cantor and congregation, alternating with readings from "the Prophets," Epistle, and Gospel. Luther's time: a single Psalm or Psalm verses chanted between the Epistle and Gospel by the choir.

**Comment:** Latin, "holy." The Sanctus, rooted in Jewish worship, is based on Isaiah's vision of heavenly worship in Isaiah 6 and is placed in Christian worship immediately preceding the Lord's Supper.

**Comment:** Latin, "Lamb of God." Introduced in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (and therefore a "late" addition to the mass), to be sung by the choir during the breaking of the bread just before communion and ending "grant us peace" at the point of passing the peace.

**Comment:** A psalm chanted during the distribution of the Lord's Supper

**Comment:** "appropriate to the time"

**Comment:** cf. 2 Kings 16

**Comment:** a fixed sequence of prayer petitions before communion, stressing the mass as a sacrifice offered to God.

**Comment:** 'Offertory' not in the sense of a collection of tithes and gifts, but a specific form of prayer stressing communion as a sacrificial offering.

**Comment:** Composers circumvented strict rules against "innovation" in the liturgy by adding syllables and words among existing liturgical songs (actually called "tropes" – Luther erred here) or creating entire songs added on to the end of the Alleluia (sequences and proses). Sung by cantor and choir between Epistle and Gospel lessons, this functioned similarly to today's choir anthem.

**Comment:** *Actiones* and *communicantes* are words from the canon, venerating saints

work – we have amply demonstrated that elsewhere. We do accept it as a sacrament, a testament, the blessing (as in Latin), the eucharist (as in Greek), the Table of the Lord, the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Memorial, communion, or by whatever evangelical name you please, so long as it is not polluted by the name of sacrifice or work. And we will set forth the rite according to which we think that it should be used.

First, we approve and retain the introits for the Lord's days and the festivals of Christ, such as Easter, Pentecost, and the Nativity, although we prefer the Psalms from which they were taken as of old. But for the time being we permit the accepted use. And if any desire to approve the introits (inasmuch as they have been taken from Psalms or other passages of Scripture) for apostles' days, for feasts of the Virgin and of other saints, we do not condemn them. But we in Wittenberg intend to observe only the Lord's days and the festivals of the Lord. We think that all the feasts of the saints should be abrogated, or if anything in them deserves it, it should be brought into the Sunday sermon. We regard the feasts of Purification and Annunciation as feasts of Christ, even as Epiphany and Circumcision. Instead of the feasts of St. Stephen and of St. John the Evangelist, we are pleased to use the office of the Nativity. The feasts of the Holy Cross shall be anathema. Let others act according to their own conscience or in consideration of the weakness of some – whatever the Spirit may suggest.

Second, we accept the Kyrie eleison in the form in which it has been used until now, with the various melodies for different seasons, together with the Angelic Hymn, Gloria in Excelsis, which follows it. However, the bishop may decide to omit the latter as often as he wishes.

Third, the prayer or collect which follows, if it is evangelical (and those for Sunday usually are), should be retained in its accepted form; but there should be only one. After this the Epistle is read. Certainly the time has not yet come to attempt revision here, as nothing unevangelical is read, except that those parts from the Epistles

**Comment:** An essential question of the day: is God present in worship because of what we do, or because of who God is? See Luther's theological rationale in worship in "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" written three years earlier.

**Comment:** sacrament (small 's') = either baptism or the Lord's Supper (the two Lutheran sacraments); Sacrament (capital 'S') = the Lord's Supper

**Comment:** *Eucharistia*, literally "thanksgiving." The Early Church referenced I Cor. 11:24. Greek words in liturgy are clues that they were used by very early Christian communities, before Latin became the liturgical language.

**Comment:** This detailed outline progresses sequentially through the order of the Roman rite of Luther's time.

**Comment:** Holy days commemorating events in Mary's life -her birth, motherhood, death, and events relating to her sainthood.

**Comment:** presentation of the infant Jesus at the temple

**Comment:** visitation by the angel Gabriel

**Comment:** commemorates the cross used in the crucifixion of Jesus as the instrument of salvation.

**Comment:** Again Luther counsels how to proceed pastorally with worship changes.

**Comment:** Luther's reforms are based on the premise that that which is not forbidden in Scripture is allowable in worship (unlike some Reformers, who held that only that which is specifically mandated in Scripture is to be used in worship). Luther is anxious not to confuse or upset worshipers with many changes in the liturgy they know.

**Comment:** Luther, writing in Latin, uses the word *Episcopus*, which can be translated as "bishop" or "parish pastor."

**Comment:** Recent scholarship indicates the *Gloria* was omitted in various communities during Advent, Lent, holy days when other hymns of praise were used, and during winter, to shorten the service in cold weather (see Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism*).

