



The Lutheran Book of Worship at Ten

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Most Lutherans in North America entered the 1980s with a new worship resource, the *Lutheran Book of Worship*¹ (LBW). The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, the Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and the American Lutheran Church cooperated in its inception. Many suggest the birth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was midwived in those antecedent bodies through the nurture of this green-covered worship resource. Threat of that ecclesiastical birth apparently caused Missouri to flee from the impending blessed event and withdraw from the project. Gone, but not forgotten, is Missouri. One can detect from the musical midwife a German accent.

The LBW and I arrived the same year at the third congregation to which I was called for Word and Sacrament ministry. That coincidence brought blame or praise to the new pastor, depending on how parishioners responded to “the new book.” One family left the congregation because “the LBW format is too rigid, doesn’t allow enough space for the Word, and the hymns are not singable.” At the same time another family joined the congregation because of the variety in LBW worship. An elderly woman approached the newly-installed pastor with her agenda cloaked in motherly concern. Patting me on the arm she firmly warned, “Don’t make any more changes in the service!”

Throughout the first decade of its use, members and visitors in congregations I have served expressed appreciation or discouragement with the LBW along lines I am discovering extend throughout the church. Worship professionals likewise proffer mixed reviews regarding the composition and effectiveness of the LBW. After ten years with the LBW, one-third to one-half way to the next Lutheran worship book, I regard these responses as noteworthy and representative.

¹*Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg; Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978).

I. HYMNS, PSALMS, AND CANTICLES

1. Hymns are nicely indexed in the back of LBW. Additional scriptural and topical indices to LBW provide welcome supplementary tools.²

2. Modified hymn harmonizations have generated mixed reviews, many negative. A common response to the changes is, Why did they change them? That question ranks in frequency alongside, Why did they change the words? Recognizing how closely hymns reflect personal piety and aware that piety takes generations to change, it’s no wonder hymn changes evoke pained responses. In preparation for the next Lutheran hymnbook, the church needs to hear

a plea from the people in the pews: Please do not change the words to “A Mighty Fortress” again!

3. “Lift High the Cross” (No.377) is worth the price of the book, but may already be overused. “We Know That Christ Is Raised” (189), “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (562), “Amid the World’s Bleak Wilderness” (378), and, yes, “Amazing Grace” (448) are among some LBW additions which have lifted and broadened the spirit of Lutheran worship. Lutherans need not maintain the same lists of favorites, but many of the new hymns and hymns new to LBW are gems.

4. Only a few of the canticles are used in most congregations, but they provide the rare moments of substance in the Service of the Word.

5. Pointed Psalm tones enable Lutherans actually to sing the psalmody. However, without additional settings beyond the ten printed in LBW, weekly (and certainly daily) Psalm singing can grow wearisome.

6. *Songs of the People*,³ a hymn supplement to LBW, has provided the remarkably large number of congregations who have ordered it a readily usable variety of ethnic and contemporary songs. Some have argued that this book provides a needed balance to LBW.

7. Search from green cover to green cover and you will not find even one Bach chorale in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. An unfortunate omission!

8. The church is behind in providing worship materials for Lutherans whose ethnic origin is not Northern European. While liturgy and hymns for Hispanic Lutherans have been produced for years, the need is now for additional Hispanic worship resources. Moreover, the church is lagging in accumulating and producing black/urban and Asian liturgies and hymns.

9. The intention of inclusivity need not deny maintaining traditional Lutheran hymns from Northern European sources. A collection of Scandinavian hymns, for example, could provide an alternative supplement to LBW along with Hispanic, black/urban, and Asian materials.

10. Formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has interrupted a dynamic process facilitated in the Joint Committee on Worship (namely, pan-participation of North American Lutherans) which must now proceed double time, one hopes in a similarly constituted group. The development of

²Robin R. Hough, *Concordance to Hymn Texts, Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985); Paul E. Schuessler, Thomas R. Bartsch, David P. Rebeck, *Scriptural and Topical Indices to LBW* (Lima, OH: C.S.S.); Marilyn Kay Stulken, *Hymnal Companion to the Lutheran Book of Worship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

³*Songs of the People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986).

appropriate worship materials will in large measure determine the church’s commitment to becoming a multi-ethnic, inclusive body.

