

# Reflections on the Context and Character of Martin Luther's *Formula Missae*

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– In Nomine Jesu –

## *Introduction*

It is fitting for us as Lutherans, in the year 2023, to commemorate Martin Luther's *Formula Missae*, titled fully (in English translation) "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," published 500 years ago, in 1523. In this essay I will not seek to present to you a broad and general historical and theological introduction to this first significant foray of the great Reformer into the field of *liturgical* reform. Such studies have been published by many scholars before me, more thoroughly and with greater acumen than what I would be able to produce. But as a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in twenty-first century America, I will offer what I hope are some timely reflections on Luther's liturgical proposals of five centuries ago, on when and why he made them, and on what significance they may have for us. And I will also explore some things that are of particular interest to me, regarding the significance of the *Formula Missae* in the larger context of Christian liturgical history.

We are living and working today within a world of ideas that is marked by much ignorance of, and even hostility to, the liturgical theology and inherited liturgical culture of Confessional Lutheranism. This ignorance and this hostility can be seen not only outside our church, among non-Lutheran secularists and sectarians, but also – and most troublingly – on the inside, among many Lutherans who, it would seem, do not know how much they do not know about the history and purpose of Lutheran liturgical worship. Lutherans in our time are absorbing ideas that have emerged and grown either in a hothouse of enthusiast liturgical iconoclasm, or in a hothouse of romantic liturgical antiquarianism, without enough consideration of what they are actually importing into our church when they import elements from these foreign seed beds; and without enough reflection on what they are losing when they make room for these innovations by casting aside tried and true elements of our Lutheran liturgical patrimony.

Let us recall together John F. Kennedy's paraphrase of G. K. Chesterton: "Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason why it was put up." And as we now deliberately set out to see what we might be able to learn from Luther in the area of worship and liturgy, let us also together consider the astute observations and sage counsel of Norman A. Madson:

May it not be that there has been too little study of Martin Luther in our seminaries of late, too little searching of that monument to the Christian faith, the Book of Concord? ... Yes, we hear ever so often, even within our Synodical Conference: "Let us forget the fathers, and get back to Scripture." Again that may sound very pious and praiseworthy. But what if Scripture, to which they appeal, has something to say about those fathers who have spoken unto us the word of God? Can we then do as we please about what they have spoken? Not unless we want to violate this injunction of the Word itself. And this is what Holy Writ enjoins upon us all: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

Heb. 13, 7. ... Let us continue to ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein [Jer. 6, 16].<sup>1</sup>

Non-Lutherans often think that Luther's many writings and opinions exercise more influence among Lutherans than they actually do, and are invested with more authority in the Lutheran Church than they actually have. It probably would have been better if our church as a whole had identified itself in the way that the Lutherans in eastern Europe and in the Slavic world have historically identified themselves: as the Evangelical Church of *the Augsburg Confession*, and not as the Evangelical *Lutheran* Church. But, while Luther can be and often is criticized for some of his opinions – especially his social and political opinions – his usually-sound biblical exegesis, and his usually-sound pastoral applications, are generally seen among us as worthy of acceptance and emulation. While Luther was certainly fallible and capable of failing, Lutherans tend to conclude, when they compare his theological writings to God's Word, that he usually did not fail in grasping the proper sense and meaning of things.

So, for this reason Luther is described by the Formula of Concord as “the foremost teacher of the Augsburg Confession.”<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere in the Formula, we are introduced to a version of sacred historiography and eschatology according to which “in these last times our merciful God, by his special grace, has through the faithful ministry of that most outstanding man of God, Dr. Luther, once again brought to light out of *the horrible darkness of the papacy* the truth of his Word.”<sup>3</sup> The Concordists do not believe that there are “no enemies to the left,” however, because in the Formula we also see an endorsement of “the teaching that Dr. Luther of blessed memory had thoroughly set forth in his writings, on the basis of God's Word, against the papacy *and other sects*.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet among the teachings of Luther that are in this way endorsed, is his teaching that his own private writings, as well as the private writings of others, are not to be accepted uncritically, but are always to be judged and evaluated in the light of Holy Scripture. So, with respect to Luther's literary legacy, those who subscribe to the Formula of Concord declare – in the words of the Formula – that while they “intend to appeal to and rely on the detailed expositions of his teaching in his doctrinal and polemical writings,” they will do so “in the manner and fashion in which he himself did in the Latin preface of his collected works with a necessary and Christian admonition. There he expressly made the distinction that God's Word alone ought to be and remain the only guiding principle and rule of all teaching and that no person's writing can be put on a par with it, but that everything must be totally subject to God's Word.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Norman A. Madson, “The Crying Need of our Beloved Conference” (sermon preached at the 75th Anniversary gathering of the Synodical Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 10, 1948), in *Preaching to Preachers* (Mankato, Minnesota: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1952), p. 203.

<sup>2</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:34, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 598.

<sup>3</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule & Norm: 5, p. 527. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule & Norm: 9, Kolb/Wengert p. 528. Emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule & Norm: 9, Kolb/Wengert pp. 528-29.

We will remember this as we now review and evaluate Luther's *Formula Missae*. He is not, and will not be, above criticism. We will also remember that Luther often made use of the literary device of hyperbole or overstatement when making an important point. We may accordingly take some of what he says with a grain of salt – as he would expect us to. And we will remember the historical and social context of this particular writing, in which Luther was not only looking over his right shoulder at the legalistic demands and requirements of Rome in matters of ritual and ceremony, but also over his left shoulder at Andreas Carlstadt and Gabriel Zwilling, whose influence in Wittenberg had led to liturgical and social chaos while Luther was away at the Wartburg Castle from May 1521 to March 1522.

### *Carlstadt's Chaos*

Before his exile at the Wartburg, Luther had called for certain reforms and corrections in the area of public worship, most especially in regard to the teaching and practice of the sacrifice of the mass in the Lord's Supper, the distribution of the sacrament to the laity in only one kind, and the celebration of private masses without communicants chiefly for the benefit of the dead in purgatory. But Luther also wanted and expected such reforms to be carried out in an orderly way, with pastoral sensitivity and careful instruction. During Luther's exile, however, some of his erstwhile friends and followers in Wittenberg, whose zeal and passion far outweighed their good judgment, implemented these and other changes in a very different way and according to a very different spirit. Ernest G. Schwiebert recounts these events:

...the new movement suffered from the over-enthusiasm of its followers who substituted vigorous action for their lack of understanding and levelheaded thinking. The men who now felt in duty bound to carry on the struggle in Luther's absence were not very clear on either Luther's objectives or the methods which as Christians they might employ. The result was a radicalism and mob rule, which often result from impulsive action not based on clear thinking.

...Carlstadt considered himself the interpreter and champion of the new Gospel movement. Through disputations, sermons, and the press he aroused the laity of Wittenberg. ...much of his preaching was in accord with the new movement, but he tried to introduce too drastic changes too rapidly. To a people still steeped in Catholic forms and doctrines he made such statements as: "Who partakes only of the bread, sins"; "Organs belong only to theatrical exhibitions and princes' palaces"; "Images in churches are wrong"; "Painted idols standing on altars are even more harmful and devilish." All of these pronouncements he sought to prove by citations based largely on the Old Testament.

Another disciple who almost outdid Carlstadt in fiery zeal was the...monk Zwilling, whose enthusiasm for the cause earned for him the title of "the second Luther" from the citizens of Wittenberg. He proclaimed that no one should henceforth attend Masses, for they were an atrocious sin against the divine Majesty. As was to be expected, Carlstadt, Zwilling, and their cohorts joined forces to put their words into action. ...under Zwilling's leadership, the monks destroyed the side altars of the old convent church, in which Luther had preached his first sermon, and burned the oil used for the Extreme Unction. All images were burned in their fanatical zeal. The Town Council feared similar unrestrained action at the Town Church under their control and in a joint meeting with the University passed *A Worthy Ordinance for the Princely City of Wittenberg*. In this ordinance a day was set upon which the images would be removed from the Town Church. But Carlstadt and the clamoring mob could not be restrained. They visited the church,

despoiling gravestones and destroying images inside and out. ...

The Castle Church was under the direct control of the Elector, but Carlstadt was Archdeacon. The Elector was already much disturbed by the service which Carlstadt had conducted on Christmas Eve, when he had officiated in the Holy Eucharist without Mass vestments and had encouraged the laity to help themselves to the bread and the wine directly from the altar. After this service there had occurred further demonstrations at both the Castle and Town Churches.<sup>6</sup>

Anthony C. Dodgers describes Carlstadt's new model for celebrating Holy Communion in more detail, noting that Carlstadt argued

that all images, including crucifixes, should be removed, by force if necessary. He also addressed the Roman abuses of the Mass. On Christmas Day 1521, Carlstadt celebrated the Mass without vestments, in German, only speaking the Words of Institution. He omitted the sign of the cross at the consecration, and he distributed the Sacrament in both kinds. Those in attendance communed without prior confession or fasting, and took the chalice in their own hands. While some of these changes were in accordance with Christ's institution, we must realize what a radical departure this was from the centuries of the medieval church. What's more, mobs were stirred up by these dramatic changes and disturbed the "traditional" services, breaking lamps and yelling insults at the priests. When Luther heard about these disturbances he was shocked.<sup>7</sup>

Luther permanently returned to Wittenberg from the Wartburg not long after this, and during the season of Lent in 1522 preached his famous *Invocavit* Sermons against the misuse of Christian freedom and against the arrogance and lovelessness of what had been transpiring in Wittenberg. And then Luther began to pay attention to the question of what kind of liturgical reforms should now be instituted, and of how he might proceed in making positive recommendations for the continuation of some of what Carlstadt and the others had put in place (such as communion being received by the laity under both kinds), but for the reversal of some if not most of the radical departures from the familiar sights and sounds of the historic liturgy that Carlstadt had promoted, and that the town council had been pressured to endorse in its *Worthy Ordinance*. Luther considered Carlstadt, Zwilling, and the mob that had followed them in their destructive fanaticism, to be hypocrites. They had rejected the legalism of Rome only to replace it with their own version of biblicistic legalism, condemning as sin many innocent and helpful liturgical customs that had developed for good reasons over time, and trying to bind consciences in areas where God would instead want Christians to exercise their freedom, responsibly and in love both for God and for God's people.

#### *Concerning the Order of Public Worship*

Luther began his literary efforts, aimed toward an evangelical reform of the order of the mass, with the publication of a tract "Concerning the Order of Public Worship" in the first part of 1523. Ulrich S. Leupold describes what Luther was thinking and trying to accomplish:

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<sup>6</sup>E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), pp. 536, 538.

<sup>7</sup>Anthony Dodgers, "Luther's *Invocavit* Sermons, Part I – From the Wartburg to St. Mary's Pulpit" (2017).