**Comment:** A formal structure of prayer dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Originally improvised, it summed up or 'collected' the assembly's petitions after a time of silent prayer. By Luther's time all collects were prescribed.

of Paul in which faith is taught are read only rarely, while the exhortations to morality are most frequently read. The Epistles seem to have been **chosen** by a singularly unlearned and superstitious advocate of works. But for the service those sections in which faith in Christ is taught should have been given preference. The latter were certainly considered more often in the Gospels by whoever it was who chose these lessons. In the meantime, the sermon in the **vernacular** will have to supply what is lacking. If in the future the vernacular be used in the mass (which Christ may grant), one must see to it that Epistles and Gospels chosen from the best and most weighty parts of these writings be read in the mass.

**Comment:** Luther is referring to the *lectionary* system of reading scripture - prescribed Psalm, Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel lessons throughout the year, as opposed to *lectio continua*, a system of reading continuously through entire books in order as written. The origins of this practice are uncertain - in 384 there is a journal reference by the pilgrim Egeria, who notes with surprise the practice of reading lessons "appropriate to the day" during Holy Week in Jerusalem.

**Comment:** "the language of the people"

Fourth, the gradual of two verses shall be sung, either together with Alleluia, or one of the two, as the bishop may decide. But the **Quadragesima** graduals and others like them that exceed two verses may be sung at home by whoever wants them. In church we do not want to quench the spirit of the faithful with tedium. Nor is it proper to distinguish Lent, Holy Week, or Good Friday from other days, lest we seem to mock and ridicule Christ with **half** of a mass and the one part of the sacrament. For the Alleluia is the perpetual voice of the church, just as the memorial of His passion and victory is perpetual.

**Comment:** Luther is referring to choral responses in worship during the forty days of Lent. The singing of Psalm and Alleluia verses between readings functioned rather like modern choir anthems. Medieval composers, stretching the rules in rigidly prescribed plainsong, inserted extra notes and phrases into established chants - a creative act that led to ever longer works.

**Comment:** A reference to the practice of reserving bread from one service during Holy Week and using it at another, without words of consecration the second time. This was to refer to Christ's body in repose (in death) before the Resurrection. Luther is arguing that Resurrection praise and victory takes precedence over remembering the Passion and death of Christ.

Fifth, we allow no sequences or proses unless the bishop wishes to use the short one for the Nativity of Christ: "*Grates nunc omnes.*" There are hardly any which smack of the Spirit, save those of the Holy Spirit: "Sancti Spiritus" and "Veni sancte spiritus," which may be sung after breakfast, at Vespers, or at mass (if the bishop **pleases**).

**Comment:** Luther is again reacting against the choral singing of musically embellished scripture verses, so elongated and ornamented over the centuries as to render them incomprehensible to the contemporary worshiper.

Sixth, the Gospel lesson follows for which we neither prohibit nor prescribe candles or incense. Let these things be **free**.

**Comment:** In two sentences Luther articulates his stance on what he considers non-theological matters in worship.

Seventh, the custom of singing the Nicene Creed does not displease us; yet this matter should also be left in the hands of the bishop. Likewise, we do not think that it matters whether the sermon in the vernacular comes after the Creed or before the introit of the mass; although it might be argued that since the Gospel is the voice crying in the

wilderness and calling unbelievers to faith, it seems particularly fitting to preach before mass. For properly speaking, the mass consists in using the Gospel and communion at the table of the Lord. Inasmuch as it belongs to believers, it should be observed apart [from unbelievers]. Yet since we are free, this argument does not bind us, especially since everything in the mass up to the Creed is ours, free and not prescribed by God; therefore it does not necessarily have anything to do with the mass.

**Comment:** Luther has a clearly delineated two-fold worship order in mind: Word and Sacrament. He muses that for believers, the Gospel proclaimed and preached could be considered the entrance into celebrating the Sacrament. This reflects his sense of locating the activity of the Holy Spirit throughout Word and Sacrament, not just within the celebration of communion.

Eighth, that utter abomination follows which forces all that precedes in the mass into its service and is, therefore, called the offertory. From here on almost everything smacks and savors of sacrifice. And the words of life and salvation [the Words of Institution] are imbedded in the midst of it all, just as the ark of the Lord once stood in the idol's temple next to Dagon. And there was no Israelite who could approach or bring back the ark until it "smote his enemies in the hinder parts, putting them to a perpetual reproach," and forced them to return it – which is a parable of the present time. Let us, therefore, repudiate everything that smacks of sacrifice, together with the entire canon and retain only that which is pure and holy, and so order our mass.

**Comment:** 1 Samuel 5:2

**Comment:** Another succinct statement of key guiding principles for reforming worship.

I. After the Creed or after the sermon let bread and wine be made ready for blessing in the customary manner. I have not yet decided whether or not water should be mixed with the wine. I rather incline, however, to favor pure wine without water; for the passage, "Thy wine is mixed with water," in Isaiah 1 [:22] gives the mixture a bad connotation.