II. LITURGY

Holy Baptism. LBW has provided a stellar liturgy for the sacrament of Holy Baptism. The words, “Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father,” at both the “flood prayer” in Baptism and the eucharistic prayer bind the sacramental life of the congregation together. Vocal participation by parents and sponsors at the presentation of the child, presentation of the baptismal candle by a

representative of the congregation, and a hearty welcome to the Lord's family from the whole community enable Lutheran baptismal liturgy to be the worship of the whole congregation.

The use of the baptismal candle and oil bring sensory and symbolic enhancement to sacramental moments. Prayer over the water and prayer for the Holy Spirit clearly connect the first and third articles of the creed to the second. Affirmation of Baptism ties milestones of faith to the font.

Holy Communion. The introduction of LBW intended a shift in paradigm to increased frequency and prominence of Holy Communion in the worship life of North American Lutherans. For many congregations this tilt toward the Eucharist has resulted in a healthy process of study and intentionality in balancing occasions for congregations to receive each of the means of grace.

Opportunities and assignments for presiding and assisting ministers of Holy Communion have corrected misconceptions of who does what in worship. The three settings of Holy Communion ennoble the worship leadership of both ordained and non-ordained ministers.

Although I greet this shift with appreciation, I join those who have expressed an attendant concern. The enthusiasm of this decade for the Eucharist may have resulted in diminishing the importance of preaching on the part of pastors and in seminary training. While the church rejoices at more comprehensive preparation of seminarians as worship leaders and liturgists, the church must accommodate the need and desire of congregations to hear good preaching. The ideal of LBW is that both Word and Sacrament be prominent opportunities to encounter the crucified and risen Lord. Both require significant preparation in the seminary and by pastors serving congregations.

Three musical settings of Holy Communion are provided in LBW. Each setting contains some splendid musical moments and also some lapses in musical support. Setting Three, for example, seems best used in Advent and Lent when the Hymn of Praise is omitted because its musical rendition of "Worthy Is Christ" does not adequately carry the freight of the text.

The last musical setting of Holy Communion is yet to be written. The church needs to encourage her composers to keep on writing. The Cornell setting⁴ and the Detroit Folk Mass⁵ are noble attempts at providing distinctive alternatives to the three LBW settings.

Other Liturgies. Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are major liturgies of the church which await even occasional usage in most congregations. At ten

⁴Gary Cornell, *Holy Communion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981).

⁵James Harris and Tillis Butler, *Detroit Folk Mass* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986).

years with LBW, it is high time for people to make friends with the Paschal Blessing in Morning Prayer and the Service of Light in Evening Prayer. Compline, the good-night prayers of the church, is new to LBW and deserves a place in congregational worship plans.

The remaining liturgies in LBW and *Occasional Services*⁶ have expanded the worship resources of the church to the occasions where the ministry of worship actually happens. The LBW and LBW *Occasional Services* are targeted for today. The AIDS epidemic and the need for touch in a high-tech age are among the needs the church of today and tomorrow must face and our worship resources must address. Inclusion of the Service of the Word for Healing and of the Laying on of Hands and Anointing of the Sick has legitimized and made appealingly available

healing prayers for church-wide use.

The selection of Psalms, Lessons, and Prayers in *Occasional Services* points the minister to places of deep need with skillfully chosen resources. An order for distribution of communion to those in special circumstances is among liturgies which enable the assisting ministers to provide needed service in sacramental life.

Inclusion of the Athanasian Creed in LBW represents visual testimony of the Lutheran subscription to the three ecumenical creeds, even though it is rarely spoken. The two-year daily lectionary is a welcome devotional source for congregational members. One congregation publishes the daily Scripture selections with the daily calendar of events. The liturgy and life of that congregation are intended to intersect in the daily Word.

The LBW inclusion of a calendar of Sundays and principal festivals and a calendar of lesser festivals and commemorations, with accompanying prayers and pericopes, has connected the most recent decade of Christian history to significant centuries and saints of past Christian witness. The result is a dawning of ecumenical, international, and historic appreciation. The LBW has provided names and occasions for remembering the great cloud of witnesses.