Having rejected Karlstadt's violent reformation of the cultus, Luther could not simply return to the traditional order. He had to point the way which led between the Scylla of reaction and the Charybdis of revolution. In other words, he had to spell out the basic principles of an evangelical reform of the liturgy and their practical application. This he did in *Concerning the Order of Public Worship*.<sup>8</sup>

This tract or pamphlet was in many ways an important prelude to, and preparation for, Luther's *Formula Missae*, published in December of that same year. At the very beginning of this earlier tract, Luther wrote that

The service now in common use everywhere goes back to genuine Christian beginnings, as does the office of preaching. But as the latter has been perverted by the spiritual tyrants, so the former has been corrupted by the hypocrites. As we do not on that account abolish the office of preaching, but aim to restore it again to its right and proper place, so it is not our intention to do away with the service, but to restore it again to its rightful use.

Luther then went on to list "Three serious abuses" that had "crept into the service": the silencing of God's Word, which is "the worst abuse"; the replacing of God's Word with "a host of un-Christian fables and lies, in legends, hymns, and sermons"; and the errant teaching and belief that "such divine service was performed as a work whereby God's grace and salvation might be won," which resulted in the disappearance of true faith. Also in this tract, Luther made his famous and still-relevant statement that "a Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God's Word and prayer, no matter how briefly, as Psalm 102 says, "When the kings and the people assemble to serve the Lord, they shall declare the name and the praise of God."<sup>9</sup>

A focus of this tract was on the institution of daily Matins and Vespers during the week, at which Scripture would be read and preached upon, as a replacement for the previous daily masses (already abolished by Karlstadt) which seldom included any communicants except for the celebrating priest. In a way that more directly laid out a "blueprint" for the *Formula Missae* that would be published in a few months' time, Luther said that "Besides these daily services for a smaller group, the whole congregation should come together on Sundays, and mass and Vespers be sung, as has been customary."<sup>10</sup> In this respect, Luther also wrote:

Let the chants in the Sunday masses and Vespers be retained; they are quite good and are taken from Scripture. However, one may lessen or increase their number. But to select the chants and Psalms for the daily morning and evening service shall be the duty of the pastor and preacher. For every morning he shall appoint a fitting responsory or antiphon with a collect, likewise for the evening; this is to be read and chanted publicly after the lesson and exposition.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ulrich S. Leupold, Introduction to "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," pp. 13-14.

Luther understood that chanting is the church's natural and ordinary way of reading. These texts are to be "read *and* chanted," not read *or* chanted. Luther did not revise the *Venite* so as to make it say: "O come, let us read responsively to the Lord." Chanting is elevated speaking. It serves the *practical* purpose of making the text more audible; the *devotional* purpose of slowing down the reading of the text for better absorption and deeper comprehension on the part of listeners and worshipers; the *didactic* purpose of showing that what is happening in public worship, in the presence and fear of God, is different and more important than what transpires in the marketplace; and the *confessional* purpose – especially in the face of the kind of sectarianism that had been fomented by Carlstadt and Zwilling – of testifying to the catholic spirit of the genuine Reformation movement, and to the desire of Luther and his true followers to *reform* the church on the basis of the gospel, not to destroy it and recreate it in their own image.

In discussing the gatherings for worship that take place on the Lord's Day, Luther also articulated here what continued to be the consistent approach of the Lutheran Reformation regarding the frequency of the offering and reception of the Lord's Supper. He wrote that "If anyone desires to receive the sacrament at this time, let it be administered at a time convenient to all concerned." He also said that "if any should desire the sacrament during the week, let mass be held as inclination and time dictate; for in this matter one cannot make hard and fast rules."<sup>12</sup>

The regular and frequent availability of the sacrament, especially on Sundays, was simply assumed, "For properly speaking, the mass consists in using the Gospel and communing at the table of the Lord" – as Luther later expressed it in his *Formula Missae*.<sup>13</sup> The actual celebration of the sacrament was determined by there being communicants who wished to receive it, and who were properly prepared to receive it. There was no predetermined and arbitrarily-scheduled rotating sequence of "communion Sundays" and "non-communion Sundays." If anyone in the parish desired to commune on a particular Sunday, that's what made that Sunday to be a communion Sunday. If no communicants had announced their intention to receive the sacrament on a given Sunday, that's what made that Sunday to be a non-communion Sunday. The only exception would be an occasion when there was no pastor available to serve as celebrant. Then, of course, there would be no communion. But otherwise, if there were communicants, then there was communion. A pastor today who would imply or say to a parishioner who wants to receive the sacrament on a so-called "non-communion Sunday" that he may not have it, or should not wish to have it, but must wait until the next pre-scheduled "communion Sunday" rolls around, has, in effect, made one of those "hard and fast rules" that Luther said cannot be made.

When the city of Nürnberg, through Lazarus Spengler, sought Luther's guidance on these matters in 1528, he offered this response:

Should anyone request my counsel in this way, then I would give this advice: ... that you should celebrate one or two Masses in the two parish churches on Sundays or holy days, depending on whether there are few or many communicants. Should it be regarded as needful or good, you might do the same in the hospital too. ...you might celebrate Mass during the week on whichever days it would be needful, that is, if any communicants

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<sup>12</sup>Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," p. 13.

<sup>13</sup>Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, p. 25.

would be present and would ask for and request the Sacrament. This way we should compel no one to receive the Sacrament, and yet everyone would be adequately served in an orderly manner. If the Ministers of the Church would fall to griping at this point, maintaining that they were being placed under duress or complaining that they are unfitted to face such demands, then I would demonstrate to them that no merely human compulsion is at work here, but on the contrary they are being compelled by God Himself through His Call. For because they have the Office, they are already, in virtue of their Call and Office, obliged and compelled to administer the Sacrament whenever people request it of them, so that their excuses amount to nothing; just as they are under obligation to preach, comfort, absolve, help the poor, and visit the sick as often as people need or ask for these services.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Formula Missae: Introduction*

Luther begins his introduction to the *Formula Missae* by noting two main problems that he hopes his proposed liturgical revision will correct. He speaks first of the people's "godless regard for ceremonial."<sup>15</sup> Luther certainly would not have disagreed with the Augsburg Confession when it declared, six and a half years after this writing, that ceremonies – correctly understood and properly used – "serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ."<sup>16</sup> What he is criticizing here is, rather, an improper fixation on ceremonies *as such*, according to their external form, and not according to their higher meaning as teaching tools for the sake of the gospel. This criticism is very similar to what the Augsburg Confession itself also criticizes in its reference to those teachers in the papacy who claimed that various humanly-instituted traditions,

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<sup>14</sup>Martin Luther, Letter to Lazarus Spengler, August 15, 1528; quoted in John R. Stephenson, "The Holy Eucharist: At the Center or Periphery of the Church's Life in Luther's Thinking?", in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus*, edited by Kurt E. Marquart, Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985), pp. 161-62.

Luther did recognize the possibility of the Lord's Supper being celebrated in some parishes only once in a month, but this would be because no one desired to commune on the other Sundays, and not because it had been decided beforehand that the sacrament would be unavailable to those who might wish to receive it. In the context of opposing the daily celebration of endowed masses, without communicants, he wrote: "I wish, and it ought to be so, that no mass at all would be celebrated except at such times as the people were present who really desired the sacrament and asked for it, and that this would be only once a week or once a month. For the sacrament should never be celebrated except at the instigation and request of hungry souls, never because of duty, endowment, custom, ordinance, or habit" ("Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959], pp. 256-57).

I have no doubt that the First Martin would also agree with what the Second Martin wrote in this regard: "For the rule about when and how often one should go to Communion must be taken: I. From the teaching about the fruit and power of the Eucharist, namely, when and as often as we recognize that we have need of this power; II. From the teaching about self-examination, lest we receive it unworthily. On this basis people are to be taught, admonished, and exhorted to more diligent and frequent use of the Eucharist. For because Christ says: 'As often as you do this,' it is wholly His will that those who are His disciples should do this frequently. Therefore those are not true and faithful ministers of Christ who in any manner whatever lead or frighten people away from more frequent use and reception of the Eucharist. There are beautiful examples of frequent use of the Eucharist from the true antiquity. Some had the custom of receiving the Eucharist daily, some twice a week, some on the Lord's day, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, some only on the Lord's Day" (Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, trans. by Fred Kramer [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978], pp. 330-31).

<sup>15</sup>Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>Augsburg Confession XXIV:3 [German], Kolb/Wengert p. 68.

ceremonies, ordinances, holy days, and fasts were works and acts of worship which are “necessary... for meriting grace,” and who “viciously terrified consciences if people omitted any of them.”<sup>17</sup>

The second major problem that had captured Luther’s pastoral concern and liturgical attention was what he referred to as “the abomination which Satan set up in the holy place through the man of sin.”<sup>18</sup> This, of course, is a reference to the sacrifice of the mass, together with its attendant errors regarding purgatory, the transfer of merit, and other papal departures from the true nature and purpose of the Sacrament of the Altar as Jesus had instituted it.

Luther had not wanted to be too hasty in implementing these reforms, however. He remained cautious even after his return from the Wartburg, when he had seen a need for undoing the damage that Carlstadt’s rash and unwise actions had caused, while also seeing a need to put Carlstadt’s valid reforms on a surer footing. Luther also did not want to put something in place without having thought it through very carefully, since he sensed that his example would likely be followed by other reform-minded church leaders in other places. And Luther did not want to risk sowing even more seeds of confusion and offense in a community that had recently endured some significant and unsettling liturgical upheavals. He wanted to teach the people before making necessary changes, and he wanted to avoid making unnecessary changes.

Luther was indeed going to be proposing something that would be significantly more conservative than what Carlstadt had implemented, before Luther put a stop to it. He was going to reverse much of what Carlstadt had done, and restore various church usages that Carlstadt had cast aside. We are not permanently stuck with the bad liturgical innovations of a predecessor. We can undo them, especially when the reasons for undoing them are clear and persuasive.

First, we can re-teach uninformed or misinformed people by explaining to them that historic symbols and ceremonies which testify to Christ, which underscore and accentuate the message of the gospel, and which maintain order and reverence in worship, are good and beneficial, even if the Roman Church has and employs similar symbols and ceremonies. Such useful traditions need not have been abandoned, and they can be reclaimed.

The biblical and Christ-centered content of the ancient western liturgy predates the medieval errors that were later introduced into the liturgy. Localized mostly in the canon of the mass, these errors occupy only a small percentage of the rite that was inherited by the generation of the Reformation era from the church of the middle ages. One need not throw out the entire banana just because a small portion of it has been bruised. One can cut out the bruised section, and eat what is left with enjoyment. So too, if scholastic theologians and avaricious Roman bishops introduced into the liturgy errors which contradicted the article on justification – even though the rest of the liturgy, when taken at face value, still taught and testified to the article on justification – the added-in part can be excised, and the good parts that were there before will still be there, to fulfill their original and proper purpose of guiding the worship of God’s people in a God-pleasing way.

