

WELS and *Lutheran Worship*

[Essay prepared for the Metropolitan North Conference, Milwaukee May 10, 1982]

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Quo vadis, WELS and the new Lutheran hymnal? Hopefully, this question will be answered at the next synodical convention in August of 1983. In the meanwhile, it is "look and see, study and reflect" time. In a few weeks, following the directive of our last convention, all the districts will begin a study of the new Missouri Synod hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*, and of the general question of a possible hymnal change of one kind or another for our Synod.

The initial response to the call for this study is probably predictable. Some will cry out in bewilderment, "What on earth do we need a new hymnal for? What's wrong with the one we've got?" Others (far fewer in number) will say, "It's about time we did something about our liturgy and/or hymns." And most will probably say, "Well, I don't know exactly what they're after, but maybe it's time we took a good look at *The Lutheran Hymnal*." Whatever the reaction, it is fair to ask the question: "Why are we talking about a hymnal change NOW?"

Without being exhaustive, or exhausting, about it (and in defense of the Commission on Worship which is promoting this matter), let me at least mention some of the influences and historical developments which have brought this question before our Synod. [I am trying to resist the influence of my Germanic background here. You may remember the story about the writers who all decided to produce a book about the elephant.... The British author submitted a modest volume entitled simply, *The Elephant*. The French writer came up with a slick-paper edition, *The Love-life of the Elephant*. Then came the German author with his book, sturdily bound and printed on India paper: *A Brief Introduction to the Origin, Nature, and Habits of the Elephant in Four Volumes*. The American's production was a paperback, with a picture of a scantily clad female riding an elephant and simply titled, *Bigger and Better Elephants*.] But back to the reasons for promoting discussion of hymnal change at this time. It is more than the desire of worship commissions to produce bigger and better hymnals. The most obvious stimulus is of course the publication of *Lutheran Worship* by the church body with whom we presently share a hymnal, the LC-MS. Another factor is that *The Lutheran Hymnal* is agrowin' old. There is no such thing as a perfect hymnal, and generally after a generation or so there are felt needs which build pressure for revision or change. After forty years of use, TLH has proved to be no exception to the rule. A third reason relates to social change. The 60's and early 70's were a period of social revolution in our country. The church, along with other established institutions, came in for criticism and challenge by its youth; and one of the results was a critical look at its worship forms and hymns, and a good deal of liturgical experimentation. Our Synod, though perhaps influenced less than most church bodies by the social upheaval, was not entirely unaffected by it. At any rate, the last decade or so has seen a resurgence of interest in worship and renewal of liturgical creativity in our Synod, as it has in the whole Lutheran Church and other church bodies as well. (This is especially true, it seems to me, of our younger pastors.) Choral composers, for example, have been turning away from composing music for concert use by trained choirs in favor of music for the church service, singable by average church choirs. Another example is the new interest in writing of hymns. Back in the forties the prevailing attitude was, "We've got 660 hymns in our hymnal, why would anyone want to write a new hymn?!" Today you are apt to see bulletins with music for a new hymn laboriously printed out for the congregation to try. And the relaxation of the exclusive use of Elizabethan language for worship seems to have spurred new interest in the writing of prayers for the service by our pastors.

Beyond these influences, there is the simple historical fact that the call for attention to our hymnal needs is only the culmination of a number of years of progressive development, not something that just popped up. This gives me opportunity to cite a bit of synodical hymnal history. (Those who have heard this all before are invited at this point to doze off, but only briefly, please.)

James C. Grasby's current series of articles in *The Lutheran Educator* provides information on our early hymnal history. The painful and somewhat acrimonious language change in our Synod from German to English

produced our first English hymnal in 1911, entitled *Church Hymnal*. With fewer than 125 hymns, its influence was short-lived. Within six years Pastor O. Hagedorn of Milwaukee produced a new hymnal, *Book of Hymns*, with 320 hymns and sixteen pages of liturgical material. This was the predecessor to TLH. At the synodical convention of 1925, the Book Commission proposed the production of an inter-Lutheran hymnal with the other members of The Synodical Conference. In 1929 the Missouri Synod responded to the invitation by taking steps that eventually led to the publication of our present hymnal. We might also note in passing that prior to the joint hymnal project, a movement was spearheaded by Pastor H. Koller Mousa of Fond du Lac to produce a supplement to the *Book Of Hymns*. By 1941 the Synodical Conference Committee on Hymnology and Liturgics had produced TLH, a book with 660 hymns and 168 pages of liturgical resources.

