



## **The Lutheran Book of Worship: A Shaper of Lutheran Piety in North America\***

EUGENE L. BRAND

Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the “greening” of worship among Lutherans in North America, i.e., the introduction of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW). The LBW has become a major expression of Christian worship in the international English-speaking world. There it stands alongside the various modern versions of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the English edition of the *Missal* of Paul VI. Not only are these books all in English; they also employ the same texts for chief portions of the liturgy, and many of them use a variety of the three-year lectionary system originally introduced as part of the post-Vatican II reform of the Roman Catholic Church. In many aspects, therefore, the “green book” is not exclusively Lutheran. It is rather *an* expression of a broader heritage. But it is Lutheran; Lutherans are the ones who benefit directly from its strengths and suffer directly from its weaknesses.

To speak of *Lutheran* piety requires an introductory observation. Lutherans have known varying styles of piety, and, in this country, pieties have varied according to ethnic origins and even within ethnic groups. The transition from Norwegian or German or Swedish to English had its effect on piety. Shapers of Lutheran piety, at least traditionally, have included the Bible, hymns, liturgy, the Small Catechism, the nurturing ministry of congregations, and family and personal devotions. Piety, I think one can say, is the quality of life as shaped by God’s Word and prayer (in the broadest sense of that word). Presently Lutheran piety is being shaped by other movements, including the struggle for inclusiveness in the church, the charismatic movement, and influences from otherworld religions. But while it is still useful and possible to speak of *Lutheran* piety, is it not increasingly true that varieties of piety do not divide along con-

\*This essay is adapted from a convocation address delivered at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, on October 3, 1988.

fessional lines, but rather cut across them all? Charismatic piety is a good example.

It would be presumptuous to speak of a ten-year-old book as a *shaper* of piety unless that book is seen as the most recent benchmark in a development traceable through a series of predecessors. That is especially appropriate since 1988 also marks the 240th anniversary of the *Agende* of Lutheran patriarch Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the centenary of the *Common Service* (CS), and the 70th anniversary of the *Common Service Book* (CSB). A number of other landmark books appeared in years ending in 8!

## I. THE LBW IN LITERARY CONTEXT

By comparing liturgical texts, one can demonstrate a linear development beginning with the *Church Book*, a nineteenth-century predecessor of the CSB, through the CSB to the *Service Book and Hymnal* (SBH), used both in the former Lutheran Church in America and American Lutheran Church. Actually the SBH was published in 1958 by the eight Lutheran bodies which became two in the early 1960s.

The liturgical section of the SBH marked the culmination of the Common Service tradition. By the time work on the SBH began (1945), the Common Service had become either the standard English-language service in the partner churches or was included in their books as an alternate possibility. Over half a century the Common Service had established itself as common liturgical ground for American Lutherans worshiping in English.

The problem was that the Common Service existed in several books which contained different hymnals and differing occasional services. The chief contribution of the SBH is not that it is the apotheosis of the Common Service tradition; rather it is the achievement of a common hymnal and selection of occasional services.

But the SBH liturgy was not just a culmination; it also opened the door toward *oikumene*. The SBH Eucharist contains three additions to the “common consent” of the sixteenth-century Lutheran Church Orders which make it not only the culmination of the Common Service eucharistic tradition, but also a response to the challenge of twentieth-century ecumenical liturgical and theological developments. These are the introduction of an Old Testament series in the lectionary (permissive), placing the *Kyrie* in the context of an Eastern Orthodox litany, and the introduction of a Eucharistic Prayer built primarily of Orthodox elements (as an alternate form).

The LBW Eucharist also stands in the Common Service tradition, but less obviously. It is heir to two major reforms: that of the sixteenth century and that of twentieth-century Roman Catholicism. Drawing from both reforms and from biblical and patristic research, the liturgical movement has brought those in the “Western” tradition to a remarkable degree of convergence in the Eucharist liturgy. One can demonstrate this by placing in parallel columns the Eucharist liturgy of the LBW, the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*, and the English *Missal* of Paul VI. To swell the Lutheran chorus, add columns for the Church of Norway (1977), the Lutheran Church in France (1983), the Church of Sweden (1986), and the proposals of German Lutherans (cf. *Strukturpapier*, 1974).

Like the SBH, the chief contribution of the LBW is not the liturgy for Holy Communion. Modifications there include the separation of confession from the Eucharist itself (about which more later), establishing the Old Testament reading alongside Epistle and Gospel, moving the Offertory to its logical place just prior to the Preface, and making the Eucharistic Prayer the preferred form of Great Thanksgiving.

But the major contributions of the LBW consist in its attempt to replace traditional sixteenth-century English diction with a more contemporary and inclusive English style, its emphasis on Baptism in the liturgical corpus, its version of the three-year lectionary and revised calendar, and the explicit demarcation of a variety of leadership roles (both lay and clerical). All these, of course, have a bearing on the Eucharist.