And second, we can re-teach uninformed or misinformed people by pointing out to them the dangers of imitating the practices of sectarian churches, since those sectarian practices are

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<sup>17</sup>Augsburg Confession XXVI:2 [Latin], Kolb/Wengert p. 75.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 19.

almost always inspired by sectarian doctrine, and are almost always imbued with the spirit of that sectarian doctrine. Carlstadt's introduction of an inadequate and irreverent sacramental service was accompanied by his introduction of an inadequate and irreverent sacramental theology. Lutherans rightly mock Carlstadt's silly suggestion that when Jesus said, "This is my body," he was not referring to the bread that he was offering the disciples, but was referring (and pointing) to his physical body as it was seated at the table. Yet we can observe what seems to be an increasing trend on the part of many Lutheran pastors in our time – even professedly conservative ones – of imitating Carlstadt's sacramental practice, even while still rejecting his sacramental beliefs.

The Lord's Supper is celebrated by such pastors while they are wearing street clothes – often very casual street clothes – rather than ecclesiastical vestments. Lost on them are the sensibilities of Luther's friend and fellow-Reformer Johannes Brenz, who maintained that while "vestments, altar cloths, gold and silver vessels, candles, etc., are free, and do not at all affect faith and conscience," they are nevertheless – for the sake of order and reverence – "to be retained and used, *especially the vestments*, in order that the ministers may not be in their ordinary clothes, but may fitly minister to the congregation."<sup>19</sup> And among such pastors today, inappropriate *garments on the body* are frequently accompanied by inappropriate *movements of the body*. They often bob, sway, and strut around the chancel with a demeanor that suggests a thoughtless lack of seriousness about where they are and what they are doing. Lost on them are the sensibilities of Paul H. D. Lang, who reminds us that

Communication is not limited to language. We express ourselves to others and we receive impressions from others and from God through signs and symbols. ... While this is true in ordinary life, it is particularly true in the church's worship. ... Therefore, the devaluation of signs and symbols in the Protestant churches and also, at least since the day of Rationalism, in the Lutheran church, and the almost exclusive reliance on words as the means of communication, seems to be a mistake. While we need to rely on language as the most important means of communication, we should perhaps reconsider our attitude toward the use of signs and symbols. ... The positions and actions of the body in worship are included in liturgical signs and symbols. ... Some are accompanied by words and verbal formulae and others are not. Some are gestures and actions of reverence, some of prayer, some of penitence, and others are sacramental. ...many convey more than one meaning when used under different circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

Also, in Carlstadtian fashion, such pastors often omit those parts of the traditional communion liturgy that by design are intended to lead worshipers, step by step, up to the apex of the consecration. The services they conduct often jump immediately from the prayer of the church to the speaking of the Words of Institution. And, when such pastors speak those Words at a rushed pace and with inarticulate or slurred diction, without facing the bread and wine, or without at least noticeably gesturing toward the bread and wine, it is not at all reassuring to troubled observers who wonder if a real consecration has actually taken place.

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<sup>19</sup>Edward T. Horn, "Liturgical Work of John Brenz," *The Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. I, No. 4 (October 1882), pp. 280-81. Horn is here summarizing one of the provisions of the Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order of 1533. Emphasis in original.

<sup>20</sup>Paul H. D. Lang, *Ceremony and Celebration: An Evangelical Guide for Christian Practice in Corporate Worship* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 64-65.

The Preface and Proper Preface – or, depending on rite and local usage, the exhortation to communicants – are designed to prepare worshipers to be reverently attentive to the consecration when that does finally take place in the service. This ordered sequence of preparatory elements in the communion liturgy serves progressively to increase ever more deeply, and to sharpen ever more narrowly, the worshiper’s devotional focus on Christ and on his sacramental gifts and promises. But when a Carlstadtian approach is followed, with major amputations and omissions, it is as if worshipers are unexpectedly grabbed from behind and thrown into the deep section of a cold pond, rather than being allowed to wade in gradually and carefully.

In contrast, Luther – at least as far as the main Sunday service in the churches was concerned – wanted to avoid making more changes in the received rite than were absolutely necessary. He certainly did not intend to make any changes that might leave room for a frivolous or arrogant attitude on the part of either minister or people. When Luther concluded that the time had in fact come to make the necessary changes, thoughtfully and circumspectly, he implemented his conservative and evangelical liturgical principles in the stable and stabilizing order of service that he now recommended in the publication of the *Formula Missae*. And so he writes in the introduction to this work:

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.

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 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, ...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.

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.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” pp. 19-20.

*The Formula Missae: It's Place in Liturgical History Looking Back*

Luther at this point in his introduction then sets forth a summary of his understanding of the historical development of the Christian communion rite, beginning with an acknowledgment of the divine institution of the sacrament by the Lord himself, and then stating that in earliest apostolic times it was observed “quite simply and evangelically,” while also acknowledging that over time many human additions were added to the liturgy, causing it no longer to be a simple rite. But unlike Carlstadt and Zwilling, and unlike the various restorationist movements of more recent times, this in itself was not seen by Luther as a bad or problematic thing, as long as the distinction between what is divinely mandated, and what sanctified human judgment has found useful and beneficial, is maintained.

So, after recounting the addition of various Psalm texts and the Kyrie, and the introduction of the reading of Epistles and Gospels – which he says is actually “necessary,” and should not be done “in a language the common people do not understand” – Luther goes on to describe the later shaping of Psalm texts into the Introit, and the introduction of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the graduals, the alleluias, the Nicene Creed, the *Sanctus*, the *Agnus Dei*, and the *communio* (that is, songs that are chanted during the distribution of the sacrament). Modern historians of the liturgy might question some of Luther’s conclusions regarding when, where, and how the different components of the liturgy were added in. But Luther’s observations regarding the gradual development of the western rite are essentially sound and correct, as is his conclusion that

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.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 21.

Luther also writes that it is not 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” (p. 24). Luther is primarily criticizing two things here. *First*, he disagrees with the Roman custom of distributing pre-sanctified communion elements on Good Friday without a full communion service, and in particular without those distributed elements having been consecrated on that day and in that place. I agree with this criticism. Proper Lutheran practice calls for a consecration of whatever elements are to be distributed to communicants, to be performed in the presence of those communicants. This would pertain also to the communing of shut-ins (see Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:79-84). So, for Good Friday, it is a sound Lutheran practice to have a full communion service, with both a consecration and distribution. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many Lutheran congregations did this, and for those services Lutheran pastors re-purposed the black chasubles that previously had been used for requiem masses. It is also a sound Lutheran practice *not* to celebrate the Lord’s Supper on Good Friday, in view of the fact that members would have had an opportunity to commune on the previous day (Maundy Thursday) and would again have an opportunity to commune in one or two days’ time (at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Day). Also, if the Triduum, of which Good Friday is the central part, is seen as one continuous service, then the point could also be made that on the first and last days of this elongated service (Maundy Thursday and the Easter Vigil) the sacrament *is* celebrated, even if it is not celebrated on the middle day. *And second*, Luther here disagrees with the western rite custom of omitting the singing or speaking of the word “alleluia” during Lent. I disagree with this criticism. Important lessons about repentance and humility before God are taught and learned during Lent. Christians certainly do not repent of their sins only during Lent. The lessons about repentance and humility that they learn in that season are of benefit to them throughout the year and indeed throughout an entire lifetime. But those important lessons are especially taught and learned *during Lent*. The omission of the Alleluia during Lent contributes toward the teaching and learning of those lessons. In the same way, the special celebratory joy that is taught and learned in the lessons of Easter – with its multiple Alleluias! – is not just for the Easter season. This deep and abiding joy characterizes the faith of Christians at all times, as they always live within their Baptism in a daily dying to the sinful self through repentance, and in a daily rising with Christ through faith.

And this is where Luther begins to take aim at what he considered to be an abominable intrusion into what had been, from earlier and better times, an edifying and evangelical order of service. He attributes the introduction of the canon to “the tyranny of priestly greed and pride,” and compares its various objectionable elements to “those altars to the images of Baal and all gods in the Lord’s temple” that the wicked and idolatrous kings had profanely erected in Old Testament times.

And Luther does not stop there. The canon is described as an “abominable concoction drawn from everyone’s sewer and cesspool,” which turned the mass into a sacrifice. Luther does not appreciate many of the later ceremonial and ritual elaborations in the rest of the liturgy either, which loaded it down with unnecessary and overly complicated distractions. He continues in his criticism:

...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?<sup>23</sup>

The transformation of the mass into a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead – which conceptually put the mass into competition with the finished sacrifice of Christ on the cross, or at least caused the mass to be interpreted as supplementing that true and final sacrifice – was actually a more gradual process than Luther intimates. The early Christian liturgies, as a rule, placed the recitation of the Words of Institution within a eucharistic prayer, which often did, in various places, employ the terms “sacrifice,” “oblation,” and “offering.” But originally, this terminology was not used to indicate that the body and blood of Jesus in particular were being sacrificed anew. Rather, the entire prayer – and even the entire service – were seen as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, offered by God’s people in response to his sending of his Son Jesus Christ to be their Redeemer, as they gratefully recalled in the prayer all the important things that Jesus had done for their salvation. In its own unique way, the Lord’s institution of his Sacred Supper was one of those things. The terminology of oblation or offering was generally attached also to the bread and wine, as fruits of the earth which were now being placed before the Lord so that he could use them for his sacramental purposes. And the eucharistic prayer in which these various thoughts were expressed generally concluded with an epiclesis, asking God to send his Holy Spirit upon the people preparing to commune, or upon the bread and wine that were being offered so that they would become and be for the communicants the true body and blood of their Savior.

An early illustrative example of this kind of eucharistic prayer can be seen in the “Apostolic Tradition” of St. Hippolytus of Rome, which shows us how the Lord’s Supper was celebrated in the imperial capital around the year 215 A.D.:

The Lord be with you!  
    And with your spirit!  
Let us lift up our hearts.  
    They are turned to the Lord.  
Let us give thanks to the Lord!  
    It is right and just!  
We give you thanks, O God, through your beloved Child Jesus Christ, whom you have

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<sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” pp. 21-22.

sent us in the last days as Savior, Redeemer, and Messenger of your will. He is your Word, inseparable from you, through whom you have created everything and in whom you find your delight. You sent him from heaven into the womb of a Virgin. He was conceived and became flesh, he manifested himself as your Son, born of the Spirit and the Virgin. He did your will, and, to win for you a holy people, he stretched out his hands in suffering to rescue from suffering those who believe in you.

When he was about to surrender himself to voluntary suffering in order to destroy death, to break the devil's chains, to tread hell underfoot, to pour out his light upon the just, to establish the covenant and manifest his resurrection, he took bread, he gave you thanks and said: "Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you." In like manner for the cup, he said: "This is my blood which is poured out for you. When you do this, do (it) in memory of me."