Our more recent hymnal history is perhaps familiar to most of us. In 1953 the LC-MS began preparation of an extensive supplement to *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Our Synod's representatives worked on this hymnal committee until the Synod severed its relations with the LC-MS. It continued to be closely associated with the project although in the capacity of observers. There was a general hope that a hymnal supplement acceptable for use in the Wis. Synod would be produced. In 1965, when the hymnal revision was almost ready for publication, the convention of the Missouri Synod unexpectedly decided to issue an invitation to all other Lutheran bodies to publish a pan-Lutheran hymnal. The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship was formed and in 1978 was ready with the material for the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Our Wisconsin Synod had in the beginning been invited to participate in the joint project but was not welcomed in the role of observers. At this point our commission began to plan its own *Worship Companion* for TLH. While the work on LBW was progressing, the Missouri Synod did publish its *Supplement*, but greatly reduced in content out of deference to the new hymnal in preparation. When LBW was ready for publication in 1978, the LC-MS declined out of doctrinal concerns to share in the publication. Instead, it decided to publish its own revision of LBW, which it began to market in February of this year under the title of *Lutheran Worship*. When the Missouri Synod decided to publish LW, our Wis. Synod commission suspended its work on the *Worship Companion* to await publication and scrutiny of the Missouri book. And that, dear readers, brings you up to date and ends this fascinating and eventful history. I would only add that after this long number of years it would seem to be time for our Synod to give serious attention to making some decisions on the hymnal. And this appears to be the intent of the last synodical convention's resolutions.

II. A SUMMARY OF NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS IN TLH

Before we take a look at *Lutheran Worship*, it might be well to summarize some of the felt needs for improvement in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Some of these needs have already been noted by our Synod and the commission has responded by publishing booklets with revision of the Collects for the Day and by providing the congregations with New International Version translations for the Introits and Graduals. Other liturgical materials and hymns have been gathered or produced for possible inclusion in *The Worship Companion*, in case the Synod should request its publication.

Among the obvious needs in TLH is the lowering of pitches in both liturgies and hymns. The rather high *tessituras* tend to make chanting a strain and probably promote the use of part-singing in the hymns. This latter practice is defended and relished by many, particularly basses, but its blithe indulgence often results in unchristian harmonies and does little to promote the quality of the fellowship in the immediate area where it is practiced. Be that as it may, the simple solution would be to lower the pitches.

Another generally perceived need has already been alluded to, namely the need to revise the Propers or to provide new ones. The apocopated Introits, remnants of the original psalms or psalm-sections, have been generally felt to be unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons.

Related to the Propers problem is the desirability of providing room in the Sunday service for the use of the Psalms. It seems a shame that the rich devotional and liturgical treasury of these Old Testament songs is becoming an increasingly lost treasure to our congregations. We do indeed have the Psalms in TLH, but there is

no place provided in our Sunday services for their use. It would also be desirable to make some provision for the singing of these poetic masterpieces, as was originally intended and long practiced in the church. In the last decade a number of workable melodic formulas have been developed which make psalm-singing by the choir or congregation or a combination of both relatively easy and satisfying.

The meeting of another felt need would result in the expansion of Scripture presented each Sunday to the congregation. Specifically, the addition of an Old Testament reading as provided for in the new three-year lectionary. This conference has recently heard an essay pleading the need for attention to the Old Testament scriptures. Liturgical provision for this third reading would be a practical way of implementing this. Presently our Synod has the dubious distinction of reading less of the Bible than most of the rest of America's Lutherans. This would seem to be out of character for the Wisconsin Synod.

