

# The German Mass and Order of Divine Service

by Martin Luther

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christian liberty and the need for a German Mass and Order of Divine Service that is agreeable to Christian liberty and conducive to the growth of Christians.*

**Scripture:** Romans 14:19, 1 Corinthians 14:26, 1 Corinthians 14:40, Galatians 5:13, Colossians 3:16, 1 Timothy 4:13, Hebrews 10:24, 1 Peter 4:10

**Topics:** "Christian Liberty", "Divine Worship"

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## Description

Martin Luther emphasizes the importance of Christian liberty in the Order of Divine Service, urging against making it a compulsory law but rather using it in love and consideration for others. He advocates for a unified approach to Divine Service, highlighting the need for simplicity, Scripture reading, and teaching for the growth of Christians and the youth. Luther discusses the different types of Divine Service, including the use of Latin, German Mass, and private gatherings for serious Christians, emphasizing the focus on the Word of God and love for one's neighbor.

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## Transcript

(i) The Preface of Martin Luther.

Above all things, I most affectionately and for God's sake beseech all, who see or desire to observe this our Order of Divine Service, on no account to make of it a compulsory law, or to ensnare or make captive thereby any man's conscience; but to use it agreeably to Christian liberty at their good pleasure as, where, when and so long as circumstances favour and demand it. Moreover, we would not have our meaning taken to be that we desire to rule, or by law to compel, any one.

Meanwhile, there is on every side great pressure towards a German Mass and Order of Divine Service: and there is great complaint and offence about the different kinds of new Masses, that every one makes his own, some with a good intention and others out of conceit to introduce something new themselves and to make a good show among others and not be bad masters. As then always happens with Christian liberty, few use it for anything else than their own pleasure or profit: and not for God's honour and the good of their neighbour.

While, however, every man is bound on his conscience, in like manner as he uses such liberty himself, not to hinder nor forbid it to any one else, we must also take care that liberty be servant to love and to our neighbour. Where, then, it happens that men are offended or perplexed at such diversity of use, we are

truly bound to put limits to liberty; and, so far as possible, to endeavour that the people are bettered by what we do and not offended. Since, then, in these matters of outward ordinance nothing is laid upon us as matter of conscience before God, and yet such ordinance can be of use to our neighbour, we ought in love, as St.

Paul teaches, to endeavour to be of one and the same mind; and, to the best of our power, of like ways and fashion; just as all Christians have one baptism and one sacrament, and no one has a special one given him of God. Still, I do not wish hereby to demand that those who already have a good Order or, by God's grace, can make a better, should let it go, and yield to us. Nor is it my meaning that the whole of Germany should have to adopt forthwith our Wittenberg Order. It never was the case that the ministers, convents, and parishes were alike in everything.

But it would be a grand thing if, in every several lordship, Divine Service were conducted in one fashion; and the neighbouring little townships and villages joined in the cry with one city. Whether in other lordships they should do the same or something different, should be left free and without penalty. In fine, we institute this Order not for the sake of those who are Christians already. For they have need of none of these things (for which things' sake man does not live: but they live for the sake of us who are not yet Christians, that they may make us Christians); they have their Divine Service in their spirits.

But it is necessary to have such an Order for the sake of those who are to become Christians, or are to grow stronger; just as a Christian has need of baptism, the word and the sacrament not as a Christian (for, as such, he has them already), but as a sinner. But, above all, the Order is for the simple and for the young folk who must daily be exercised in the Scripture and God's Word, to the end that they may become conversant with Scripture and expert in its use, ready and skilful in giving an answer for their faith, and able in time to teach others and aid in the advancement of the kingdom of Christ.

For the sake of such, we must read, sing, preach, write, and compose; and if it could in any wise help or promote their interests, I would have all the bells pealing, and all the organs playing, and everything making a noise that could. The Popish Divine Services are to be condemned for this reason that they have made of them laws, work, and merit; and so have depressed faith. And they do not direct them towards the young and simple, to practise them thereby in the Scripture and Word of God; but they are themselves stuck fast in them, and hold them as things useful and necessary to salvation : and that is the devil.

For in this wise the ancients have neither ordered nor imposed them. Now there are three different kinds of Divine Service. [I] The first, in Latin; which we published lately, called the Formula Missae. This I do not want to have set aside or changed; but, as we have hitherto kept it, so should we be still free to use it where and when we please, or as occasion requires. I do not want in anywise to let the Latin tongue disappear out of Divine Service; for I am so deeply concerned for the young.