Remembering therefore your death and your resurrection, we offer you the bread and the wine, we thank you for having judged us worthy to stand before you and serve you. And we pray you to send your Holy Spirit on the offering of your holy Church, to bring together in unity all those who receive it. May they be filled with the Holy Spirit who strengthens their faith in the truth. May we be able thus to praise and glorify you through your Child Jesus Christ. Through him glory to you and honor, to the Father and the Son, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, now and for ever and ever! Amen.<sup>24</sup>

This early form of the epiclesis does not specifically ask that the Holy Spirit would cause the bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ. But just before the epiclesis, the prayer clearly states that it is only bread and wine, and not the body and blood of the Lord, that are being offered to God the Father. We can assume that Hippolytus believed that the Words of Christ were efficacious within and for the use or action of the Supper, so that the bread and wine that are offered to communicants will be the true body and blood of Jesus, as the Words of Jesus declare. But it also seems pretty clear that Hippolytus did not insist that the Words of Christ need to be understood as being *immediately effective*, causing his body and blood to be instantly united to the bread and wine as soon as those Words were quoted within the prayer. After this quoting of the instituting Words of Jesus – at least as far as the progression and structure of the prayer are concerned – the bread and wine are still understood to be only bread and wine, and are offered to God as bread and wine.

An interesting example of an ancient eucharistic prayer that includes a more conventional epiclesis – invoking the Holy Spirit *upon the elements* – can be found in "The Ethiopian Anaphora of the Apostles." The text of this Ethiopian rite is accessible to us by means of a fourteenth-century manuscript, but it likely dates to the late fourth or early fifth centuries. It is noteworthy that this rite calls for a higher level of participation on the part of the laity than what we usually see in the early communion orders. A typical Preface dialogue is followed by a lengthy and elaborate Preface, with many thanksgivings, commemorations, and petitions. The Preface is then followed by a version of the *Sanctus*, after which follows a multi-part prayer spoken by the priest or presbyter, punctuated as it goes by petitions, acclamations, and confessions from the people:

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<sup>24</sup>The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome, trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell, in *Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries*, compiled and edited by Lucien Deiss (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1979), pp. 129-31.

[*Priest:*] Truly heaven and earth are full of the holiness of your glory, through our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, your holy Son. He came and was born of a virgin, so that he might fulfill your will and make a people for yourself.

[*People:*] Remember us all in your kingdom; remember us, Lord, Master, in your kingdom; remember us, Lord, in your kingdom, you remembered the thief on the right hand when you were on the tree of the holy cross.

[*Priest:*] He stretched out his hands in the passion, suffering to save the sufferers that trust in him; he, who was delivered to the passion that he might destroy death, break the bonds of Satan, tread down hell, lead forth the saints, establish a covenant and make known his resurrection. In the same night that they betrayed him, he took bread in his holy, blessed, and spotless hands.

[*People:*] We believe that this is he, truly we believe.

[*Priest:*] He looked up to heaven toward you, his Father, gave thanks, blessed and broke. And he gave to his disciples and said unto them: Take, eat, this bread is truly my body which will be broken on your behalf for the remission of sin.

[*People:*] Amen. Amen. Amen. We believe and confess, we glorify you, O our Lord and our God; that this is he we truly believe.

[*Priest:*] And likewise also the cup giving thanks, blessing it, and hallowing it, he gave it to his disciples, and said unto them, take, drink; this cup is my blood which will be shed on your behalf as a propitiation for many.

[*People:*] Amen. Amen. Amen. We believe and confess, we glorify you, O our Lord and our God; that this is he we truly believe.

[*Priest:*] And as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me.

[*People:*] We proclaim your death, Lord, and your holy resurrection; we believe in your ascension and your second advent. We glorify you, and confess you, we offer our prayer to you and supplicate you, our Lord and our God.

[*Priest:*] Now, Lord, we remember your death and your resurrection. We confess you and we offer to you this bread and this cup, giving thanks to you; and thereby you have made us worthy of the joy of standing before you and ministering to you. We pray and beseech you, O Lord, that you would send the Holy Spirit and power upon this bread and upon this cup. May he make them the body and blood of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, unto the ages of ages.

[*People:*] Amen. Lord pity us, Lord spare us, Lord have mercy on us.<sup>25</sup>

Note the flow and sequence. The Words of Institution are “prayed” over the bread and wine. With a confession of faith in Christ, and a thankful remembrance of his saving work and sacramental institution, the bread and wine – as bread and wine – are offered to God the Father. And a prayerful request is then made to God the Father, that he would send his Holy Spirit down upon these elements, to make and cause them to be the body and blood of his Son.

Another example of an ancient eucharistic prayer, from around the year 350 A.D., can be found in the “Euchology” of Serapion, the bishop of Thmuis in Egypt. An unusual variation in this prayer is that the epiclesis invokes the *Logos* or *Word* to come upon the bread and wine,

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<sup>25</sup>The Ethiopian Anaphora of the Apostles, in *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, originally edited by R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming; fourth edition edited by Paul E. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019), pp. 129-30. Various rubrics regarding the priests’ gestures and actions while he prays are here omitted.

rather than the Holy Spirit. The Preface portion of the prayer contains assorted ascriptions of praise and thanksgiving to God, culminating in a version of the *Sanctus*. Following that, the prayer continues as follows:

Lord of the Powers, fill this sacrifice too with your power and your participation. For it is to you that we have offered this living sacrifice, this bloodless offering. It is to you that we have offered this bread, figure of the body of your only-begotten Son. This bread is a figure of the holy body. For the Lord Jesus, the night when he was betrayed, took bread, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying: “Take and eat, this is my body, which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins.” For this reason, we too, celebrating the memorial of his death, have offered this bread, and we pray: Through this sacrifice, reconcile us all to yourself, be favorable to us, O God of truth. For just as this bread, once scattered upon the hills, has been brought together and become one, so too, deign to gather your Church from every people, from every land, from every town, village, and house, and make of her a single Church, living and catholic. We offer too the cup, figure of the blood. For the Lord Jesus, after the meal, took the cup and said to his disciples: “Take and drink, this is the New Testament, that is, my blood poured out for you, for the forgiveness of sins.” For this reason we too have offered the cup, a figure of the blood.

O God of truth, may your holy Word come down upon this bread, that it may become the body of the Word, and upon this cup, that it may become the blood of the Truth. Grant that all who communicate may receive a life-giving remedy, that will heal every weakness in them and strengthen them for all progress and all virtue; let it not be a cause, O God of truth, of condemnation, confusion, or shame. For we call on you, O eternal (God), through your only-begotten Son, in the Holy Spirit: Take pity on this people, judge them worthy of progress. Send your Angels to this people, to help them triumph over the Evil One and to strengthen your Church.<sup>26</sup>

The prayer goes on from here to offer petitions for the souls of the faithful departed, asking that they be sanctified by God and welcomed into his kingdom, followed by general petitions for God’s blessing upon all people, and ending finally with a Trinitarian doxological conclusion. For our purposes, though, we take note of the fact that in the portion of the prayer that we have quoted, it is the bread *as bread* that is prayerfully offered to the Lord, together with the cup of wine, within the “living sacrifice” and “bloodless offering” of this prayerful act of praise and thanksgiving. To be sure, the offered bread is described as a “figure” or image of the body of Jesus, even as the cup of wine is described as a “figure” of the blood of Jesus. This anticipates a sacramental union that will soon take place, but that is not believed to have occurred yet. When and as these earthly elements are offered to God, within this ritual, they are not yet understood to be the body and blood of the Lord. It is only after this – and after the recitation of the pertinent part of the Lord’s institution narrative over each element in turn – that the “holy Word” of God is further invoked upon these elements, so that they may “become the body of the Word” and “the blood of the Truth.”

As the theology of the Lord’s Supper became ever more freighted with sacrificial ideas, and as the liturgical forms employed for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper became ever more freighted with sacrificial terminology, it also came to be firmly believed as dogma in many

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<sup>26</sup>The Euchology of Serapion of Thmuis, trans. by Matthew J. O’Connell, in *Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries*, pp. 194-96.

Christian circles – especially in the Latin West – that in the sacrament, the body and blood of Jesus are united to the bread and wine as soon as the Words of Institution are spoken or prayed over that bread and wine. And this became an especially important point of conviction in the middle ages, when the doctrine of transubstantiation emerged as the accepted explanation of the mystery of the Real Presence. So, the later Roman Rite dropped the epiclesis, since it was now believed that as soon as the Words of Institution were quoted in the eucharistic prayer, the bread and wine were already at that moment the body and blood of Christ. It would no longer make any sense to ask God to send the Holy Spirit onto bread and wine over which the Words of Jesus have already been spoken, to cause them to become the body and blood of Jesus, since they were now believed already to be the body and blood of Jesus.

What was not omitted from the later Roman Rite, however, was a reference to the offering up of the bread and wine to God the Father, after the place in the prayer when the Words of Institution were recited, and before the place in the prayer where the epiclesis used to be. But now, the meaning of that offering was very different from what it had been, in earlier times of liturgical history, when it was not believed that this bread and wine were already the body and blood of Jesus. Now, in the altered Roman Rite, when the bread and wine were offered to God the Father, it was the body and blood of the Lord specifically that were being offered.

The text of the canon of the mass in this newer Roman Rite, where these changes can be seen, is believed to have become fixed around the middle of the sixth century, but surviving manuscripts exist only from the eighth century. In this canon, following the section in which the Words of Institution are quoted, these petitions are spoken:

Therefore also, Lord, we your servants, but also your holy people, having in remembrance the blessed passion of your Son Christ our Lord, likewise his resurrection from the dead, and also his glorious ascension into heaven, do offer to your excellent majesty from your gifts and bounty a pure victim, a holy victim, an unblemished victim, the holy bread of eternal life and the cup of everlasting salvation. Vouchsafe to look upon them with a favorable and kindly countenance, and accept them as you vouchsafed to accept the gifts of your righteous servant Abel, and the sacrifice of our patriarch Abraham, and that which your high priest Melchizedek offered to you, a holy sacrifice, an unblemished victim. We humbly beseech you, almighty God, bid these things be borne by the hands of your angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, that all of us who have received the most holy body and blood of your Son by partaking at this altar may be filled with all heavenly blessing and grace; through Christ our Lord.<sup>27</sup>

A trace of an older version of the prayer, in which an offering only of bread and wine had been understood to be taking place, can be seen in the now strange-sounding statement that something is being offered to God “from your gifts and bounty.” But then this echo of an ancient thank offering is overwhelmed by the new emphasis on a propitiatory sacrifice, when this offering is immediately described as “a pure victim, a holy victim, an unblemished victim.”

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<sup>27</sup>The Roman Rite, in *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, p. 208.

### *The Formula Missae: The Canon and the Verba*

Luther's reform of the sacramental rite could have followed a more conservative route, and could have removed from the canon all references to the offering up of Christ as victim, while retaining the older model of the eucharistic prayer with its references to the people's eucharistic sacrifice of praise and prayer, and to the offering up of bread and wine. Theologically I think he personally could have lived with a revised eucharistic prayer that still included within it the quoting of the Words of Institution, and that also still included a petition that the bread and wine there present would become the body and blood of Christ for the communicants. Luther probably would have found Serapion's prayer that God's "holy Word" come down upon the bread and wine to be preferable to the more common epiclesis, which calls upon God to send the Holy Spirit to the elements.