**Comment:** In the Early Church, the strong regional wine in Rome was diluted with water before consumption. In worship, this action eventually assumed theological significance - water and blood flowing from the crucified Christ's side.

Pure wine beautifully portrays the purity of gospel teaching. Further, the blood of Christ, whom we here commemorate, has been poured out unmixed with ours. Nor can the fancies of those be upheld who say that this is a sign of our union with Christ; for that is not what we commemorate. In fact, we are not united with Christ until he sheds his blood; or else we would be celebrating the shedding of our own blood together with the blood of Christ shed for us. Nonetheless, I have no intention of cramping anyone's freedom or of introducing a law that might again lead to superstition. Christ will not care

**Comment:** Some theologians associated the wine with the divine and water with humanity. A tremendous amount of reflection is happening in the Reformation regarding what is communicated by the actions, rites, and symbols in worship.

very much about these matters, nor are they worth arguing about. Enough foolish controversies have been fought on these and many other matters by the Roman and Greek churches. And though some direct attention to the water and blood which flowed from the side of Jesus, they prove nothing. For that water signified something entirely different from what they wish that mixed water to signify. Nor was it mixed with blood. The symbolism does not fit, and the reference is inapplicable. As a human invention, this mixing [of water and wine] cannot, therefore, be considered binding.

II. The bread and wine having been prepared, one may proceed as follows:

The Lord be with you.

*Response:* And with thy spirit.

Lift up your hearts.

*Response:* Let us lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God.

*Response:* It is meet and right.

It is truly meet and right, just and salutary for us to give thanks to Thee always and everywhere, Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, through Christ our Lord...

**Comment:** This beginning, or *Preface*, of communion, appears in *The Apostolic Tradition*, c. 217, when the mass was commonly referred to as the *Eucharistia* or "Thanksgiving."

**Comment:** C.f. Col. 3:1, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." *NIV*

**Comment:** Or, "It is fitting, correct, reasonable and beneficial for us to give thanks..."

III. Then:

...Who the day before he suffered, took bread, and when he had given thanks, brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you.

After the same manner also the cup, when he had supped, saying This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; this do, as often as ye do it, in remembrance of me.

I wish these words of Christ – with a brief pause after the preface – to be recited in the same tone in which the Lord's Prayer is chanted elsewhere in the canon so that those who are present may be able to hear them, although the evangelically minded should be free about all these things and may recite these words either silently or audibly.

**Comment:** 1 Cor. 23-25

**Comment:** Luther's thoughts on the use of the Words of Institution in worship progressed from "utter them softly" in 1521 to the even more radical position of *singing* them in 1523. Chanting (rather than speaking) enhanced audibility, signaled reverence and denoted import to the hearers. Luther instructed the presider to use the same chant melody as the preceding "Lift up your hearts" and the Lord's Prayer, following, thereby framing and magnifying the Words of Institution chanted in the middle. Further, Luther directed that these three elements (Preface, *Verba*, Lord's Prayer) to be sung in the same mode (tonality) as the Gospel tone, Tone V, which was the *modus laetus* – the mode of joy.

IV. The blessing ended, let the choir sing the **Sanctus**. And while the **Benedictus** is being sung, let the bread and cup be elevated according to the customary rite for the benefit of the weak in faith who might be offended if such an obvious change in this rite of mass were suddenly made. The concession can be made especially where through sermons in the vernacular they have been taught what the elevation means.

**Comment:** "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth (from Hebrew, *armies*), heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest." C.f. Isaiah 6:3

**Comment:** "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Ps. 118:26. Luther instructs the presider to lift up the consecrated bread for all to see, a) to reinforce the sense of him who comes to us in the Sacrament, and b) as a concession to those who believed miracles might occur at this moment.

V. After this, the Lord's Prayer shall be read. Thus, let us pray: "Taught by thy saving precepts. . ." The prayer which follows, "Deliver us, we beseech thee . . .," is to be omitted together with all the signs they were accustomed to make over the host and with the host over the chalice. Nor shall the host be broken or mixed into the chalice. But immediately after the Lord's Prayer shall be said, "The peace of the Lord," etc., which is, so to speak a public **absolution** of the sins of the communicants, the true voice of the gospel announcing remission of sins, and therefore the one and most worthy preparation for the Lord's Table, if faith holds to these words as coming from the mouth of Christ himself. On this account I would like to have it pronounced facing the people, as the bishops are accustomed to do, which is the only custom of the ancient bishops that is left among our bishops.

**Comment:** Announcement of forgiveness. Luther believed "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" was an adequate congregational Confession of Sins, and the Passing of the Peace a fitting proclamation and enactment of absolution - reconciliation with God and each other.