There are a number of other changes in the liturgical section of TLH which ought to be made. For example, the omitting of the four-part harmony in the liturgical chants and canticles would make it easier to follow the texts and track their meaning. Some revision in the harmonizations of the chants would make for smoother and more comfortable singing. The rubrics in general in TLH are not printed very boldly and are sometimes misleading. For example, the PRAYERS in the Matins and Vespers are usually done in a wrong order. A careful reading of the rubrics shows that they are correct, but it is easy to be misled.

We should also not fail to recognize that there are a number of liturgical resources from the heritage which are not incorporated in TLH. It would be nice to have them included, e.g. the Chorale service, which is adapted from Luther's German Mass of 1526. This service substitutes Reformation age chorales for the liturgical chants in our Sunday service. There are other desirable additions and revisions which could be cited.

Of more interest, perhaps, are the growing needs of our hymn section. Over the last forty years it has become apparent (as it always does) that there are a number of hymns which are not sung nor do they hold a high historical place in our Lutheran heritage. These could well be culled out and their place taken by the rather large number of worthy hymns which were not included in TLH but are available to us today. Especially noteworthy are some of the more recently written hymns. To the extent that ignorance is bliss, of course, they are not missed by our congregations. But their inclusion would be a distinct and enjoyable plus for our worshipers. The fruits of creative work by today's poets and composers ought not be scorned by the church just because with 660 hymns "we certainly have more than enough!" The Lutheran principle of retaining the best of the past and also welcoming worthy additions for the worship is not served by such an attitude. If we had not moved from the *Book of Hymns* to *The Lutheran Hymnal*, we would not now be able to sing such favorites as Glory, Laud and Honor," O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today," "For All the Saints," or "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage," to mention just a few.

The last need that we mention is one that affects the whole liturgical section of the hymnal and many of the hymns. That is the need for revision in the worship language. This, it seems to me, is the most pressing and potentially the most important for our Synod. With the increasing use of modern Bible translations, particularly the NIV, and the revision of the Catechism incorporating the use of that translation, the use of Elizabethan English in our worship will shortly become more and more uncomfortable and archaic-sounding. We do not perhaps notice this right now, but in contemplating a hymnal change we need to look into the future. We need to consider that we will be providing a hymnal for our children more than for ourselves. There is not time, nor perhaps need, to review all the arguments for language change, but we should seriously consider the future impact of continuing use of our present worship language on our children, on member acquisitions from other Lutheran bodies, and on adult confirmands for whom our Lutheran liturgy and hymns hold difficulties enough without compounding them by the use of Elizabethan language.

III A LOOK AT LUTHERAN WORSHIP

First, some general remarks and reactions. It should be noted right off that *Lutheran Worship* is essentially a revision of LBW, not a new hymnal. The original intent of the LC-MS was simply to answer certain

doctrinal concerns about LBW, such as objections to the eucharistic prayer, ambiguities or questionable statements in some of the collects and hymns etc. An additional concern was the desire to retain the present historic Sunday liturgy which was not included in LBW. Eventually, the revision went further, including a number of the hymns from TLH which had been dropped 71 from LBW, and adding a number of hymns and also certain liturgical materials. In general, however, the book remains a version of LBW.

In general format and appearance LW is a good improvement over TLH. It is attractively bound, has a good deal more white space and the rubrics are printed in red, which makes the directions stand out. It has 270 pages of liturgical material and 520 hymns (including eleven canticles). It is a tad larger and thicker than TLH and weighs two and one half pounds(a far cry from the little black hymnals that some of us used to carry to church in our pockets). Its price (\$10.00) is reasonable considering that TLH now costs \$7.50. The language has been changed throughout to conform to today's English.

Overall, one could say that this is a fine hymnal, particularly in its liturgical section. There are many excellencies (which is not to say that there are no perceived weaknesses). Though your worship commission is still sorting out the validity of the spate of initial criticisms published by *Christian News*, our present feeling is that the intent of the LC-MS in taking care of legitimate doctrinal concerns was carefully and adequately met by the work of the Synod's worship commission.