If it lay in my power, and the Greek and Hebrew tongues were as familiar to us as the Latin, and possessed as great a store of fine music and song as the Latin does, Mass should be held and there should be singing and reading, on alternate Sundays in all four languages-German, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. I am by no means of one mind with those who set all their store by one language, and despise all others; for I would gladly raise up a generation able to be of use to Christ in foreign lands and to talk with their people, so that we might not be like the Waldenses in Bohemia whose faith is so involved in the toils of their own language that they can talk intelligibly and plainly with no one unless he first learn their language.

That was not the way of the Holy Ghost in the beginning. He did not wait till all the world should come to Jerusalem, and learn Hebrew. But He endowed the office of the ministry with all manner of tongues, so that the Apostles could speak to the people wherever they went. I should prefer to follow this example; and it is right also that the youth should be practised in many languages. Who knows how God will make use of them in years to come? It is for this end also that schools are established. [2] Next, there is the German Mass and Divine Service, of which we are now treating.

This ought to be set up for the sake of the simple laymen. Both these kinds of Service then we must have held and publicly celebrated in church for the people in general. They are not yet believers or Christians. But the greater part stand there and gape, simply to see something new: and it is just as if we held Divine Service in an open square or field amongst Turks or heathen. So far it is no question yet of a regularly fixed assembly wherein to train Christians according to the Gospel: but rather of a public allurements to faith and Christianity. [3] But the third sort [of Divine Service], which the true type of Evangelical Order should embrace, must not be celebrated so publicly in the square amongst all and sundry.

Those, however, who are desirous of being Christians in earnest, and are ready to profess the Gospel with hand and mouth, should register their names and assemble by themselves in some house to pray, to read, to baptize and to receive the sacrament and practise other Christian works. In this Order, those whose conduct was not such as befits Christians could be recognized, reprov'd, reformed, rejected, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ in Matt. xviii. Here, too, a general giving of alms could be imposed on Christians, to be willingly given and divided among the poor, after the example of St.

Paul in 2 Cor. ix. Here there would not be need of much fine singing. Here we could have baptism and the sacrament in short and simple fashion: and direct everything towards the Word and prayer and love. Here we should have a good short Catechism about the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. In one word, if we only had people who longed to be Christians in earnest, Form and Order would soon shape itself. But I cannot and would not order or arrange such a community or congregation at present.

I have not the requisite persons for it, nor do I see many who are urgent for it. But should it come to pass that I must do it, and that such pressure is put upon me as that I find myself unable with a good conscience to leave it undone, then I will gladly do my part to secure it, and will help it on as best I can. In the meantime, I would abide by the two Orders aforesaid; and publicly among the people aid in the promotion of such Divine Service, besides preaching, as shall exercise the youth and call and incite others to faith, until those Christians who are most thoroughly in earnest shall discover each other and cleave together; to the end that there be no faction-forming, such as might ensue if I were to settle everything out of my own head.

For we Germans are a wild, rude, tempestuous people; with whom one must not lightly make experiment in anything new, unless there be most urgent need. Well, then: in the name of God. The first requisite in the German system of Divine Worship is a good, plain, simple, and substantial Catechism. A Catechism is a form of instruction by which heathen, desirous of becoming Christians, are taught and shown what they are to believe, to do, to leave undone and to know in Christianity.

Hence mere learners who were admitted to such instruction, and were acquiring the rudiments of the Christian faith before their baptism were called catechumens. This instruction or information I know no better way of putting than that in which it has been put from the beginning of Christianity till today: I mean,

in those three articles of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. In those three articles is contained, plainly and briefly, all that a Christian needs to know. (ii) Of Divine Service.

Now since in all Divine Service the chief and foremost part is to preach and teach the Word of God, let us begin with the preaching and teaching. [1] On Holy Days and Sundays we would have the usual Epistle and Gospel to continue, and have three sermons. About 5 a.m. or 6 a.m., some Psalms should be sung, as for Mattins; then a sermon on the Epistle for the day, chiefly for the sake of servants that they also may be provided for and may hear the Word of God, if they are not able to be present at other sermons.

After that, an antiphon with Te Deum or Benedictus alternately, with Our Father, Collect, and Benedicamus Domino. At Mass, about 8 a.m. or 9 a.m., there should be a sermon on the Gospel, as found according to the season. In the afternoon, at Vespers, before Magnificat, sermons in regular course. The reason why we have retained the division of the Epistles and Gospels into portions corresponding with the season of the [Church's] year is that we have nothing particular to find fault with in such arrangement.