In part I think this because Luther, in the *Formula Missae*, calls for the Words of Institution to be chanted aloud *as a part of the Preface* – which is a prayer! – and with the use of the tone that was otherwise used for chanting the Our Father, which is, of course, also a prayer. In part I think this also because Luther was willing to subscribe to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, which recognizes that it is proper and acceptable to speak of a eucharistic sacrifice or thank offering in conjunction with the communion liturgy – just not a *propitiatory* sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus specifically, *within* the communion liturgy.<sup>28</sup> And in part I think this because of what Luther once wrote to Carlstadt regarding the "moment" of the sacramental union:

Why have you not taken note of this word of the Evangelist, "saying," by which he clearly indicates that the bread was given as he [Christ] was speaking and adds what he said, "Take and eat, this is my body?" From this it is clear that the giving of the bread took place at the same time as and together with the speaking, that is, as the words of Christ were uttered and spoken: "This is my body"... The nature of the act and the account of the event strongly suggest...that the giving and speaking were simultaneous, so that at one and the same time he gave the bread and said, "This is my body." ... Unless you would again bring up to us that miserable old question concerning the moment of the presence according to which, as the papists teach, Christ's body is there at the last syllable [of the words of institution] and not before. We despise these thoughts and prescribe no certain moment or time for God, but we are satisfied simply to believe that what God has said certainly happens. ... Thus we also say here, that the bread is the body of Christ because Christ said, "This is my body." We leave it to others, namely to those who quarrel over words, to fight

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<sup>28</sup>The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states that "the Mass...can be called an offering for the same reason it is called a Eucharist: here are offered prayers, thanksgiving, and the entire act of worship. ... The Greek canon also says a lot about an offering; but it clearly shows that it is not talking about the body and blood of the Lord in particular, but about the entire service, about the prayers and thanksgivings. This is what it says: 'And make us worthy to come to offer you entreaties and supplications and bloodless sacrifices for all the people.' Properly understood, this is not offensive. It prays that we might be made worthy to offer prayers and supplications and bloodless sacrifices for the people. It calls even prayers 'bloodless sacrifices.' It also says this a little later: 'We offer you this reasonable and bloodless service.' It is a misinterpretation to translate this as a 'reasonable victim' and to apply it to the body of Christ itself. For the canon is talking about the entire service; and by 'reasonable service' [Rom. 12:1] Paul meant the service of the mind, fear, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, and the like..." (XXIV:87-88, Kolb/Wengert pp. 273-74).

about the moment and syllables. For we are commanded to believe that the Word of God is true; but we are not to investigate as to which moment or how they are true or fulfilled.<sup>29</sup>

In his revision of the sacramental rite of the mass, however, Luther made the pastoral judgment that a more conservative approach would not suffice in removing the dangerous confusion regarding the directionality of the sacrament that had been created by the Roman Rite's innovations in how the terms "sacrifice" and "offering" were used in the Roman canon. Luther concluded that it would be necessary to wipe the slate of the canon clean, and drop all references to any kind of sacrifice, so that the people would once again clearly understand that the direction of the sacrament is from God to us, and not from us to God.

And besides, Luther's seemingly radical excision of the entire post-*Sanctus* canon – beginning with the phrase "Te igitur, clementissime Pater" ("To you therefore, most merciful Father") – together with the slight adjustments in other parts of the eucharistic liturgy that accompanied this excision, was perhaps not so radical after all, since only the clergy would have really noticed that the canon was gone. For the laity, this deletion did not represent a major, jarring change in what they would have heard and seen during the service, since the canon of the Roman Rite was whispered by the priest and not read aloud. And Luther was conservative in other respects, such as in his retention of the elevation – albeit in a different place in the communion rite – although this was done as a concession to the weak and not, it would seem, as something that Luther expected to be done in perpetuity in churches that had embraced his evangelical reforms. This is how Luther described his proposals for the revision of the canon and the reasons for some of those revisions:

I. After the Creed or after the sermon let bread and wine be made ready for blessing in the customary manner. ...

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...

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.

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

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<sup>29</sup>Martin Luther, Letter to Andreas Carlstadt, 1528 (WA Br. IV, 366-388); quoted in Gaylin R. Schmeling, "The Theology of the Lord's Supper," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (December 1988), pp. 27-28.

benefit of the weak in faith who might be offended if such an obvious change in this rite of the mass were suddenly made. This concession can be made especially where through sermons in the vernacular they have been taught what the elevation means.

V. After this, the Lord's Prayer shall be read. Thus, let us pray: "Taught by thy saving precepts..." ...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.

VI. Then, while the *Agnus Dei* is sung, let him [the liturgist] communicate, first himself and then the people.<sup>30</sup>

Luther's suggestion that "the evangelically minded" have the freedom to recite the Words of Institution "either silently or audibly" seems strange. This was a concession that Luther should not have made, and in later years he certainly would not have made it. In his Large Catechism, published six years after the appearance of the *Formula Missae*, Luther writes – concerning who it is who receives the benefits of Christ's Supper – that

It is the one who believes what the words say and what they give, for they are not spoken or preached to stone and wood but to those who hear them, those to whom he says, "Take and eat," etc. And because he offers and promises forgiveness of sins, it can be received in no other way than by faith. This faith he himself demands in the Word when he says, "given for you" and "shed for you," as if he said, "This is why I give it and bid you eat and drink, that you may take it as your own and enjoy it." All those who let these words be addressed to them and believe that they are true have what the words declare.<sup>31</sup>

None of this can be so, however, if the Words of the Lord in the sacrament are not audibly "spoken or preached" to communicants; if these Words are not "addressed to" communicants; or if communicants are not able to "hear them" in the celebration of the Supper. And of course, by the time we get to the Formula of Concord in 1577, this question is dogmatically and decisively settled for us. The Solid Declaration teaches that

in the administration of the Holy Supper the Words of Institution are to be clearly and plainly spoken or sung publicly in the congregation, and in no case are they to be omitted. This is done, first, so that Christ's command, "Do this," may be obeyed. Second, it is done so that Christ's words will arouse, strengthen, and confirm the hearers' faith in the nature and benefits of this sacrament... Third, it is done so that the elements of bread and wine are sanctified and consecrated in this holy practice, whereby Christ's body and blood are offered to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says [1 Cor. 10:16], "The cup of blessing that we bless..."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," pp. 26-29.

<sup>31</sup>Large Catechism V:33-35, Kolb/Wengert p. 470.

<sup>32</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:79-82, Kolb/Wengert p. 607.

*The Formula Missae: The Elevation*

Regarding the elevation, Luther seems to sense that a ceremonial ritual which looks like a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people – since it would normally be performed by the pastor with his back to the congregation – would indeed require oft-repeated explanations that it no longer means what it used to mean; and that for Lutherans it does not actually mean what it would likely be taken to mean by most observers who witness it without the benefit of these explanations. The “sermons in the vernacular” through which people would be “taught what the elevation means” now, would need to state – in effect – what Luther himself later stated in his *(Brief) Confession concerning Christ’s Supper*:

This, too, would be a fine interpretation, if the priest would with the elevation of the sacrament do nothing other than illustrate the words, “This is my body,” as if he wished to express by means of his action: Look, dear Christians, this is the body which is given for you. Thus the elevation would not be a symbol of the sacrifice to God (as the papists foolishly imagine) but an admonition directed toward men, to provoke them to faith, particularly since he immediately elevates the bread right after speaking the words: “This is my body which is given for you.”<sup>33</sup>

The Philippists, of course, never liked the elevation. But in time many orthodox Lutherans also seem to have concluded that the counterintuitive explanation that, in Lutheran churches, the elevation does not mean what it means in Romanist churches, was no longer worth the effort; and that the church’s belief in the Real Presence could be confessed and underscored through the use of other ceremonies which do not have the look and feel of an offering up of the body and blood of Jesus to God the Father. And so, Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae – whose credentials as orthodox Lutherans are unimpeachable – say this in their 1569 *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel*:

After the Exhortation, let the priest sing the Our Father and the Words of Institution of the Supper of Jesus Christ... And because the elevation has, for good and important reasons, been abolished in the neighboring Reformation churches of this and other lands, it shall therefore be discontinued in all places, so that the dissimilarity may not produce disputes.<sup>34</sup>

We know that this directive did not arise from Calvinist influences, because Chemnitz and Andreae had also said in this church order that

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<sup>33</sup>Martin Luther, “Confession concerning Christ’s Supper,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 38 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 314.

Of course, if the elevation of the body and blood of Christ is taken to be a gesture that carries the thought, “Look, dear Christians, this is the body which is given for you,” then one would think that such a gesture could be carried out while the pastor is facing those “dear Christians” – perhaps during the *Pax Domini* – rather than while his back is to them. Since Luther in the *Formula Missae* moved the elevation from the time immediately after each part of the *Verba* has been recited to the time when the *Benedictus* is being sung, it would seem that he could have reversed the directional stance of the pastor for this ritual as well.

<sup>34</sup>Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae, *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel* (1569), trans. by Jacob Corzine, Matthew C. Harrison, and Andrew Smith (*Chemnitz’s Works*, Volume 9) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), p. 91.

the pastors and ministers of the church who wish to celebrate Mass should, if communicants are present, approach the altar with all decency, and with deep devotion and invocation of the Son of God, and begin, celebrate, and complete the Office of the Mass not merely in their common clothing but also in their churchly vestments, such as alb, chasuble, and stole. The altar shall also be adorned and clothed with fair linens and other decorative cloths. Likewise, candles shall burn on the altar, because such is the observance in neighboring Reformation churches. And nevertheless the common people may be instructed that such things are unnecessary, as though a special service to God consisted in them or the sanctification of this Sacrament depended upon them. Rather, this practice may be observed as adiaphora without any superstition. And so that in all the churches of this principality the ceremonies in the Office of the Mass may henceforth be conducted in all points with decency, order, and uniformity, as much as ever is possible...<sup>35</sup>

Returning to an analysis of Luther's reform of the communion rite in the *Formula Missae*, and of his preferred and recommended usage regarding the chanting of the Words of Institution, Frank C. Senn reminds us that

Luther deleted the offertory prayers (the "minor canon") and reduced the *canon missae* to the preface, the words of institution (joined to the preface by a *qui*-clause in the style of a "proper" insertion), and the *Sanctus*. The purpose of the deletion was to clarify the "direction" of the sacrament as God's gift of communion with Christ rather than the people's offering to God. But Luther also wanted the words of Christ to be proclaimed aloud since they are "a summary of the gospel." So he inserted the *Verba Christi* into the section of the canon [broadly speaking] that was traditionally sung aloud (the preface), instead of within the post-*Sanctus* prayers that were customarily recited silently by the priest. Luther's deletion of the Canon [narrowly speaking] may strike us as an extreme measure. We need to remember, however, that the Canon was not the entire eucharistic prayer but only the prayers after the *Sanctus*, beginning with the *Te igitur*. Few lay worshipers would have noticed the omission of a silent prayer; but they would have noticed the omission of what was, for them, the high point of the mass – the elevation of the host and chalice. By retaining the elevation of the host at the *Benedictus qui venit* ("Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"), Luther managed to retain the most dramatic moment of the medieval mass while effecting the most radical surgery on the Canon.<sup>36</sup>