VI. Then, while the **Agnus Dei** is sung, let him [the liturgist] communicate, first himself and then the people. But if he should wish to pray the prayer, "O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who according to the will of the Father," etc., before communing, he does not pray wrongly, provided he changes the singular "mine" and "me" to the plural "ours" and "us." The same thing holds for the **prayer**, "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my (or thy) soul unto life eternal," and, "The blood of our Lord preserve thy soul unto life eternal."

**Comment:** "Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us; grant us peace." C.f. John 1:29

**Comment:** One of the set petitions in the canon. Changing the singular to the plural reinforced the idea of a public, communal mass, not a private mass.

**Comment:** There is no extemporaneous prayers in this age; every prayer is prescribed.

VII. If he desires to have the communion sung, let it be sung. But instead of the *complenda* or final collect, because it sounds almost like a sacrifice, let the following prayer be read in the same tone: "What we have taken with our lips, O Lord . . . The following one may also be read: "May thy body which we have received . . . (changing



to the plural number) . . . who livest and reignest world without end.” The Lord be with you,” etc. In place of the *Ite missa* let the *Benedicamus domino* be said, adding Alleluia according to its own melodies where and when it is desired. Or the *Benedicamus* may be borrowed from Vespers.

**Comment:** “Go, it is the dismissal.”

**Comment:** “Let us bless the Lord.” The response was “Thanks be to God.” This was a common form of closing, in use since the eleventh century.

VIII. The customary benediction may be given; or else the one from Numbers 6 [:24-27], which the Lord himself appointed.

**Comment:** “May Almighty God bless you: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

“The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up his countenance upon us, and give us peace.”

Or the one from Psalm 67 [:6-7]:

“God, even our own God shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.”

I believe Christ used something like this when, ascending into heaven, he blessed his disciples [Luke 24:50-51].

The bishop should also be free to decide on the order in which he will receive and administer both species. He may choose to bless both bread and wine before he takes the bread. Or else he may, between the blessing of the bread and of the wine, give the bread both to himself and to as many as desire, then bless the wine and administer it to all. This is the order Christ seems to have observed, as the words of the Gospel show, where he told them to eat the bread before he had blessed the cup [Mark 14:22-23]. Then is said expressly, “Likewise also the cup after he supped” [Luke 22:20, I Cor. 11:25]. Thus you see that the cup was not blessed until after the bread had been eaten. But this order is [now] quite new and allows no room for those prayers which heretofore were said after the blessing, unless they would also be changed.

**Comment:** Luther gives specific directions how to distribute both bread and wine – worshipers receiving both elements was a new practice in this age.

**Comment:** That is, the consecration (blessing) of bread and wine, noted in Section III.

Thus we think about the mass. But in all these matters we will want to beware lest we make binding what should be free, or make sinners of those who may do some things differently or omit others. All that matters is that the Words of Institution should be kept intact and that everything should be done by faith. For these rites are supposed to be Christian, i.e., children of the “free woman” [Gal. 4:31], who observe them voluntarily

**Comment:** Again and again Luther emphasizes Christian freedom in determining matters of worship. Note the reasons he gives for insisting on liturgical liberty.

and from the heart, but are free to change them how and when ever they may wish... Therefore, it is not in these matters that anyone should either seek or establish as law some indispensable form by which he might ensnare or harass consciences. Nor do we find any evidence for such an established rite, either in the early fathers or in the primitive church, but only in the Roman church. But even if they had decreed anything in this matter as a law, we would not have to observe it, because these things neither can nor should be bound by laws. Further, even if different people make use of different rites, let no one judge or despise the other, but every man be fully persuaded in his own mind [Rom. 14:5]. Let us feel and think the same, even though we may act differently. And let us approve each other's rites lest schisms and sects should result from this diversity in rites – as has happened in the Roman church. For external rites, even though we cannot do without them – just as we cannot do without food or drink – do not commend us to God, even as food does not commend us to him [I Cor. 8:8]. Faith and love commend us to God. Wherefore here let the word of Paul hold sway, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost” [Rom. 14:17]. So the kingdom of God is not any rite, but faith within you, etc.

We have passed over the matter of vestments. But we think about these as we do about other forms. We permit them to be used in freedom, as long as people refrain from ostentation and pomp. For you are not more acceptable for consecrating in vestments. Nor are you less acceptable for consecrating without vestments. But I do not wish them to be consecrated or blessed – as if they were to become something sacred as compared with other garments – except that by general benediction or word and prayer by which every good creature of God is sanctified. Otherwise, it is nothing but the superstition and mockery which the priests of Baal introduced together with so many other abuses.

**Comment:** During Luther's time in hiding at the Wartburg Castle, colleague Andreas Karlstadt instigated reforms that scandalized some worshipers and Duke Frederick, such as presiding at communion in street clothing.