It has been the case at Wittenberg up till now that there are many there who are to learn to preach in the districts where the old apportionment of Epistle and Gospel still goes on and will probably continue. As, then, we can be of use to such and help them thereby, in our judgement, we suffer the custom to continue; without, however, finding fault with those who adopt the books of the Gospels as a whole. Hereby we provide that the layman has preaching and teaching enough : but, if a man wants more, he may find it on other days. [2] Thus on Monday and Tuesday mornings there should be a lesson in German on the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, on Baptism and the Sacrament; so that on these two days the Catechism may be kept up and grasped in its proper sense.

On Wednesday morning a lesson in German, for which is appointed the Gospel of St. Matthew. The day is to be kept specially for this Gospel : for Matthew is a fine evangelist to teach the people by, and he relates Christ's good Sermon on the Mount, and makes much of the practice of love and good works. But the evangelist John, who teaches faith with special force, should also have his own day-Saturday afternoon at Vespers. And so we have two Evangelists in daily use. On Thursday and Friday mornings there are the daily lessons week by week of the Apostolic Epistles and the rest of the New Testament.

This makes sufficient provision for lessons and preaching, to set the Word of God going, except it be for lectures in the Universities to the learned. [3] We come now to practising boys at school in the Bible. Every week- day, before the lesson, let them sing some psalms in Latin, as has been customary hitherto at Mattins; for, as we have said, we wish the young to be trained and practised in the Latin tongue, through the Bible. After the psalms, the boys two or three in turn, according to its length, should read a chapter in Latin out of the New Testament.

Then let another boy read the same chapter in German for practice, and in case any layman were there to hear. After that, go on, with an antiphon, to the lesson in German of which we have spoken above. Then let the whole lot sing a German hymn, followed by the Lord's Prayer said silently; and let the parson or chaplain say a Collect and conclude with the Benedicamus Domino, as usual. In the same way at Vespers, let them sing the Vesper Psalms as sung hitherto, in Latin, with an antiphon; then a hymn, as there is opportunity.

Then let them read, two or three, by turn, in Latin, out of the Old Testament, a chapter or half a chapter according to its length. Then let one boy read it in German. Next, Magnificat in Latin, with an antiphon or chant. Then Our Father silently and the Collects with the Benedicamus. So much for Divine Service daily

throughout the week in towns where there are schools. (iii) On Sundays for the laity. The Mass vestments, altars, and lights may be retained till such time as they shall all change of themselves, or it shall please us to change them: though, if any will take a different course in this matter, we shall not interfere.

But in the true Mass, among sincere Christians, the altar should not be retained, and the priest should always turn himself towards the people as, without doubt, Christ did at the Last Supper. That, however, must bide its time. [a] At the beginning then we sing a spiritual song or a psalm in German, in primo tono, as follows : Ps. xxxiv. [b] Then Kyrie eleison, to the same tone, but thrice and not nine times. . . . [c] Then the priest reads a Collect in Effaut in unisono, as follows : 'Almighty God,' &c. [d] Then the Epistle, in the eighth tone. . . .

The Epistle should be sung with the face turned to the people, but the Collect with the face turned to the altar. [e] After the Epistle is sung a German hymn, 'Nun bitten wir den heiligen Geist,' or some other, by the whole choir. [f] Then is read the Gospel in the fifth tone, also with the face turned towards the people. [g] After the Gospel the whole congregation sings the Creed in German, 'Wir glauben all' an einen Gott,' &c. [h] Then follows the sermon, on the Gospel of the Sunday or Holyday: and I think that, where the German Postills are in use throughout the year, it were best to order the Postill of the day, either whole or part, to be read out of the book to the people; not merely for the preacher's sake who can do no better, but as a safeguard against fanatics and sectaries,--a custom of which one may see traces in the Homilies at Mattins.

Otherwise, where there is no spiritual understanding, and the Spirit himself speaks not through the preacher (though I set no limits to the preacher; for the Spirit can teach better than any Postills or Homilies) the end of it will be that every man will preach what he likes; and, instead of the Gospel and its exposition, they will be preaching once more about blue ducks! There are further reasons why we keep the Epistles and Gospels as they are arranged in the Postills, because there are but few inspired preachers who can handle a whole Gospel or other book with force and profit. [i] After the sermon shall follow a public paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, with an exhortation to those who are minded to come to the Sacrament, in this, or some other better, fashion, as follows: 'Dear friends in Christ, as we are here gathered together, in the name of the Lord, to receive His holy Testament, I exhort you, first, to lift your hearts to God and to say with me 'Our Father' according as Christ our Lord hath taught us, faithfully promising that we shall be heard: ['Our Father,' &c., in paraphrase].