THE CONTENTS OF *LUTHERAN WORSHIP*

A sketch of the new hymnal's contents was prepared by Prof. Bruce Backer for our worship commission and is printed on the final page of this review. A STUDY GUIDE is being prepared by the commission which will be distributed at the district conventions in June. This Guide brings a rather detailed comparison of LW with TLH. Some of the principal differences include the following:

Liturgical Section

TLH really has only one Sunday service, although it is printed twice, with Communion or non-Communion conclusions.

LW has three services: *Divine Service I* is our traditional p. 5/15 service with minor musical adjustments to accommodate updated language.

Divine Service II is a new service, following the historical structure but with some changes and with new music. This service is offered with two different musical settings.

This service differs from our TLH service in the following points:

1. The "Lord have mercy" of the Kyrie is interspersed with petitions for the church and for the world.
2. There is an alternate song (very appealing) for the Gloria: "This Is the Feast of Victory for our God."
3. The Creed follows the Sermon instead of the Gospel.
4. The Offertory is changed. "Create in Me" is replaced by two alternates: "What Shall I Render to the Lord for All His Benefits" and "Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful."
5. There is a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of salvation after the exhortation, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."
6. "The Peace" permits communicants to greet one another with a handshake.

Divine Service III is a version of Luther's German Mass. It is a Communion service in which congregational participation consists entirely of hymn singing.

MATINS AND VESPERS - The content of these services is the same as in TLH. The language is, as everywhere, updated. The music is mostly new although the tunes for the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis are basically the same as in TLH.

For those who use Matins and Vespers frequently, LW offers two additional services: MORNING PRAYER and EVENING PRAYER. Although similar to Matins and Vespers they offer some variety and enrichment.

One of the appealing additions to the liturgical resources in LW is the inclusion of the ancient order of Compline, called PRAYER AT THE CLOSE OF DAY. This is a little devotion or service prayed late in the evening. It too is similar to Vespers.

A Closer Look at Divine Service I

Since we are perhaps most interested in the new version of our TLH service, let's note the changes in LW's version:

1. There are *three* readings, with the addition of an Old Testament selection. Readings are provided for One Year or Three Year series.
2. The Offertory (Create in Me) is sung *after* the offering has been received.
3. A Prayer of Thanksgiving is added after the Sanctus in response to the exhortation, "Let us give thanks unto the Lord, our God." This prayer thanks God for His gift of salvation and prays for worthy reception.

As for the music, an attempt was made to keep most of the melodies of TLH. Changes in the language of course have made some revising necessary. The melody for the Nunc Dimittis is new. All harmonies under the melodies are new. Music is consistently provided for the minister to sing his part. He is not required to do so by the rubrics.

During Lent the song, "The Royal Banners Forward Go" may be sung in place of the Gloria in Excelsis. During Advent, the song, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is appointed.

THE PSALMS - Sixty psalms are included in LW. One of these psalms is used each Sunday for the Introit. Melodies are provided so that the choir or congregation may sing them. The melodies are simple, usually consisting of eight notes. The language used is that of the NIV.

A BRIEF CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE LITURGICAL SECTION OF LUTHERAN WORSHIP

Our concerns about TLH are taken care of in LW. Individual opinions about the solutions will vary, but in general we would give the liturgical section a high rating. It should be noted, however, that the musical harmonizations will offer a considerable challenge to our organists. The accompaniments are considerably more difficult than in TLH.

THE HYMNS OF LUTHERAN WORSHIP

The hymns of LW total 520. That number includes the eleven canticles which are numbered with the hymns. The number of tunes used is 364.

The Texts

The Lutheran Hymnal has contributed 381 hymns to LW. All but eleven of these texts have been altered or slightly modified, usually in the interest of language update. In a few cases, the Elizabethan language was retained.

The other major source of hymn texts for LW was the group of non-TLH hymns previously printed in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. 94 hymns came from this source. A few hymns were drawn from other sources.

