

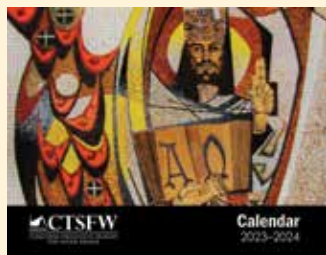
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Volume Twenty-Seven, Number Four

## CTSFW Wall Calendars

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Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), mailed its 2024 wall calendar to CTSFW alumni and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at the end of November. A limited number of additional copies are available to individuals and congregations.



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## For the Life of the World

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

## FEATURES

### 4 Luther's Order of Baptism, 1523

**Cameron A. MacKenzie**

Martin Luther rejoiced that God had preserved baptism through all the preceding centuries and by it had offered salvation to countless numbers of people. The problem was, however, that few of them knew it. Luther's little baptism book of 1523 was his first effort at putting the rite of baptism—the words and prayers by which a pastor baptizes somebody—into German, the language of his people. It was a giant step forward in teaching them about the importance of baptism.

### 7 The Formula Missae: Amputating the Dragon's Tail

**Jon S. Bruss**

As a meritorious sacrifice from human to God, the mass was, according to Martin Luther, the very dragon's tail [*Trachenschwanz*] that had swept Christendom clean of Christ's gifts and left nothing but a trail of poison. Reform of the mass required teaching—through the Word, not by force—and good, patient teaching takes time.

### 10 Let Me Sing You a Song

**Paul J. Grime**

More than five years before publishing the Small Catechism, Martin Luther recognized that music combined with words would work admirably to implant his Reformation insights into the hearts of God's people. And what better way to do so than by borrowing the methods of the Meistersingers and writing ballads that told the news of God's love in Christ Jesus?

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# Amputating the Dragon's Tail

Jon S. Bruss



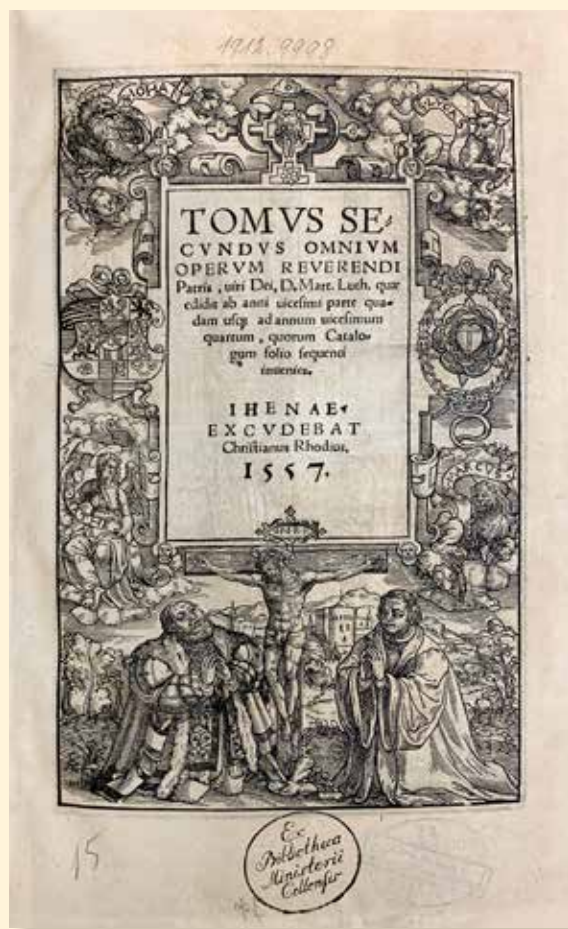
Photo: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod/Erik M. Lunstedt

In 1537 Luther traced nearly every abuse in the papacy—every false teaching and practice—to the mass. As a meritorious sacrifice from human to God, the mass was, according to Luther, the very dragon's tail [*Trachenschwanz*] that had swept Christendom clean of Christ's gifts and left nothing but a trail of poison: purgatory and meritorious masses for the dead, vigils, pilgrimages, alms, monastic orders, relics, and indulgences (Smalcald Articles II II 11-24).

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Those who have never laid eyes on the *Formula Missae* will at first be startled by two things. First, as its name indicates, it is in Latin. The second striking thing about the *Formula Missae* is how different its layout appears from a modern printed liturgy. It is not so much what we moderns think of as an “order of service” as it is a series of instructions, with rationale, on what to do when, with the words to be spoken at certain times either understood or inserted within the description.

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The *Formula Missae* is also altogether conservative. It retains practically the entire ordo—the order—of the mass inherited from the medieval world, along with the medieval propers (Introit, Epistle, Gradual, Gospel) for Sundays and the chief Christic festivals.

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Luther had, of course, been onto these abuses for nearly two decades by then, starting with the 1517 “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences” (aka Ninety-Five Theses). From that point on, with an almost preternatural literary and homiletical output, he went on the offensive and sounded the alarm against that trail of poison, including dozens of sermons and treatises on the *Trachenschwanz* itself, the mass. But as for reform of the mass, Luther remained pastorally patient. “Let the word do it,” we can hear him say.