**Comment:** 1 Timothy 4:4-5: For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. *ESV*

### *The Communion of the People*

So far we have dealt with the mass and the function of the minister or bishop. Now we shall speak of the proper manner of communicating the people, for whom the Lord's Supper was primarily instituted and given this name. For just as it is absurd for a minister to make a fool of himself and publicly preach the Word where no one hears or to

harangue himself in any empty room or under the open sky, so it is equally nonsensical if the ministers prepare and embellish the Lord's Supper, which belongs to all, without having guests to eat and drink it, so that they who ought to minister to others, eat and drink by themselves alone at an empty table and in a vacant room. Therefore, if we really want to cherish Christ's command, no private mass should be allowed in the church, except as a temporary concession for the sake of necessity or for the weak in faith.

**Comment:** Private masses, spoken and enacted by a priest alone or with a single server present, on behalf of persons seeking favor with God or on behalf of deceased relatives – a practice extending back to seventh century monastic life.

**Comment:** "do this in remembrance of me"

**Comment:** More evidence of Luther's practical and compassionate, pastoral nature.

Here one should follow the same usage as with baptism, namely, that the bishop be informed of those who want to commune. They should request in person to receive the Lord's Supper so that he may be able to know both their names and manner of life. And let him not admit the applicants unless they can give a reason for their faith and can answer questions about what the Lord's Supper is, what its benefits are, and what they expect to derive from it. In other words, they should be able to repeat the Words of Institution from memory and to explain that they are coming because they are troubled by the consciousness of their sin, flesh, the world, or the devil, and now hunger and thirst to receive the word and sign of grace and salvation from the Lord himself through the ministry of the bishop, so that they may be consoled and comforted; this was Christ's purpose, when he in priceless love gave and instituted this Supper, and said, "Take and eat," etc.

But I think it enough for the applicants for communion to be examined or explored once a year. Indeed, a man may be so understanding that he needs to be questioned only once in his lifetime or not at all. For, by this practice, we want to guard lest the worthy and unworthy alike rush to the Lord's Supper, as we have hitherto seen done in the Roman church. There they seek only to communicate; but the faith, the comfort, the use and benefit of the Supper are not even mentioned or considered. Nay, they have taken pains to hide the Words of Institution, which are the bread of life itself, and have furiously tried to make the communicants perform a work, supposedly good in itself, instead of letting their faith be nourished and strengthened by the goodness of Christ. Those, therefore, who are not able to answer in the manner described above

**Comment:** In the medieval era, some worshipers would rush from one church to another in order to witness the elevation of the consecrated host, with hopes of witnessing or experiencing a special blessing at this miraculous moment of *transubstantiation* – the understanding that the substance of bread changed to Christ's body.

**Comment:** A play on the above-mentioned concept of encountering "the bread of life."

should be completely excluded and banished from the communion of the Supper, since they are without the wedding garment [Matt. 22:11-12].

When the bishop has convinced himself that they understand all these things, he should also observe whether they prove their faith and understanding in their life and conduct. For Satan, too, understands and can talk about all these things. Thus if the pastor should see a fornicator, adulterer, drunkard, gambler, usurer, slanderer, or anyone else disgrace by a manifest vice, he should absolutely exclude such person from the Supper – unless he can give good evidence that his life has been changed. For the Supper need not be denied to those who sometimes fall and rise again, but grieve over their lapse. Indeed, we must realize that it was instituted just for such people so that they may be refreshed and strengthened. “For in many things we offend all” [James 3:2]. And we “bear one another’s burdens” [Gal. 6:2], since we are burdening one another. But I was speaking of those arrogant people who sin brazenly and without fear while they boast glorious things about the gospel.

When mass is being celebrated, those to receive communion should gather together by themselves in one place and in one group. The altar and the chancel were invented for this purpose. God does not care where we stand and it adds nothing to our faith. The communicants, however, ought to be seen and known openly, both by those who do and by those who do not commune, in order that their lives may be better observed, proved, and tested. For participation in the Supper is part of the confession by which they confess before God, angels, and men that they are Christians. Care must therefore be taken lest any, as it were, take the Supper on the sly and disappear in the crowd so that one cannot tell whether they live good or evil lives. On the other hand, even in this matter I do not want to make a law, but simply want to demonstrate a decent and fitting order to be used in freedom by free Christian men.

**Comment:** Once again Luther is giving explicit instructions on the mechanics of distribution. Worshipers until now rarely communed – perhaps once a year. Pastors were unaccustomed to many people coming forward to partake. In what order people should approach, where to stand, whether to kneel, how to distribute the elements, under what circumstances someone should be denied communion – these were novel issues.