#### *The Formula Missae: It's Place in Liturgical History Looking Forward*

The suggestions made by Luther in 1523, for how the service of the sacrament could be structured in an evangelical mass, did have an influence on some of the early Lutheran orders that appeared soon after the publication of the *Formula Missae*. Wittenberg itself – for which Luther had specifically prepared and recommended his order – did not adopt it exactly as Luther wrote it. But the order of service that was prepared by Johannes Bugenhagen in 1524 and that was for a

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<sup>35</sup>Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae, *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel*, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup>Frank C. Senn, "The Reform of the Mass: Evangelical, but Still Catholic," in *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 39.

time used in the churches of the city did followed the main contours of Luther's proposals. In Bugenhagen's slight revision of Luther's major revision,

After the Sermon or Gospel, the priest at Wittenberg prepares the bread and wine for as many persons as have announced to him that they desire to come to the Holy Sacrament, and have declared to the pastor or priest why they wish to come to the Sacrament, and have received instruction from him. The priest may then pray thus with the people: "All-gracious Father, merciful God, help that this bread and wine may be to us the true Body and the innocent Blood of Thine all-beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

And when he has prepared the bread and wine, the priest begins immediately to sing the *Preface*, no *Offertory* or *Canon Minor* being used. He sings or reads in loud words in Latin: *The Lord be with you.* Answer of the choir: *And with thy spirit.* Then he sings: *Lift up your hearts to God.* Answer: *We have lifted up our hearts to God.* Then he sings: *Let us thank God our Lord.* Answer: *For it is just and right.* He further sings: *Yea, verily, it is just, right and salutary that we should in all places and at all times, give thanks to Thee, Holy Father, Almighty, everlasting God, through Christ our Lord.* Then the priest refrains a short time from singing or reading, until he have taken the bread in his hands. Then he sings or reads with a loud voice: "Who in the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said: Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then he raises the sacrament and shows it to the people. Then he sings or reads: "After the same manner also, when he had supped, he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to them saying: Drink ye all of this. This is the cup of the New Testament in my blood, which was shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Then he raises the cup; and immediately the choir and people sing: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Praise be to thee in the highest. Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord. Happiness and salvation in the highest."

While the *Sanctus* is being sung, the priest should wait, and do nothing; or he should meditate, or pray as he will, especially that unto the utmost ends of the whole world, as the Gospel is learned, faith may be given to the words of Christ, the sacrament and attestation of which he sees before him. After the *Sanctus*, the priest sings: Let us pray: "Our Father, which art in Heaven — And lead us not into temptation." Answer of the choir: "But deliver us from evil. Amen. May this be done through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost," etc. Then the priest at the altar turns to the people and says: "The peace of the Lord be with you alway." Answer: "And with thy spirit." Then the choir sings, and the priest speaks in words: "O Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us, etc., give us thy peace."

Then it would not be improper if the priest desire to give an admonition to the people, for him to speak of the Holy Sacrament or something consolatory from the Gospel. Afterwards, before the reception of the Holy Sacrament, he should pray thus for the people: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou eternal word of the Father, Thou Saviour of the world, Thou only living God and man, deliver us by Thy holy Body and scarlet Blood from all sins; help us at all times to fulfil Thy commandments, and not to be separated from Thee in eternity. Amen." After this prayer the priest administers to himself, and then to the people.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>"Bugenhagen's Order of Service of 1524," *The Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (October 1891), pp. 290-92.

Another important Lutheran order, which was significantly influenced by the *Formula Missae* in its structure, but also with some unique features and content, was Olavus Petri's *Swedish Mass* of 1531. Here is a relevant section:

*Then the priest commences the Preface, saying thus:*

The Lord be with you. *Response:* And with your spirit.

Lift up your hearts to God. *Response:* We lift up our hearts.

Let us give thanks unto our Lord God. *Response:* It is right and meet.

Truly it is meet, right and blessed that we should in all places give you thanks and praise, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, for all your benefits; and especially for that benefit which you gave us when by reason of sins we were all in so bad a case that nothing but damnation and eternal death awaited us, and no creature in heaven or earth could help us. Then you sent forth your only-begotten son Jesus Christ, who was of the same divine nature as yourself; you suffered him to become a man for our sake; you laid our sins upon him; and you suffered him to undergo death instead of our all dying eternally. And as he has overcome death and risen again and now is alive for evermore, so likewise shall all those who put their trust in him overcome sin and death and through him attain to everlasting life.

And for our admonition that we should bear in mind and never forget such a benefit, in the night that he was betrayed, he celebrated a supper, in which he took the bread in his holy hands, gave thanks to his heavenly Father, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said: Take and eat; this is my body which will be given for you; do this in remembrance of me. *Then the priest lifts it up, lays it down again, and takes the cup, saying:* Likewise also he took the cup in his holy hands, gave thanks to his heavenly Father, blessed it, and gave it to his disciples and said: Take and drink all from this; this is the cup of the new testament in my blood, which will be shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me. *Then he lifts it up and sets it down again. Then is read or sung:* Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. *Then the priest says:* Let us all now pray as our Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, saying, Our Father... *Then the priest turns to the people and says:* The peace of the Lord be with you. *Response:* And also with your spirit.<sup>38</sup>

The basic pattern of the communion rite that Luther set forth in the *Formula Missae* involves the Words of Institution being chanted according to a *prayer tone*, in the literary form of a remembrance *within a prayer* – that is, as a part of the Preface. This pattern did not, however, become normative in the Lutheran Church. Luther's own *Deutsche Messe* of 1526 called for the Words of Institution to be sung aloud as a self-standing narrative or declaration, according to the tone that was otherwise used for the chanting of the Gospel.<sup>39</sup> But this was not because Luther had come to think that it was an error to set forth the Words of Institution as a part of a prayer, and that he now needed to correct the mistake he had made by calling for this to be done in the *Formula Missae*. In his Preface to the *Deutsche Messe* Luther spoke of the

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<sup>38</sup>Olavus Petri: The Swedish Mass 1531, in *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, pp. 244-45.

<sup>39</sup>Martin Luther, "The German Mass and Order of Service," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, pp. 80-81.

divine service or mass...in Latin which we published earlier under the title *Formula Missae*. It is not now my intention to abrogate or to change this service. It shall not be affected in the form which we have followed so far; but we shall continue to use it when or where we are pleased or prompted to do so. For in no wise would I want to discontinue the service in the Latin language...<sup>40</sup>

Luther did believe that the Words of Institution are inherently evangelical, and that they are in themselves a special proclamation of the gospel from Christ to us. But he believed that this proclamation from Christ could be articulated liturgically from within the literary form of a prayer, as communicants in a sense “overhear” those words when the pastor speaks them to God at the altar, in reverent thanksgiving and in solemn remembrance.

In some ways this is like the *Protevangelion* that Adam and Eve heard, when the Lord spoke in the Garden of Eden concerning the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head and thereby deliver humanity from Satan’s deceptions. But this *Protevangelion* was not, strictly speaking, spoken *to* our first parents. It was spoken *to the devil* as a curse and a threat: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15, English Standard Version). Yet when Adam and Eve *overheard* this curse and threat, those words became *for them* a blessing and a promise, and were received by them as a comforting proclamation of the gospel.

#### *The Formula Missae: Christian Freedom*

At the conclusion of his comments regarding the conserving and reforming of various texts and rituals of the mass – some of the less significant aspects of which we pass over here – Luther offers an important summary statement, which we shall include in its entirety:

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 for Christians, i.e., children of the “free woman” [Gal. 4:31], who observe them voluntarily 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

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<sup>40</sup>Martin Luther, “The German Mass and Order of Service,” pp. 62-63.

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.<sup>41</sup>

A few contextualizing comments are in order. In laying out these basic principles of Christian freedom, in its relation to God’s Word, Luther has two opponents in mind: not only the Roman Church, with its legalistic *requirements* regarding many matters of text and ritual in the liturgy, but also puritanical radicals such as Carlstadt and Zwillinger, with their legalistic *prohibitions* of virtually everything that had been a part of the inherited legacy of worship in the western church.

In response to the papist liturgical tyranny that had previously weighed down consciences with human laws that often contradicted the gospel, Luther reminds everyone that in our studies of sacred history we do not “find any evidence for such an established rite, either in the early fathers or in the primitive church, but only in the Roman church.” The quotations from several ancient liturgical texts that I have included in this essay illustrate the kind of variety that existed across the span of the early church. But of course, this variety existed within the parameters set by God’s Word for the kind of solemnity and seriousness that are necessary, according to the First Commandment, for mortals who stand and kneel before almighty God. People today need to be explicitly reminded of things that both Luther and his opponents simply assumed and took for granted: that the church is to “offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29, ESV).

In response to the kind of iconoclastic liturgical tyranny that had wreaked havoc in Wittenberg during Luther’s absence at the Wartburg, Luther reminded everyone that we cannot do without “external rites” – “just as we cannot do without food or drink.” And every religious body has external rites, whether they admit it or not. The question to be asked, then, is not whether there are external rites in a religious gathering, but whether decisions about the use of the rites and ceremonies that are in fact being followed, have been made after careful thought and with a knowledge of the history of such things, or whether such decisions have been made rashly, impetuously, and in ignorance of the church’s larger tradition. And another question to be asked, is what the rites and ceremonies that have been chosen for use are intended to teach, or even what they do actually teach or imply regardless of intention. Carlstadt’s deliberate donning of secular attire for the celebration of Holy Communion, rather than ecclesiastical vestments, was not the absence of external rites, but was itself an external rite that taught and testified to something that Carlstadt definitely wanted to get across.

Today, a typical big-box “contemporary” church almost always follows a very predictable opening sequence of quick-paced, hand-clappy praise choruses to “warm up the crowd”; followed by the performance of a slower-speed song, often by a female singer crooning seductively; followed by a chatty welcome, a few announcements, and a prayer to “Father God” offered winsomely by a man bedecked in jeans and an untucked shirt. These, too, are “external rites,” which teach and testify to something. And we should not be overly cerebral in our conceptualization of what “teach” means in this context. A praise song set to an emotionally-manipulative Dionysian chord progression, with words that involve a mantra-like stringing-together of innocuous phrases from the Bible, may not teach much of anything in terms of creedal or dogmatic content. But such a praise song may very well be ingraining an enthusiast piety into misled Lutherans who have been enticed by these sectarian worship forms: freighted as they are with Arminian and revivalist

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<sup>41</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” pp. 30-31.

assumptions; and deliberately shaped as they have been to implement an Arminian and revivalist purpose – even if they do not explicitly teach Arminian and revivalist doctrine.