Of the 275 TLH hymns which were not included in LW, over half are of the 18th-19th century English origin. Most of the rest are the work of 17th and 18th century German writers.

The Tunes

364 of the tunes in LW come from TLH. The majority of the other tunes used come from LBW and the *Worship Supplement*. About 150 of the tunes used in TLH are not found in LW.

Critical Evaluation

The Texts - The alteration of hymn texts in many cases has resulted in smoother reading. The removal of archaic expressions gives the hymns a more contemporary feel, although this will take some getting used to, particularly where the hymns are well known. Unfortunately, the determination to remove all the “thee” and “thou” pronouns with their attendant verb endings seems frequently to have been excessive zeal. More of the old hymns should have been considered “classics” and left untouched. The LW commission, particularly, made changes which most worshipers will probably feel to be unwelcome.

It was a general practice of LBW to cull stanzas from the longer hymns, particularly the chorales. The LW commission retained this general principal, although they did restore some stanzas and occasionally chose a better selection of stanzas. Generally, no more than six stanzas are included in the hymns. On the balance, this seems to be a negative.

The Tunes - To a large extent, the tunes from TLH which were dropped from LW are no great loss. Most of the better tunes were used. There are exceptions, of course. (E.g. TLH 12, 73.2, 78, 82, 112, 549 these are good tunes.) The biggest plus in this area is in the number of strong and sometimes superior new hymn tunes incorporated into LW. There is little doubt that users of LW will shortly sing some of these with considerable enthusiasm.

Harmonizations - The harmonizations of the hymns in LW use a more sophisticated musical language than does TLH. This will probably be felt, after a period of adjustment, to be plus for the singing. As far as the organists are concerned, however, they will find the music for the hymns, like that provided for the liturgies, to be a considerable challenge.

DOES LUTHERAN WORSHIP HAVE A FUTURE IN WELS?

That is a question nobody can answer yet. The intent of the Synod is that LW be studied carefully in this coming year. Your commission considers the new hymnal to be generally an excellent hymnal, retaining a distinctive Lutheran character but also incorporating a wider selection of material from the larger heritage of the Christian church.

There are a number of options open to our Synod. We could use LW, or we decide to prepare our own hymnal. If we did, there is little doubt that we would attempt to borrow largely from LW. Other possible options to meet the need for improvement in TLH might be the retaining of TLH and the publication of the *Worship Companion*. It would also be possible to purchase the bound “insides” of LW, add an appendix of our own materials, and put on our own cover. The commission on worship is instructed to consider the feasibility of all options. The result will be examined to consider the feasibility of all options. The result will be examined by the

next synodical convention and a choice, hopefully, will be made. The one option that we hope will not be considered seriously by the Synod is to do nothing.

The hymnal is the one book that is used by all the worshipers of our church body every week. It deserves the careful attention of us all, and we should provide our people with absolutely the best product that our resources can provide. So mote it be!

Contents of *LUTHERAN WORSHIP*

	Introduction	
One	The Church Year Propers of the Day Petitions, Intercessions, Thanksgivings Athanasian Creed	126 pp.
Two	Divine Service I (TLH revised) Divine Service II, Two Settings (from LBW) Divine Service III (Luther's German Mass) Holy Baptism Confirmation Matins & Vespers Morning Prayer & Evening Prayer Prayer at the Close of Day (Compline)	127 pp.
Three	Responsive Prayer 1 & 2(Suffrages) The Bidding Prayer & The Litany Propers for Morning & Evening Prayer Psalms for Daily Prayer	22 pp.
Four	Daily Devotions, Family Daily Readings Luther's Small Catechism Corp. Confession-Absolution Indiv. Confession-Absolution Holy Baptism - Emergency	19 pp.
Five	Psalms (60 psalms with melodies) How to Sing Psalms, Introits, Graduals, Canticles Canticles and Chants 11 Hymns 491 & Spiritual Songs 18	636 pp.
	Indexes	