In early 1522, however, his hand was forced. Luther was holed up at the Wartburg castle. Back in Wittenberg, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, a more radical university colleague, had begun to implement reforms he thought in keeping with the movement. From Luther’s perspective, Karlstadt moved too fast and trampled the conscience of the people. This was particularly the case in Karlstadt’s “reform” of the mass: he reduced the mass to a bare-bones affair and forced the people to receive the sacrament in both kinds—both the body and the blood of Christ—to which they had been unaccustomed from time immemorial.

Karlstadt’s imposition of the reform of the mass on Wittenberg had to be pulled back, at least temporarily. Luther was able to roll back Karlstadt’s reform upon his return in March 1522, but the need to correct the mass remained clear in view of the abuses under the papacy.

For Luther that reform required teaching. If anything was to be, it would have to be done through teaching, through the word, not by force—and good, patient teaching takes time. Luther had another concern, as well: new masses had begun to proliferate across Germany. With those two concerns in mind, Luther wrote,

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. (*An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg* [1523], LW 53:19)

Luther’s misgivings here have nothing to do with confidence in what God’s word teaches about the mass or in his ability to conceive a reform of the mass that would bring it in line with God’s word. His concern is entirely the stability of the church and the faith of believers.

It took a full ten months of regular Sunday and weekday preaching and teaching before Luther took the first practical step toward reform of the mass. In January 1523, communion in both kinds was reintroduced in the churches of Wittenberg, though it remained unrequired for the sake of the conscience of the weak. Luther patiently continued to encourage the weak. By September/October of 1523 the people had been sufficiently instructed. Anyone still refusing was not weak, but stubbornly set against Christ’s institution. From then on the church in Wittenberg practiced only communion in both kinds.

Throughout this period, the liturgy of the mass remained unreformed. It was not until Christmas Day 1523 that the Wittenberg Christians first experienced the reformed mass Luther had envisioned, the *Formula Missae et Communionis pro Ecclesia Wittenbergensi*—*Formula of the Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg* (hereafter just *Formula Missae*; in English at LW 53:19-40; in Latin at WA 12:205-220). Luther had completed his work on the mass sometime before December 4 of that year, when he sent the Zwickau reformer Nicholas Hausmann a copy.

Those who have never laid eyes on the *Formula Missae* will at first be startled by two things. First, as its name indicates, it is in Latin. The use of Latin for mass (and matins and vespers) persisted in some Lutheran cities, particularly in congregations with Latin schools, well into the nineteenth century. The second striking thing about the *Formula Missae* is how different its layout appears from a modern printed liturgy. It is not so much what we moderns think of as an “order of service” as it is a series of instructions, with rationale, on what to do when, with the words to be spoken at certain times either understood or inserted within the description.

The *Formula Missae* is also altogether conservative. It retains practically the entire ordo—the order—of the mass inherited from the medieval world, along with the medieval propers (Introit, Epistle, Gradual, Gospel) for Sundays and the chief Christic festivals. The ordo begins with the Introit and continues with the Kyrie and the “Angelic Hymn,” i.e., the Gloria in Excelsis. The Collect and Epistle are next, followed by the Gradual, the Gospel, the Nicene Creed, and Sermon.

Much is recognizable, too, in what we could call the Service of the Sacrament, which begins with the familiar Salutation, Preface, and Proper Preface. The Sanctus, Our Father, and Agnus Dei are included, as well, except that they follow the Words of Institution.

But what is absent from the Service of the Sacrament is more telling: gone is the Offertory, “that utter abomination.” Why? “From here on almost everything smacks and savors of sacrifice.” For that reason, too, Luther removed the silent prayers of the priest within the canon of the mass. These prayers represented a double offense: not only did they emphasize sacrifice, they also diminished the glory of Christ the Mediator by invoking the saints. Whether the average Wittenberg parishioner would have noticed the absence of these prayers is unclear—they were, after all, prayed silently.

But one element of those silent prayers was brought to speech. In the medieval ordo they had been the setting of the Words of Institution—the Verba. To Luther’s mind, that got the directionality wrong: the Verba are not for God the Father, they are for sinners; they are not man’s pledge to God, but God’s promise to men. They are the gospel, and the gospel is to have voice. To reverse the directionality, Luther moved the Verba from the prayers of the canon by specifying “a brief pause after the [proper] preface.” To restore them to their glorious proclamatory role, Luther instructed that they not be just spoken aloud, but “recited in the same tone in which the Our Father is chanted *so that those present may be able to hear them*” (emphasis added).

The Sanctus, Our Father, and Agnus Dei are then sung, in that order. Hymns and chants may be used during the distribution—in both kinds. After the distribution comes a post-communion collect. The ordo ends not with the medieval “*Ite, missa est*” (“Go. It is the dismissal”), but with the Salutation, Benedicamus, and a biblical Benediction, either Numbers 6:24–27 or Psalm 67:6–7.

Looking back on Wittenberg liturgical practice since Christ’s death in 1523, Philip Melancthon wrote, “The mass is retained among us and celebrated with highest reverence” (AC XXIV 1–2 Lat.)—a reverence predicated upon the restoration of Christ’s institution: communion in both kinds and, above all, the restoration of the blessed Sacrament as gift, the forgiveness of sins in Christ.

The dragon’s tail had been hacked off. 🏹

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