Next, I exhort you in Christ that with right faith ye take heed to the Testament of Christ: and specially that ye hold fast in your hearts the Word whereby Christ gives us His body and blood for remission of sins; that ye bethink you of, and thank Him for, the infinite love which He has shown us in that through His blood He has redeemed us from God's wrath, from sin, death, and hell: and then take to yourselves outwardly the bread and wine, which is His body and blood, for an assurance and pledge thereof.

In such wise will we, in His name and as He commanded in His own Word, handle and use His Testament.' Whether this paraphrase and exhortation should take place in the pulpit, immediately after the sermon, or at the altar, I leave free to every man's discretion. . . . [k] Then the Office and Consecration proceeds, as follows : 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the same night'(i Cor. xi. 23 ff). I think that it would be in accordance with the Last Supper if the sacrament were distributed immediately after the consecration of the bread before the blessing of the cup.

So say, both Luke and Paul: 'Likewise also the cup after supper. Meanwhile, there might be sung the Sanctus in German or the hymn 'Gott sei gelobet', or the hymn of John Huss, 'Jesus Christus unser Heiland.' And after this should come the consecration of the chalice and its delivery, with the singing of whatever remains of the above-mentioned hymns, or of the Agnus Dei in German. And for the sake of good order and discipline in going up, not men and women together but the women after the men, men and women should have separate places in different parts of the church.

As to private confession, I have already written enough about that: and my opinion may be found in the little prayer-book. [l] The elevation we desire not to abolish but to retain, for it fits in well with the Sanctus in German, and means that Christ has bidden us to think of Him. Just as the sacrament is bodily elevated and yet Christ's body and blood therein are invisible, so through the word of the preacher He is commemorated and uplifted, and in the reception of the sacrament recognized and worshipped: and yet it is all a matter of faith and not of sight, how Christ gave His body and blood for us and still daily intercedes with God to bestow His grace upon us. [m] The Sanctus in German, 'Jesaia dem Propheten das geschach,' &c. [n] Then follows the Collect : 'We thank thee, Almighty Lord God,' &c. [o] With the Blessing : 'The Lord bless thee and keep thee,' &c.

So much for daily Divine Service and for teaching the Word of God, specially with a view to influencing the young and alluring the simple. Those who come out of curiosity and the desire to gape at something new will soon be sick and tired of the whole thing, as they were before of Divine Service in Latin. For that was sung and read in church daily, and yet the churches are deserted and empty: and already they are prepared to do the same with the German Service. So it is best that such Divine Service should be arranged with an eye to the young and to those simple folk that may perhaps come to it.

As for the rest, no law nor order, exhortation nor driving, that one can devise, is of any good to induce them to go willingly and of their own accord to Divine Service, so unwilling and reluctant are they to do so (though God takes no pleasure in forced service), so idle and good-for-nothing. As for feast-days, such as Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, Michaelmas, Purification and the like, we must go on, as hitherto, with Latin till we have hymns enough in German for the purpose.

The work is but beginning, and all that belongs to it is not yet ready. Only, as one knows, make a start one way and several ways and means will be discovered. Fast-days, Palm Sunday, and Holy Week may be retained. Not that we would compel any one to fast; but that the reading of the Passion and the Gospels appointed for these times should be observed. But we would not keep the Lenten veil, strewing of palms, covering up of pictures, and all the other mummery, nor sing the four Passions, nor preach on the Passion for eight hours on Good Friday.

Holy week must be like other weeks, except that there should be sermons on the Passion for an hour daily throughout the week, or on as many days as is convenient, with reception of the Sacrament by all who desire it. For with Christians everything should be kept in God's service that has to do with the Word and the Sacrament. To sum up, this and every other order is so to be used that should any misuse arise in connexion therewith, it should be immediately done away with and another made: just as King Hezekiah broke up and did away with the brazen serpent, which God Himself had commanded to be made, because the children of Israel misused it.

Forms and Orders should be for the promotion of faith and the service of love, and not to injury of faith. When they have no more to do, they are forthwith dead and of no more worth; just as, if good coin is

counterfeit, for fear of misuse it is abolished and destroyed; or as, when new shoes have become old and dry, we wear them no longer but throw them away and buy new ones. Order is an outward thing. Be it as good as it may, it can fall into misuse. Then it is no longer order but disorder.

So no Order has any intrinsic worth of its own, as hitherto the Popish Order has been thought to have. But all Order has its life, worth, strength, and virtue in right use; else it is worthless and fit for nothing. God's Spirit and grace be with us all. Amen.

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