Now concerning private confession before communion, I still think as I have held heretofore, namely, that it neither is necessary nor should be demanded. Nevertheless, it is useful and should not be despised; for the Lord did not even require the Supper itself as

necessary or establish it by law, but left it free to everyone when he said, “as often as you do this,” etc. [I Cor. 11:25-26]. So concerning the preparation for the Supper, we think that preparing oneself by fasting and prayer is a matter of **liberty**. Certainly one ought to come **sober** and with a serious and attentive mind, even though one might not fast at all and pray ever so little. But the sobriety I speak of is not that superstitious practice of the papists. I demand it lest people should come belching their drink and bloated with overeating. For the best preparation is – as I have said – a soul troubled by sins, death, and temptation and hungering and thirsting for healing and strength. Teaching these matters to the people is up to the bishop.

**Comment:** “We” includes the faculty at Wittenberg, especially Philip Melancthon, and Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther’s pastor.

**Comment:** (Wittenberg was known for its breweries.)

It remains to be considered whether both **forms**, as they call them, should be administered to the people. Here I say this: Now that the gospel has been instilled among us these two whole **years**, we have humored the weak in faith long enough. Hereafter we shall act according to the words of St. Paul, “If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant” [I Cor. 14:38]. For if after all this time they have not understood the gospel, it matters little whether they receive either form. If we continue to make allowance for their weakness, we only run the risk of confirming their obstinacy and of making rules contrary to the gospel. Wherefore, both forms may be requested and shall be offered in simple compliance with the institution of Christ. Those who refuse them will be left alone and receive nothing. For we are devising this order of the mass for those to whom the gospel has been proclaimed and by whom it has been at least partly **understood**. Those who have not yet heard or understood it are also not ready to received advice concerning this matter [of liturgical forms].

**Comment:** That is, bread and wine

**Comment:** Two years since Luther’s return from the Wartburg Castle in March, 1522, and since his tempering or tabling Karlstadt’s radical reforms during his absence. Karlstadt, without catechizing or permission, had allowed worshipers to handle and consume both bread and wine – a further scandal to many peoples’ consciences.

**Comment:** Worshipers at the town church where Luther attended would have included both university students and lower to middle-class townspeople

**Comment:** In Wittenberg and Zwickau, where Hausmann lived and the Anabaptists were forming, confusion and tumult over reforms – what reforms to enact and who had authority to enforce them – emboldened some nobility, citizens, and clergy, and intimidated others. Luther lashes out against ecclesiastical councils trying to assert their authority.

Nor is it necessary to wait for a council – as they prate – in order to have this practice **sanctioned**. We have the law of **Christ** on our side and are not minded to be delayed by or to listen to a council in matters which manifestly are part of the gospel. Nay, we say more: If by chance a council should establish and permit this practice, then we would be the last to partake of both forms. Nay, in contempt both of the council and of its statue, we should then wish to partake either of one or of neither, but never of both;

**Comment:** “the law of Christ” - another reference to liberty, based on Galatians 6. Elsewhere Luther writes “...thus the stronger member may serve the weaker member, and we may be children of God, and busy for one another, bearing one another’s burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ.” – Luther, “Freedom of a Christian,” 1520

and we would hold those to be wholly anathema who on the authority of such a council and state would partake of both.

You wonder why and ask for a reason? Listen! If you know that the bread and wine were instituted by Christ and that both are to be received by all – as the Gospels and Paul testify so clearly that even our adversaries themselves are forced to admit it – and if you still dare not believe and trust in Him enough to receive both forms, but dare to do so after men decide this in a council, are you not preferring men to Christ? Do you not extol sinful men over Him who is named God and worshiped as such [II Thess. 2:3-4]? Do you not trust in the words of men more than in the words of God? Nay rather, do you not utterly distrust the words of God and believe only the words of men? And how great a rejection and denial of God the most high is that? What idolatry can be compared to the superstitious regard in which you hold the council of men? Should you not rather die a thousand deaths? Should you not rather receive one or not form at all, than [both] in the name of an obedience which is a sacrilege and of a faith that amounts to apostasy?

Therefore, let them stop prating of their councils. First, let them do this: Let them restore to God the glory which they have denied him. Let them confess that with Satan their master they have held back one form, that they have lifted themselves up above God, that they have condemned his word, and have led to perdition so many people for so long a time. And let them repent of this unspeakably cruel and godless tyranny. Then, let them solemnly declare that we have done right when on our part and even against their dogma we have taught and received both forms and have not waited for their council. And let them give thanks, because we have refused to follow their perditionous abomination. When they have done this, we shall gladly and willingly honor and obey their council and [its] statute. In the meantime, while they fail to do so and instead continue to demand that we should await their authorization, we shall listen to nothing. Rather, we shall continue to teach and act against them, particularly where we know it displeases them most. For what do they require with their diabolical demand except that we should exalt them above God and their words above his, and that we

should receive the phantoms of their fancy as idols in the place of God? It is our concern, however, that the whole world be completely subjected and obedient to God.

