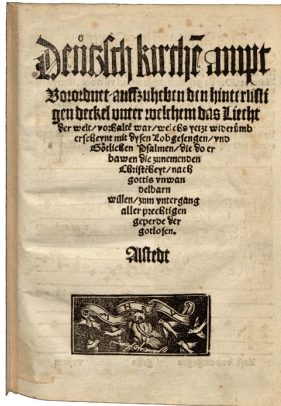


A GERMAN CHURCH OFFICE



This work was prepared in 1523, and probably printed between the autumn of 1523 and early 1524, by Nikolaus Widemar of Eilenburg. The publishing location is given as 'Allstedt' The text accompanied by musical notation runs to around 204 printed pages. Confusingly, there is also a short 'Introduction' – reproduced here below – which appears to have been part of a separate print-run amounting to two printed pages.

A German Church Office, composed in order to raise the treacherous cover
under which the light of the world was concealed,
and which now shines forth with these hymns and godly psalms
to instruct and build up Christianity in accordance with God's unalterable will
and bring about the downfall of the lavish mimicry of the Godless.

Allstedt

Introduction to this Book of Service

Our true saviour Jesus Christ foretold all the abuses of Christianity, saying in Matthew Chapter 13: "While men were sleeping (whom afterwards he called angels) the enemy came and sowed weeds among the rows of wheat." Christ initiated true Christianity. But, because of the neglect of the elect, the godless were able to pollute it. Paul says in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 20, using plain words: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and

remember!” But so that no one should now use his deceitful understanding to alter these words of Christ and Paul according to his own inclination, and so lead further astray a Church which is already hobbled, we must review all the trustworthy histories: for in this way it will become obvious that the words of Christ and Paul and of all the holy prophets concerning the ruin of Christianity have been realised many times over. Hegesippus, a trustworthy historian, and pupil of the Apostles, in his fifth book of *Memoirs*, and also Eusebius, in his fourth book about the Christian Church, state quite plainly that the holy bride of Christ remained a virgin only until the death of the pupils of the Apostles, and thereafter immediately turned into an immoral adulteress. In these clear histories, and in others like those, it is quite unmistakably evident what state Christianity was in when our ancestors first came to the faith six hundred years ago. The pious, good-hearted fathers (who converted our country) did whatever they could according to the condition of the people they found. These were Italian and French monks. Their arrival was to be tolerated until something better came along, for it is easy to see that they sang in Latin because the German language was utterly irregular. Latin kept the people united: for at that time the whole of Asia fell away. But the idea that such beginnings could not be improved on is a matter of astonishment: for it is reasonable to expect men to improve themselves day by day – so are we to suppose that God does not want to make progress in his works? No, indeed; and Christ says so and commands us to think about it with all seriousness, Matthew 5 and 10: “A city that is set on a hill should shine forth. A man should not hide the light under a bushel. It should give light unto all who are in the house.” What else does this say, when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14 and Ephesians 5: “When the people come together, they should delight each other with hymns and psalms, so that all who join them may be improved.”

It can no longer be tolerated that we ascribe some power to the Latin words, as if they were magical spells, and let the poor people go out of the church more ignorant than when they came in. God said in Isaiah 14 and Jeremiah 51, and John 6, that all the elect should be taught by God. And Paul said: “The people will be instructed through hymns.” That is why I have translated the psalms into a German style and form, rather according to their meaning than the actual words, but still adhering to

the steadfast teaching of the holy spirit. It is a squalid thing to do, to set up one puppet against another at a time when we are in sore need of spiritual guidance to purge us of our traditional ways.

In the course of the whole year, five Church Offices will be sung, and in these the entire Bible will be sung, rather than read out. The first is for the Advent of Christ, which starts in the wine-month [*October*] or on All Souls' Day, when the readings from the prophets begin. The second, from the birth of Christ until the Presentation in the Temple [*February*]. The third from the suffering of Christ until Easter. The fourth from the Resurrection of Christ until Whitsun. The fifth from Holy Ghost [*Trinity*] until All Souls' Day. In this way, Christ will be revealed to us by the holy spirit through his own testimony, as was foretold by the prophets: how he was born, died and rose again, to rule eternally with his father and the holy spirit, and to make us his pupils.

Amen.

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
November 2015)*