III. THE LBW: ALIVE WITH UNREALIZED PROMISE

Following the publication of the LBW, an interpretative pamphlet was distributed to Lutheran congregations which anticipated questions at the grassroots and provided answers for the intended users. The pamphlet asked: "What will the new book do for our worship?" It answered: "By itself, very little. But the introduction of the book can be the occasion for the rediscovery of the vitality and the depth of Christian worship. It should be the centerpiece for a wider program of renewal of congregational life."

One could deduce from this preview that renewal in worship and congregational life will not occur simply by introducing anew book. It hasn't. Nor will renewal, vitality, and rediscovery automatically sparkle in a congregation by ordering and studying the accompanying resource volume, *Manual on the Liturgy-Lutheran Book of Worship*.⁷

Mary Collins, O.S.B., was among those who saw the LBW's potential in

⁶*Occasional Services: A Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg; Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1982).

⁷Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy—Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979).

relationship to a more crucial congregational agenda. Concluding her warm review of the *Manual on the Liturgy*, she asks rhetorically:

Could anyone ask for more? Yes. Preparation for celebration involves preparing the people, a task outside the stated scope of this book, but not outside the purpose of the basic liturgical renewal project. Christian educators or catechists will need to find ways to open up for the laity the underlying vision of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* which is set out here. The book is alive with promise.⁸

Now a decade into its use, I suggest the underlying vision of LBW remains alive with

promise, yet without actual corresponding renewal in most parishes. That LBW has not significantly impacted life and mission in the congregation is not to express disappointment in the book. For most congregations, the underlying vision of the LBW is a winsome dance waiting to take the floor. Unfortunately, some congregations are rehearsing LBW with the choreography of previous books, while others are making up steps as they go. Actual change happens slowly. But the crucial issue lies deeper than a pastor's or congregation's willingness to change or, for that matter, deeper than the publication of a new book.

Individual congregations share rites and norms of worship with other churches—basic, universal norms, giving clear evidence of the catholicity of the church in worship. The major dance movements of the LBW invite Lutherans to a cosmopolitan ballet. “But it is always *we* who celebrate,” concludes Robert Hovda,

and the celebration must be ours. So each group of celebrating Christians will have its own liturgical needs arising from its own particular circumstances and its situation. Christian worship must be the authentic, personal worship of these particular persons in this particular assembly.⁹

Something needs to happen to facilitate incarnating the major movements of the liturgy onto the local congregation's dance floor while at the same time keeping the vision of the universal dance intact. Lutherans have faced a dilemma for the past decade. At one end of the spectrum, congregations have attempted to use the LBW as if it were *the* liturgy—fearful of every invitation to interpretive dance and mechanical about options; at the other end, congregations have tried each Sunday to reinvent the dance—beginning from scratch, as if nothing had been learned from the past.

Lutheran congregations would do well to give more attention to preparing people for worship. To that end, it is well worth planning at least one series of adult classes on worship themes each year. Over a period of five years a congregation could cover themes such as Lutheran liturgy, hymns, the worship space, sacraments, and the occasional services. Instruction about the ingredients of worship for Lutheran people seems a primary core course.

Seasonal planning teams composed of pastor, parish musician, and a few other members of the congregation can look forward to each season of the church year, combining textual study and liturgical calendar considerations with the specific needs of the congregation. This time spent in advance will allow for creativity and involvement of the people both in the planning and

⁸Mary Collins, “Book Reviews,” *Worship* 54/2 (March, 1980) 186-188.

⁹Robert W. Hovda, *Strong, Loving and Wise* (Washington: The Liturgical Conference, 1976).

doing of worship. At the very least, the pastor and musician must see themselves as a team in worship planning.

It takes extra time, energy, and effort to equip and involve the congregation in worship preparation and planning. But those who have invested in worship have discovered the more deeply a congregation is involved in preparing for worship, the more meaningful worship becomes to that congregation.

For the Christian, all of life is worship. The most profound moments of worship include

gathering around Word and sacraments and the preparation for these peak experiences. Worship is an encounter with God. Worship is a celebration of life transformed by faith. As a resource toward this end, the LBW is alive with promise.