I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating? The bishops may have these [congregational] hymns sung either after the Latin chants, or use the Latin on one [Sun]day and the vernacular on the next, until the time comes that the whole mass is sung in the vernacular. But poets are wanting among us, or not yet known, who could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, as Paul call them [Col. 3:16], worthy to be used in the church of God. In the meantime, one may sing after communion, “Let God be blest, be praise, and thanked, Who to us himself hath granted,” omitting the line, “And the holy sacrament, At our last, From the consecrated priest’s hand,” which was added by some devotee of St. Barbara who, having neglected the sacrament all his life, hoped that he would on his deathbed be able to obtain eternal life through this work rather than through faith. For both the musical meter and structure prove this line to be an interpolation. Another good [hymn] is “Now Let Us Pray to the Holy Ghost” and also “Ein Kindelein so löblich.” For few are found that are written in a proper devotional style. I mention this to encourage any German poets to compose evangelical hymns for us.

This is enough for now about the mass and communion. What is left can be decided by actual practice, as long as the Word of God is diligently and faithfully preached in the church. And if any should ask that all these [forms] be proved from Scriptures and the example of the fathers, they do not disturb us; for as we have said above, liberty must prevail in these matters and Christian consciences must not be bound by laws and ordinances. That is why the Scriptures prescribe nothing in these matters, but allow freedom for the Spirit to act according to his own understanding as the respective place, time, and persons may require it. And as for the example of the fathers, [their liturgical orders] are partly unknown, partly so much at variance with each other

**Comment:** Between readings (where the sequence and prose anthem-like chants were) and during communion was a propitious spot for congregational song, felt Luther. This mass, still in Latin, is otherwise assumed to be led by the choir.

**Comment:** The earliest Reformation hymnal, *Etlich christlicher Lieder* (“Several Christian Hymns”) was published the next year, 1524, with a total of 8 hymn texts and 5 tunes, four written by Luther.

**Comment:** *Gott sei gelobet*, attributed to Jan Hus

**Comment:** A saint believed to intercede on behalf of communicants before their death

**Comment:** *Nun bitten wir*, still found in Lutheran hymnals. Luther added three stanzas to a 13<sup>th</sup> century hymn.

**Comment:** A 15<sup>th</sup> century Latin Christmas chant, also known as *dies est laetitia*

**Comment:** Elsewhere Luther elaborates, desiring hymns “which deal with thanking and praising [God] in a wonderful and excellent way, as for example, the Gloria in Excelsis, the Alleluia, the Creed, the preface, the Sanctus, the Benedictus, and the Agnus Dei. In these various parts you find nothing about a sacrifice but only praise and thanks. Therefore we have also kept them in our Mass. Particularly the Agnus Dei, above all songs, serves well for the sacrament, for it clearly sings about and praises Christ for having borne our sins and in beautiful, brief words powerfully and sweetly teaches the remembrance of Christ.” *LW* 38:122-23

**Comment:** Luther raises the issue of the role of Scripture in shaping the details of worship. As noted earlier in this commentary, whether or not one is free to introduce worship elements not specifically prescribed by Scripture or by historic tradition is a major dividing point among Protestants. In regard to conforming to tradition, this is a dividing point among present day Lutherans.

that nothing definite can be established about them, evidently because they themselves used their liberty. And even if they would be perfectly definite and clear, yet they could not impose on us a law or the obligation to follow them.

As for the other days which are called weekdays, I see nothing that we cannot put up with, provided the [weekday] masses be discontinued. For the Matins with its three lessons, the [minor] hours, Vespers, and Compline *de tempore* consist – with the exception of the *propers* for the Saints' days – of nothing but divine words of Scripture. And it is seemly, nay necessary, that the boys should get accustomed to reading and hearing the Psalms and lessons from the Holy Scripture. If anything should be changed, the bishop may reduce the great length [of the services] according to his own judgment so that three Psalms may be sung for Matins and three for Vespers with one or two responsories. These matters are best left to the discretion of the bishop. He should choose the best of the responsories and antiphons and appoint them from Sunday to Sunday throughout the week, taking care lest the people should either be bored by too much repetition of the same or confused by too many changes in the chants and lessons. The whole Psalter, Psalm by Psalm should remain in use, and the entire Scripture, lesson by lesson, should continue to be read to the people. But we must take care – as I have elsewhere explained – lest the people sing only with their lips, like sounding pipes or harps [I Cor. 14:7], and without understanding. Daily lessons must therefore be appointed, one in the morning from the New or Old Testament, another for Vespers from the other Testament with an exposition in the vernacular. That this rite is an ancient one is proven by both the custom itself and by the words *homilia* in Matins and *capitulum* in Vespers and in the other [canonical] hours, namely that the Christians as often as they gather together read something and then had it interpreted in the vernacular in the manner Paul describes in I Corinthian 14 [26-27]. But when evil times came and there was a lack of prophets and interpreters, all that was left after the lessons and *capitula* was the response, "Thanks be to God." And then, in place of the interpretation, lessons, Psalms, hymns, and other things were added in boring repetition. Although the hymn and the *Te Deum laudamus* at least confirm the same thing as the *Deo gratias*, namely, that after the

**Comment:** It was Karlstadt who had put a stop to weekday private masses in town. Luther replaced them with Matins and Vespers, incorporating much use of the Psalms.