As I have already noted, Luther’s wise guiding principle in the *Formula Missae* was to avoid innovations as much as possible,

For I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, ...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.

Without being overly concerned with the ceremonial details, and while recognizing that those details may vary from place to place, Luther’s own liturgical proposals nevertheless followed the judicious and conservative approach that was later endorsed in the Augsburg Confession and in its Apology:

...it can readily be judged that nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches.<sup>42</sup>

Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies.<sup>43</sup>

#### *The Formula Missae: Vestments*

In his summary, Luther then goes on to discuss vestments. Over against both Carlstadt and Rome, he states that

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.<sup>44</sup>

Lutheran exemplars of the past, such as Brenz, Chemnitz, and Andreae; and such as our own Norwegian Synod fathers, deeply appreciated the value of historic vestments as teaching tools regarding the office of the public ministry, and as contributors to an overall atmosphere of dignity and “specialness” in public worship. But they never thought that wearing them makes a pastor more acceptable to God. This is Luther’s point. It is in fact definitely *not* acceptable to God if a man adorns himself in a lacy surplice or in an ornate chasuble, in a spirit of proud and showy flamboyance, while looking down his nose at those who embrace a reverent yet simple “low church” piety. And it is likewise *not* acceptable to God if a man adorns himself in an academic robe, or in a neat suit and tie, in a spirit of proud and superior austerity, while looking down his

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<sup>42</sup>Augsburg Confession [Latin], Introduction of Part Two: 6, in *The Book of Concord*, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 49.

<sup>43</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:3, Kolb/Wengert p. 258.

<sup>44</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 31.

nose at those who embrace a reverent and ceremonially-rich “high church” piety. There should be a mutual fraternal tolerance among the adherents of “high church” and “low church” pieties, even while each may respectfully make their case for what should or might be seen as “best practice.” In regard to the question of vestments, and in regard also to so many other questions that arise in the church, there is no better advice to be had than that give by the apostle Paul:

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:12-17, ESV)

But beyond the limits of the mutual respect that should exist among all who embrace a reverent *churchly* piety – whether “high church” or “low church” – would be those presumptuous clerics who foist an irreverent “no church” *impiety* onto God’s people, as they attempt to reshape the church into an image of the world: while catering to the obsessive craving of the flesh for entertainment; and while accommodating the old Adam’s arrogant disrespect for authority and for anything that is holy, out of its control, or beyond its experience. Such causers of division and offense need to hear *these* words from the apostle Paul:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. (Romans 12:2-3, ESV)

#### *The Formula Missae: Pastoral Care and Preparation for Communion – Examination*

The full name of the *Formula Missae* (in translation) is “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” And Luther sees a need in this document for a discussion of communion, not only in terms of the public ritual of offering and receiving it, but also in terms of the personal, pastoral preparation of communicants. And so, in a special section entitled “The Communion of the People,” Luther sets forth a thorough guide for pastors, shaped by the gospel in general and by the Lord’s institution of his sacrament in particular. He directs that “the bishop” – who *oversees* both the public celebration of the sacrament, and the souls of those who would receive it – should

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.<sup>45</sup>

This is the pastoral examination of communicants, which became in the Lutheran Church – for many generations to come – a definitive feature of a pastor's stewardship of the Lord's Supper and of his spiritual care of the communicant members of his congregation. Luther revisits this subject in his Large Catechism, where he says that we must speak about the Sacrament of the Altar

under three headings, stating what it is, what its benefits are, and who is to receive it. All this is established from the words Christ used to institute it. So everyone who wishes to be a Christian and to go to the sacrament should know them. *For we do not intend to admit to the sacrament, and administer it to, those who do not know what they seek or why they come.*<sup>46</sup>

It is indeed the called pastors of the church who are entrusted with the responsibility of examining would-be communicants, and of either admitting them to the sacrament, or declining to admit them, based on their preparedness or their lack thereof as this would be determined by the pastor in the examination. The Danish Lutheran theologian Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand explained in the next century that “The only administrators of the Holy Communion are the ministers of the Word, who have been legitimately called, like Aaron, Heb. 5:4; also because those alone should administer this Sacrament who are able to examine the faith of the men using this Sacrament.”<sup>47</sup> And the Formula of Concord also incorporates into itself a statement that Luther had made in his capacity as a minister of Word and Sacrament – in his treatise on *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* – that the Lord's Supper “is administered daily through our ministry or office.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 321.

<sup>46</sup>Large Catechism V:1-2, Kolb/Wengert p. 467. Emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup>Jesper Rasmussen [Caspar Erasmus] Brochmand; quoted in “Lay Celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar,” *Logia*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Epiphany/January 1993), p. 55.

More recently, John F. Brug has written that “The power of the sacraments is not dependent on ordination or on the person of the administrator, but the pastor is responsible for how the sacraments are administered. The administration of the Lord's Supper involves spiritual judgment. Decisions commonly need to be made by the administrator about who is properly prepared to receive the Sacrament, both in public worship services and in the visitation of shut-ins. At times, there is a responsibility to exclude some from receiving the Sacrament. This requires a shepherd's knowledge of the sheep, and it is definitely the work of spiritual oversight” (*The Ministry of the Word* [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009], p. 118). Brug again: “It is clear that the Lord's Supper should be administered by the pastor. It is not our practice to have a layman officiate at the Lord's Supper. Even when congregations were quite isolated and some did not have a pastor present every Sunday, the Lord's Supper was celebrated only when the pastor was present. Proper administration of the Lord's Supper involves more than being able to read the right words. It involves pastoral responsibility for the souls of those who attend” (p. 221).

We leave aside here a detailed discussion of the historic debate within Lutheranism over the question of whether there are or may be certain unusual and extraordinary “emergency” circumstances that would call for an unordained layman or theological student to preside at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, in the absence of an ordained pastor. Most Lutheran theologians over the centuries have reached the casuistic judgment that the answer is No. Some have reached the casuistic judgment that the answer is Yes. See Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. by Christian C. Tiews (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), pp. 206-12.

<sup>48</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:77, Kolb/Wengert p. 607.

Elsewhere in the treatise from which that statement is taken, Luther further *defined* this “ministry or office” when he wrote that “God ordained” that the Lord's Supper “should be administered to Christians through *the clerical*

In contrast to Protestants in the tradition of Zwingli and Calvin – who deny that the body and blood of Christ are objectively present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper – Confessional Lutherans have always been much more concerned and serious about the spiritual preparation of communicants. This is due to the Lutheran belief that

the body and blood of Christ are truly distributed even to the unworthy and that the unworthy truly receive the body and blood when the sacrament is conducted according to Christ’s institution and command. But they receive it to judgment, as St. Paul says [1 Cor. 11:27-32], for they misuse the holy sacrament because they receive it without true repentance and without faith.<sup>49</sup>

Because of their concern for souls, Lutherans want to be as sure as they are able to be, that all who commune in their churches will commune in a *worthy* manner, with true repentance, and with true faith in the Words and promise of Christ. And so Lutherans affirm that fully-trained *pastors* should be in charge of something as weighty as the examination of communicants, and the administration of the Lord’s Supper to them, as those pastors thereby carry out for us an important aspect of their calling as our “spiritual fathers...who govern and guide us by the Word of God”<sup>50</sup> – to quote from the Large Catechism.

The Lutheran Church does not believe that the rite of ordination confers upon a pastor any supernatural power to confect a sacrament which he does not already have by virtue of the fact that he – as a baptized Christian – already has the Word of God. But what an unordained lay Christian does *not* have is an *orderly divine call* to make use of that supernatural power in this very public and very important way. Ordination is a public affirmation and certification that a man has in fact been trained, tested, and called according to the order of the church, and it serves as a testimony of his fitness for the serious responsibilities of this sacred office.<sup>51</sup> This is why Luther told Johann Sutel of Göttingen – who had been called as preacher in that city – that he should not preside at and administer the Lord’s Supper until he had been ordained. According to Luther, when his ordination would take place, “then publicly before the altar, by the other ministers with prayer and laying on of hands, you shall receive the testimony and authority to handle the Supper.”<sup>52</sup>

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*office.*” And in that treatise Luther further *described* this “ministry or office” when he wrote that in “a true Christian mass according to the ordinance and institution of Christ, as well as according to the true intention of Christ and the church,” it is the “*pastor, bishop, or minister in the pastoral office, rightly and honorably and publicly called,*” who consecrates and distributes the sacrament (Martin Luther, “The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 38 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971], pp. 152 and 208. Emphases added.).

<sup>49</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:16 (quoting the Wittenberg Concord), Kolb/Wengert p. 596.

<sup>50</sup>Large Catechism I:158, Kolb/Wengert p. 408.

<sup>51</sup>The Evangelical Lutheran Synod formally declared in its 2005 doctrinal statement on *The Public Ministry of the Word* that “In the Lutheran Confessions ordination is understood as the rite by which the church confirms a man to be suitable for a call to the pastoral office (SA Part III, Art. X, Treatise 66–69). Historically the Lutheran church has reserved this rite for those entering the pastoral office.”

<sup>52</sup>Martin Luther, Letter to Johann Sutel, March 1, 1531; quoted in Hellmut Lieberg, *Office and Ordination in Luther and Melancthon*, trans. by Matthew Carver (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020), p. 159.

In the next century, after the German Lutheran jurist Christoph Besold had converted to Roman Catholicism, he became an outspoken critic of Lutheranism. One of the things he claimed was that “the Lutherans often use as vicars certain scholars who are not yet ordained with the laying on of hands, permitting them to hear confession, feed the sick, and administer their [Lord’s] Supper.” The Lutheran theologian Johann Conrad Dannhauer responded to this by emphasizing the importance of ordination as a public “setting apart” of a man for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, which carried with it the “benefit, that the examined and unexamined teachers of the church can be distinguished.” Dannhauer adds:

Who, then, is the opponent of order who superciliously despises this rite? He is neither peaceful, because he goes against the church, nor conscientious, because he regards as worthless the means that serve to calm consciences; rather, he is headstrong.<sup>53</sup>

In keeping with the historic good order of the church, if theological students are required to complete their studies and to be tested and ordained before they are allowed to carry out those important soul-care duties of the public ministry that require the most pastoral skill and competence, then complaints like those of Besold could no longer be made.

Many later Lutheran church orders stipulated that a person wanting to receive the Lord’s Supper should speak privately with the pastor prior to each occasion when he wished to commune. Luther’s counsel in the *Formula Missae*, however, called for a less rigorous approach:

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.<sup>54</sup>

Yet even if the pastor does not require all communicants to speak with him each time they intend to partake of the sacrament, he does reserve the right to ask a guest or a parishioner to speak with him beforehand on any occasion when he judges that this needs to be done. Pastoral aptitude is required not only within such a private conversation, but also for determining whether such a private conversation should take place. In the *Formula Missae*, Luther describes the kind of things that may need to be taught, the kind of judgments that may need to be made, and the kind of admonitions and encouragements that may need to be given, in the context of such private conversations. He writes that a communicant

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, the fear of death, or some other evil, such as temptation of the 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. ... Those, therefore, who are not able to answer in the manner

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<sup>53</sup>Johann Conrad Dannhauer, *Liber conscientiae apertus, sive theologiae conscientiarum* (Strassburg: Spoor, 1679), pp. 1005-06; quoted in Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *The Church & the Office of the Ministry, Ministry*, trans. and edited by Matthew C. Harrison (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), p. 260.

