

ORDER AND EXPLANATION ¹



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The Order and Explanation
of the German Church Service in Allstedt,
Established Last Easter
by Thomas Müntzer, Pastor.
1523.
Printed in Eilenburg by Nikolaus Widemar.

The Order and Explanation of the German Church Service in Allstedt, Lately Established by the Servants of God

A servant of God should conduct church services completely openly, not in mysterious darkness; the services should be for the edification and instruction of the whole community, which will be nourished by a loyal steward who hands out a just measure of wheat at the appointed time. This should not be hidden under a false cover; nothing should be hidden or kept secret from the whole Christian community, aye, the whole world even, as those are accustomed to do who take away the key to the knowledge of God, which the eternal living God has commanded should rather be given to every elect person, Isaiah 22 ². That is why we take our Introitus to the Mass from the Psalms, where it says that the key of David is placed on the shoulders of Christ, in order to explain everything which is sung; in this way, so that everyone may see clearly and without any embroidering, we sing the entire psalm, just as the pious followers of the holy apostles did at the beginning of Christianity. At the beginning of the service, we make public confession before the altar and afterwards, when we have sung the Introitus of the service, we add a Kyrie Eleison to it, so that the friends of God recognise his eternal mercy and praise his name in the highest. Then comes the Gloria in Excelsis, in which we give thanks for the eternal life given

¹ Original German title: *Ordnung und berechnung des Teutschen Ampts*.

² In comparison with many of Müntzer's works, this pamphlet seems devoid of Biblical citations. However, in Müntzer's three Allstedt pamphlets of 1523/24, the citations were not contained within the main body of the text, but festoon the margins. For reasons of simplicity, the marginalia have not been reproduced here.

to us by God's son, and for the enjoyment of God's greatest gifts which returns us to our original innocence. After this thanksgiving, the people will be comforted with the words of Boaz when he spoke to his harvesters: the Lord be with you; we sing to the children of God as to the ripened wheat. After this, the whole congregation prays for the servant of God to have a pure spirit, just as St Paul taught his pupil Timothy, saying: and with your spirit; so that this same needy congregation may not have a godless person as their preacher. For anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ is not a child of God: how can he know anything about God's work if he has never suffered it? It is with such lack of knowledge that a blind man is said to lead another blind man. So in all the prayers which follow, for the whole gathering of the great Christian church, we pray against the deep-cutting and pitiable afflictions which prevent the greatest name of God from blazing out before the whole world. And then, before God the father lets his son speak through the gospels, the people will be reminded by holy readings and the epistles of the dear apostles, how every elect person should yield to the workings of God. Afterwards we sing the Gradual and Hallelujah, in order that people might be inspired to rely steadfastly on the word of God. For from such songs drawn from the Psalms they will see how God has treated his dear elect, how he draws them to him when they thank him for teaching them with his fatherly punishments, for his graciousness. Instead of the Prosa or Sequence, we sing the psalm *Miserere Mei Deus* etc in the eighth melody.

Secondly, you should know that we always read an entire chapter, rather than just scraps of the epistles or gospels. In this way, we reject the old style of patching together fragments of readings any old how. The people will get to know the holy scriptures, aye, even the superstitious ceremonies or rites will begin to fall away through continually hearing the word of God. And all of this is achieved with a soothing and mild rejection of over-decorative ceremonies; all impudence will be moderated; the people will be instructed with familiar songs, in their own language, just as children are weaned on milk, and there will be no room for their wicked ways. Although all this will stir up anger against us, the improvement of the church service will always be a more powerful weapon to quieten our opponents. And so in the Mass we also sing the epistles and the gospel in our own language, just as the holy

apostle Paul read his letters aloud before the whole congregation. And Christ our saviour ordered that the gospel be preached to every creature without any elaboration or decoration, neither with Latin nor with any other embellishments, but just as anyone can understand it in his own language, with no regard for status etc.

Thirdly, after the gospel on Sundays or feast-days we sing the complete agreement of all the main articles of faith, by means of which the coarse errors of the church are refuted. In this way, the false Christians cannot claim that they are being denied anything now that the Mass is being brought out into the light of day before the whole world.

Fourthly, what follows is the sermon, so contrived that it explains the hymns which are heard in the service. For David said: “the explanation of your words gives understanding to the simple.” After the sermon we sing: “Now we beg the holy spirit” etc. Then comes the Benedictus which gives the preacher time to catch his breath, and allows the people to give praise for having heard the word of God. We do not hold an Offertory in the Mass.

Fifthly, we sing the Preface to remind Christians that they recognise the first-born of all creatures in the fullness and knowledge of God’s will and his knowledge of God, which, along with all the elect, he has received from God himself.