**Comment:** Assigned readings and liturgy "proper" to the particular day of the church year

**Comment:** Young men entered university at fourteen or fifteen and usually graduated after about five years.

**Comment:** Responsories and antiphons were both sung responses to chanted Psalms and other scripture.

**Comment:** Here Luther is advocating *lectio continua*. On Sunday, November 8, 1523, Luther preached on Matthew 22 at the early service, and Genesis 20 at the noon service.

**Comment:** Latin, "sermon."

**Comment:** Latin, "chapter." By this time in history, the lesson had been reduced to a single verse.

**Comment:** Luther believed this exuberant praise hymn from the Early Church ranked with the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds as an affirmation of the Christian faith.

**Comment:** The Latin term for "Thanks be to God."



exposition and homilies they used to praise God and give thanks for the revealed truth of his words. That is the kind of vernacular songs I should like us to have.

**Comment:** Here and in many other letters, Luther made appeals for congregational – not just choral – songs of praise and thanksgiving “in the language of the people.”

This much, excellent Nicholas, I have for you in writing about the rites and ceremonies which we either already have instituted in our Wittenberg church or expect to introduce, Christ willing, at an early date. If this example pleases you and others, you may imitate it. If not, we will gladly yield to your inspiration and are prepared to accept corrections from you or from others. Nor should you or anyone else be deterred by the fact that here in Wittenberg the idolatrous “Topheth” [Jer. 7:31-32; 19:6] still continues as a shameless, ungodly source of revenue for the princes of Saxony. I am speaking of the Church of All Saints. For by the mercy of God, we have so great an antidote among us in the riches of his Word that this plague languishes in its own little corner and can only contaminate itself. There are scarcely three or four swinish gluttons left to serve mammon in that house of perdition. To all others and to the whole populace, it is a loathsome and abominable thing. But we dare not proceed against them by force or by law, for Christians – as you know – should not fight except with the power of the sword of the Spirit. This is how I restrain the people every day. Otherwise, that house of all the saints – rather of all the devils – would long be known by another name in all the earth. I have not used the power of the Spirit which the Lord has given me [II Cor. 13:10] against it, but patiently have borne this reproach if perchance God may give them repentance. Meanwhile, I am content that our house, which is more truly the house of all saints, reigns and stands here as a tower of Lebanon against the house of the devils [Song of Sol. 7:4]. Thus we torment Satan with the Word, even though he pretends to laugh. But Christ will grant that his hope will fail him and that he will be overthrown in the sight of all. Pray for me, you saint of God. Grace be with you and with us all. Amen.

**Comment:** The *deutsche messe*, or German Folk Mass, or a prototype of it, was first celebrated October 29, 1525, at St. Mary Church, Wittenberg.

**Comment:** Luther highly valued Hausmann’s opinion. He later sent him a proof copy of the *deutsche messe* for review before its publication.

**Comment:** This included Duke Frederick, his protector. Frederick discontinued publicly displaying the seventeen thousand relics after 1523.

**Comment:** The church in Wittenberg where the 95 Theses were nailed. Luther attended, and often preached at, the other church in town, St. Mary, whose pastor was an early and strong Reformation supporter.

**Comment:** Luther strongly objected to the use of force in overthrowing corrupt authorities. This was not enough, however, to prevent the disastrous 1525 Peasant’s War.

**Comment:** Luther’s home congregation at St. Mary in Wittenberg

An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg (1523), LW 53:19â€ 40. Stolle, Church Comes, 13. (129.) Ibid., 104. (130.) Hans Kasdorf The Reformation and Mission: A Bibliographical Survey of Secondary Literature. May 1980. 169-175. (128.) Stolle, Church Comes, 13.Â His findings offer a persuasive new answer to the critical question of how the Reformation could succeed as a mass movement in an age before mass literacy. View. Show abstract. The European Reformations: Second Edition. Article. Feb 2010. Carter Lindberg. Most North American Lutheran churches have not historically used either the Hedge or Carlyle translations. Traditionally, the most commonly used translation in Lutheran congregations is a composite translation from the 1868 Pennsylvania Lutheran Church Book ("A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon"). In more recent years a new translation completed for the 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship ("A mighty fortress is our God, a sword and shield victorious") has also gained significant popularity. Compositions based on the hymn[edit]. "A Mighty Fortress" s