<sup>54</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 33.

described above 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 disgraced 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” [Jas. 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.<sup>55</sup>

This level of pastoral care is beyond the ability of a lay elder or of an untried seminary student. But this level of pastoral care is a part of what is or should be expected of a man who has been authorized to serve as the steward of the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood in any given time and place.

#### *The Formula Missae: Pastoral Care and Preparation for Communion – Absolution*

One of the primary ways in which Lutheran pastors have traditionally exercised this kind of specialized spiritual care for communicants is private confession and absolution, which was and is often been carried out in conjunction with the pre-communion examination. The Augsburg Confession states accordingly that “private absolution should be retained and not abolished,”<sup>56</sup> and that, in fact,

Confession has not been abolished by the preachers on our side. For the custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved.<sup>57</sup>

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession reaffirms the Lutheran position on this and on related matters when it declares that we Lutherans

do not abolish the Mass but religiously retain and defend it. Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord’s day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, *after they have been examined and absolved*. We also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” pp. 32-33.

<sup>56</sup>Augsburg Confession XI:1 [German], Kolb/Wengert p. 44.

<sup>57</sup>Augsburg Confession XXV:1 [German], Kolb/Wengert p. 72.

<sup>58</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:1, Kolb/Wengert p. 258. Emphasis added.

In the Augsburg Confession it is recognized, however, that in confession “it is not necessary to enumerate all misdeeds and sins, since it is not possible to do so. Psalm 19[12]: ‘But who can detect their errors?’”<sup>59</sup> And in the Large Catechism it is stated that Lutherans “have always taught” that the practice of going to the pastor for confession

should be voluntary and purged of the pope’s tyranny. We have been set free from his coercion and from the intolerable burden and weight he imposed upon the Christian community. Up to now, as we all know from experience, there has been no law quite so oppressive as that which forced everyone to make confession on pain of the gravest mortal sin.<sup>60</sup>

And according to Luther, what cannot be required in general likewise cannot be required in the specific context of preparation for the Lord’s Supper. And so he says, in the *Formula Missae*:

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].<sup>61</sup>

I must say that I find the seeming comparison between the freedom to go or not to go to private confession, and the freedom to go or not to go to communion, a bit odd. Luther’s point regarding private confession would appear to be that since it “is useful and should not be despised,” Christians therefore should at least occasionally make use of it. But there is no divine command for exactly when or how often they should do so. Likewise with respect to the Lord’s Supper, while there is a more definite command from Christ that it be received (“Do this”), precisely when and how often it is received is not a matter of divine prescription. Luther wants to remove *coercion* from both confession and communion, but he does not want to remove either confession or communion *themselves* from the life of the church and of the Christian.

And even if a church order might indicate that someone is ordinarily expected to go to private confession before receiving the Lord’s Supper (as was the case with some Lutheran church orders), that still does not mean that any specific sins need to be confessed. There is value and special comfort in receiving a personal and individualized absolution even if the confession that preceded it had been a general confession. Luther says:

To confess sin does not mean (as among the papists) to recite a long catalog of sins, but to desire absolution. This is in itself a sufficient confession, that is, acknowledging yourself guilty and confessing that you are a sinner. And no more should be demanded and required, no naming and recitation of all or some, many or a few sins, unless you of your own accord desire to indicate something that especially burdens your conscience and calls

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<sup>59</sup>Augsburg Confession XI:2 [German], Kolb/Wengert p. 44.

<sup>60</sup>Large Catechism, Confession: 1, Kolb/Wengert p. 476.

<sup>61</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 34.

for instruction and advice or specific comfort, such as young, plain folk and also others often require.<sup>62</sup>

In the Smalcald Articles we confess that “absolution or the power of the keys” is “a comfort and help against sin and a bad conscience and was instituted by Christ in the gospel,” and therefore that

confession, or absolution, should by no means be allowed to fall into disuse in the church – especially for the sake of weak consciences and for the wild young people, so that they may be examined and instructed in Christian teaching. However, the enumeration of sins ought to be a matter of choice for each individual... Because private absolution is derived from the office of the keys, we should not neglect it but value it highly, just as all the other offices of the Christian church.<sup>63</sup>

So, even if private confession is not required, it should at least be encouraged, as Luther encouraged it in the *Formula Missae* when he said that it “is useful and should not be despised.” And people should be actively invited to it. If the invitation is regularly offered by the pastor, then it may at least occasionally be heeded by a communicant burdened with guilt who feels the need to confess something that is bothering him, and to discuss it with the pastor, before taking communion.

A Christian has the right to expect that the man who is going to administer the sacrament to him in the public service, will also be able to help him prepare for that administration in a *private* meeting *before* the public service. Here again is a reason why properly-trained and duly-called pastors are the ones who carry out these sacred duties in and for the church. More is involved here than a formulaic recitation of the words of absolution after someone has confessed a sin. Pastors know how to hear a confession. They know how to apply the gospel in response to a confession, how to counsel someone who has made a confession, and how to keep the confidences that are shared in a confession. Lay elders and untried seminary students are not ready for this kind of intense and deeply personal encounter with a troubled conscience.

#### *The Formula Missae: Hymns in the Vernacular*

The liturgical texts and canticles of the *Formula Missae*, as published in 1523, were in Latin. But Luther knew that over the long term, the exclusive use of Latin in public worship would not suffice, especially with respect to the uneducated who did not know Latin. Indeed, the Augsburg Confession, six and a half years later, is very explicit in saying that in “the Mass” as the Lutherans observe it – which they celebrate “with the greatest reverence” –

Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns, added for the instruction of the people, are interspersed here and there among the Latin ones. For

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<sup>62</sup>Martin Luther, *Am Oster Dinstage. Evangelium Luc. xxiii. Ein ander Predigt*. [On the Festival of Easter. The Gospel according to Luke 24. Another Sermon.] (1531) (*Crucigers Sommerpostille*, 1544) (WA 21:263); quoted in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, compiled and edited by Ewald M. Plass (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), Vol. I, p. 331.

<sup>63</sup>Smalcald Articles III, 8:1-2, Kolb/Wengert p. 321.

ceremonies are especially needed in order to teach those who are ignorant. Paul advised [1 Cor. 14:2,9] that in church a language that is understood by the people should be used.<sup>64</sup>

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutherans reject the Roman contention that it somehow “benefits hearers who are ignorant of the church’s faith to hear a Mass that they do not understand,” and they similarly reject the notion that “the mere act of hearing itself is a useful act of worship even where there is no understanding.”<sup>65</sup> And so it does not surprise us to hear Luther, in the *Formula Missae*, saying this:

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.

Luther then bemoans the fact that “poets are wanting among us, or not yet known, who could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, as Paul calls them [Col. 3:16], worthy to be used in the church of God.”<sup>66</sup> Yet even at the time of this writing, Luther himself had already begun to use his own poetic and musical gifts to write and compose hymns and tunes that were indeed “worthy to be used in the church of God,” and that are still used in the church of God today.

In the *Formula Missae* Luther sought “to encourage any German poets to compose evangelical hymns for us,”<sup>67</sup> and others did then follow Luther’s example, throughout the Lutheran lands of Europe, leaving us now with a broad and deep repertoire of didactic and devotional hymns that are rich in evangelical content and in literary and musical quality. Due credit must also be given to the gifted translators, beginning especially in the nineteenth century, who have for our benefit brought these masterworks of theological and doxological verbal artistry from the Lutheran mother tongues of Europe into the English language. Worthy additions to this repertoire are also produced in each generation, as the faith which inspired Luther, Speratus, Heermann, Nicolai, Gerhardt, Tranovský, Kingo, and many others of the honored past, continues to inspire gifted individuals in our time whose texts and tunes also confess and carry this faith, and offer worship to the Almighty according to this faith.

Luther’s qualifying clause is, however, important for us to remember. What are welcome among us and in our worship are hymns both old and new that are “worthy to be used in the church of God.” But it is too often the case that modern-day Lutherans set aside the great chorales of their own church, and sing in their place the *unworthy* inane ditties of the heterodox. The problem that Paul E. Kretzmann observed almost a century ago is even worse in our time – much worse, in fact. He wrote:

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<sup>64</sup>Augsburg Confession XXIV:1-4 [Latin], Kolb/Wengert p. 69.

<sup>65</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:2, Kolb/Wengert p. 258.

<sup>66</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 36.

<sup>67</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 37.

We must take note also of a most deplorable tendency of our times, namely, that of preferring the shallow modern “Gospel anthem” to the classical hymns of our Church. The reference is both to the text and to the tunes in use in many churches. On all sides the criticism is heard that the old Lutheran hymns are “too heavy, too doctrinal; that our age does not understand them.” Strange that the Lutherans of four centuries and of countless languages could understand and appreciate them, even as late as a generation ago! Is the present generation less intelligent or merely more frivolous?<sup>68</sup>

From closer to home for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are these words by the editors of *Lutheran Hymnary, Junior*, which should guide our practice and shape our standards also today:

The Lutheran Church is especially rich in songs and hymns of sound doctrine, high poetical value and fitting musical setting. They express the teachings and spirit of the Lutheran Church and help one to feel at home in this Church. Of course, there are songs of high merit and sound Biblical doctrine written by Christians in other denominations also, and some of these could and should find a place in a Lutheran song treasury. But the bulk of the songs in a Lutheran song book should be drawn from Lutheran sources. We should teach our children to remain in the Lutheran Church instead of to sing themselves into some Reformed sect.<sup>69</sup>

### *Conclusion*

After his discussion of the need for vernacular hymns, Luther wrote in the *Formula Missae*: “This is enough for now about the mass and communion.”<sup>70</sup> And as far as this essay is concerned, I think I can now also say that this is enough for now.

### – **Soli Deo Gloria** –

Princeton, Minnesota  
Commemoration of Johannes Bugenhagen, Pastor and Reformer  
April 20, 2023

Prepared for the  
Evangelical Lutheran Synod West Coast Pastors’ Conference  
Bethany Lutheran Church, Port Orchard, Washington  
April 27-28, 2023

*This essay was published in **Lutheran Synod Quarterly**,  
Vol. 65, Nos. 2 & 3 (June/September 2025), pp. 153-202.*

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<sup>68</sup>Paul E. Kretzmann, *Magazin für evangelisch-lutherische Homiletik und Pastoral-theologie*, Vol. 53, No. 6 (June 1929), pp. 216-17.

<sup>69</sup>Introduction, *Lutheran Hymnary, Junior* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1916).

<sup>70</sup>Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” p. 37.