Sixthly, we sing the Sanctus in which is explained how a man should behave if he is not to be harmed in his soul in the giving of the sacrament. That is: he should, he must know that God is inside him, that he cannot invent him or reason him out as if he was a thousand miles away; rather, heaven and earth are full, full of God; and the father continually brings the son alive in us, and the holy spirit explains the crucifixion to us by means of heartfelt sadness. For the Sanctus tells us nothing else than that we neither wish to recognise nor understand our blindness, and that God gives us the greatest honour by shaming us, he heals the soul by sickening the body etc. It is thus that his name is praised, when our name is dishonoured and blemished without any cause, without our knowledge etc.

Seventhly, in order that we might now bear with patience such great and mighty temptations, we must follow the practice which Jesus Christ, the son of God, ordained for his church: that we should think of him through all sorrow, so that our soul would crave and hunger after the staff of life. We therefore need to glorify these glorious words of Christ, and caution all men against clinging to the things of this life, but rather to urge them to adhere only to him whose memory, existence and word wishes to reside in the souls of men, not as in a beast, but as in a temple, which he won for us with his precious blood.

Eighthly, the words of the consecration were always spoken aloud in the early church, and this was only abandoned after some nonsense had been spoken about shepherds in a field ³. But now, to avoid the superstition which has been introduced into the church by misuse of the Mass, we sing these same words of the consecration aloud etc. For Christ, the son of God, did not speak these words to just one person, or under his breath, but to everyone, as the text of the gospel clearly shows. He says there using the plural: “Take and eat etc”, “take drink from it, all of you.” And the consecration is also a transformation which does not simply happen to one person, but affects the whole assembled congregation. That is our reply to our opponents, who pursue us unjustly claiming that we teach ploughboys to hold Mass in the fields. From this criticism, any pious good-hearted person can readily see what these people think of the son of God, as if he was just a painted puppet or the Mass was some kind of hocus-pocus with which to summon up the devil. So they imagine that you can conjure up Christ, the son of God, with some magic words, wherever the insolence of men might desire it. No, in no way ! Christ only fills the hungry in spirit, and he leaves the godless with empty stomachs. So what should Christ do among men, if in the sacrament he finds no hungry or empty souls? He must be obdurate with the obdurate and good with the good. What use is the symbol of faith

³ This is a story that some bored Syrian shepherd-boys had been ‘playing’ at holding a Mass; when they spoke the words of the consecration, a bolt of lightning struck their makeshift altar; after that, the church authorities decided that the consecration should be spoken silently so as to avoid further divine wrath. (Information provided in Peter Matheson’s edition of Müntzer’s Works, p.174)

to someone who denies the essence? Every congregation surely contains pious persons and for the faith of such people he truly comes to satisfy their souls etc.

Ninthly. We sing the form of the consecration or the Lord's Supper to the same tune as the Preface, using the following words: "On the day before Jesus was to be crucified, he took the bread in his holy, worthy hands and lifted his eyes up to heaven, to you God, his almighty father, gave thanks and blessed it, broke it and passed it to his disciples, saying: 'Take, and eat, all of you !' *Raising his hands, the priest says:* ⁴ 'This is my body which is given to you' *Turning, the minister will take the cup, facing the people, and say:* In the same way, when they had eaten, he took the cup in his holy, worthy hands and gave thanks to you and blessed it and passed it to his disciples, saying : 'This is the cup of my blood, the new and eternal testament, a mystery of faith, which will be shed for you and everyone for the forgiveness of sin.' *Turning again to the altar, he says:* 'Each time that you do this, do it in remembrance of me etc.'"

Tenthly. Soon after the Elevation we sing as follows to the same tune: "Therefore let us pray as we have been taught by Jesus Christ, the true son of God, saying: Our Father, who art in heaven etc." And then everyone sings: "Amen." Then comes a moment of quiet, to allow them to catch their breath, during which time the priest will distribute the sacrament to the communicants and sing: "From eternity to eternity." And the common people will reply: "Amen." And then the priest again: "The peace of the Lord be with you forever." And the people reply: "And with your spirit." Soon after this, so that the death and resurrection of Christ may be observed in the Mass and understood better, everyone sings three times the confession of John, baptiser of Christ: "O Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world etc." And then we sing from Luke chapter 17: "Have mercy on us, Lord!" And finally: "Give us your peace." For Christ died for our sins and rose up again, in order to justify us, which he alone can do, and we must suffer it. In such a belief, therefore, we give the people the holiest sacrament during the Agnus Dei, without the hypocritical Papist confession. For the congregation is reminded in every

⁴ In this paragraph, the words which are *italicised* are rendered only in Latin in the original German text.

sermon that every person should reflect on his old life, so that he might see from all his lusting how much he deserves the cross. Man sins and God punishes, and it behoves men to accept this. Unless he recognises it, no man can have a good, pure and peaceful conscience before God. So in the third Agnus Dei we conclude with: “Give us your peace” and “May your servant, Lord, receive your word in peace.” For only long-suffering people are worthy of the saviour of life etc.

Eleventhly, we distribute the most worthy sacrament in both kinds, regardless of all the prattling of the stall-holders in all the market-places about whether it should be just one part or the other. For if we do not understand the sacrament, the holy symbol, how can we understand the essence which it signifies? Therefore after the communion we say: “God be thanked” to the people and “Bless the Lord etc.”

Finally, let no one be astonished that in Allstedt we celebrate the Mass in German. At some other time we will explain this and provide all the reasons. But there is nothing new in doing things differently from the Romans, since even the people of Milan in Lombardy have a different way of celebrating Mass from Rome. Each bishopric has its own ceremonies and rites. So why should we not do things as occasion dictates? For we are German people in Allstedt and not Italians, and we want to find a way through the confusion so that we might know what we should believe. And no other method is more fitting for this than following the word of God. The Croats are Roman Catholics and conduct the Mass and all their services in their own language. The Armenians celebrate in their own language and are a great people and show the sacrament to the people on a plate [*paten*]. Similarly the Bohemians have many usages in their own language in the Mass. Similarly the Mozarabs and the Russians have quite different rites and are no devils for all that. Similarly, in the country where the Christian faith first arose, there are probably fourteen different sects and they all have different rites from us. Oh, what blind and ignorant people we are if we suppose that we alone are Christians in our outward pomp and in squabbling like crazy, bestial creatures ! If only every servant of God had the power to teach his flock in such a way that they might be instructed with psalms and hymns from the Bible, as St Paul said with clear words in Ephesians 5:

“You should,” he said, “be filled with the holy spirit and speak together with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and tunes, sing and play before God and always give thanks before everyone.” He says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 14. If we now wish to call it unchristian when German is sung and read in our churches, then what will we do when we have to testify to the movement of faith within us?

How we conduct baptism

When a child is baptised with us, we warn the god-parents, on the salvation of their souls, that they should pay attention to what happens during the baptism, so that in later years, as the child grows up, they may describe it to him and thus the baptism will be understood over time. So we read out the 68th Psalm [69th] in German, for it says that a person is born into toil, fear and want, and that the torrents of water will reach up to his neck etc. Then we read the third chapter of Matthew, on the baptism of Christ, which shows how Christ came to us as we were drowning and rescued us from the raging waves. But Christ soon climbed out again and the waves did not overwhelm him as they did us. But he had to undergo this for the sake of righteousness. For a long time, we poor, miserable, pitiable people have made this into a complete charade of pouring water. We give the child salt, saying: “N., take the salt of wisdom, that in the spirit of wisdom you may distinguish between good and evil, and are not vanquished by the devil.” After that we say to the child: “Come to Christianity, so that God may find you as a ripe ear of corn.” Next, we confirm the faith in the baptism and condemn the works and pomp and wiliness of the devil. When we pour the oil on to the child’s breast and back, the priest says: “Be joyful, N., that you now live in the eternal mercy of God.” If the priest is ready to baptise, he says: “Do you wish to be baptised?” If the god-parents reply: “Yes”, then the priest says: “I baptise you in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit. Amen. May God, who conceived you in his eternal love, keep you from the oil of the sinner.” *And putting the bonnet on the child he says* ⁵ : “Pull

⁵ Here, and in the final section (‘How we bury the Dead’) below, the *italicised* words are rendered in Latin in the original German text.

on your new coat, put away the old one, do not patch the old coat with a new patch, lest you may not endure before the strictest judge.” Then, as the candle is given: “N., may Christ be your light and ensure that your light does not become darkness, let the life of Christ be your mirror, that you may live eternally. Amen.”

How we join together people in marriage

We do not treat this light-heartedly, but read out in German the 127th Psalm [128th], Blessed is everyone; and read from the gospel, of John, chapter 2, concerning the marriage in Cana; and give them some instruction etc.

How we bring the sacrament to the sick

This is how we give the sacrament to the sick: first of all, they make a general confession. Afterwards we read the gospel of Luke, chapter 12: “In whatever house you go etc.” And then: “I believe in God the father.” And then: “Our father etc.” Then we read aloud the Lord’s Supper: “One day before Christ was crucified etc.” After giving the sacrament we say: “O Lamb of God etc.” and give thanks to God and urge the sick person to prepare himself for the cross etc.

How we bury the Dead

We fetch the dead by singing the Benedictus in German without any vigils. All the people follow the corpse and join in the singing of the Benedictus. After the burial the people sing: “In the midst of life etc.” Then we go into the church. There the priest sings from the epistle: “*We would not have you to be ignorant* etc”, and from the gospel of John, chapter 5, concerning the resurrection of the dead. And then we finish with the hymn “In the midst of life etc.”

But if any child could instruct us better, then we would be glad to accept it.

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
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