In spite of the role of hymns in shaping piety, it is outside my plan to speak about the LBW hymnal. I believe that as the LBW was taking shape the kairos was liturgical rather than hymnological. In my judgment the churches could have lived longer with the SBH hymnal than with its liturgy. In spite of its nobility and elegance, SBH diction was out-of-date the day it was published, and it became an increasing liability. Lutheran seminarians of the 1960s were reluctant to learn the rudiments of sixteenth-century grammar and showed themselves incapable of wrapping their tongues around the King James psalms.

## II. LUTHERANS AMONG AMERICAN DENOMINATIONS

The liturgical tradition I have attempted to sketch has influenced the locus of Lutheran churches in the larger context of the church catholic more than is usually recognized. The Lutheran way has been to construct an identity on the Lutheran Confessions and to tolerate, at least theoretically, liturgical diversity. But a study of Lutheran liturgy reveals that, except for periods when we deviated from our confessional heritage, our liturgies have been remarkably similar. Lutherans have in fact adhered closely to the tradition of the Latin church. That is expressed as early as the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “We do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it...” (Art. 24).

Our confessional heritage and our theological strivings have grown out of and been placed at the service of the historic church. Lutherans have never been given to rediscovering or reinventing the New Testament church. In our theology we have attempted to be evangelical catholics, and it should surprise no one that our liturgies have paralleled that. Deviations from the path of confessional theology have usually been accompanied by deviations in liturgy, thus underlining the interrelatedness of *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. In the nineteenth century, American Lutherans formed a new body, the General Council, to counter the confessional laxity of the General Synod. It was that same General Council which produced the *Church Book*. We have noted already that the *Church Book* marked the beginning of the liturgical renewal which led through the Common Service and the SBH to the LBW.

In 1906, when the Common Service was just eighteen years old, Luther D. Reed wrote:

Our service is at once a living embodiment and a luminous and lovely expression of the Holy Christian Faith as apprehended by the Lutheran Church,

---

page 40

and...as such it deserves to stand as a worthy contribution of American Lutheranism to the number of confessional Symbols of our Church...<sup>1</sup>

Some would regard that suggestion as blatantly un-Lutheran, but I think it must be taken seriously. The confessional and liturgical traditions, seen together, define less ambiguously the Lutheran place in denominational pluralism than does the confessional tradition alone.

One can argue convincingly that the Confessions relate Lutherans to the “catholic” family of churches. But from the Confessions one can also mount strong arguments that the primary partners for Lutherans are the Reformed churches, at least those who still claim their own confessional heritage.

It is my conviction that Lutherans should not—at least not at this moment in the process

of ecumenical rapprochement—cast their ecumenical lot with one “side” against the other. Churches on both “sides” are undergoing ecumenical transformation, and things may turn out differently than one would now expect.

Having said that, it is nevertheless clear that the liturgical heritage as exemplified in the LBW positions Lutherans with other churches who also adhere intentionally to the liturgical tradition of the “Western” church. Taken together, the confessional and liturgical traditions insist that Lutherans can never be anything less than evangelical catholics.

Many are agreed that the typical non-sacramental worship of mainline Protestantism becomes less and less viable. The rapid growth of emotionalistic, fundamentalistic types of Protestantism is another issue altogether. Whatever correct things one may say theologically about services of the Word, it is the full service (including sermon and sacrament), to which the Lutheran Confessors—mostly lay persons—pledged themselves, that is the way forward for evangelical catholics. Lutherans are “of a different spirit” from those who disregard the catholic tradition. But that position is not an isolated one. It is increasingly characteristic of the broad ecumenical movement.

When members of the Commission on Faith and Order wished to celebrate the completion of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM),<sup>2</sup> they did so with a Eucharist—the “Lima Liturgy”—which would also fit neatly the parallel columns test I suggested earlier. Even the BEM text bears the stamp of the Eucharist Prayer in its structure.

Celebrating the Eucharist according to the LBW is probably the most ecumenical event of the week in many Lutheran parishes. That too few people experience it that way is a pity and a missed opportunity for growth.

### III. THE ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE

Those Reformation churches which maintain the classic liturgical tradition have, together with the Roman Catholic Church, reached agreement on what constitutes the liturgy of the Eucharist. Having reached that agreement separately—in close contact, yet working separately—it seems that the remaining challenges could be most profitably addressed together. There may well be

<sup>1</sup>Luther D. Reed, “Our Distinctive Worship,” *Memoirs of the Lutheran Liturgical Association* 1 (1906) 18.

<sup>2</sup>*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982); hereafter BEM.

particular Lutheran insights into the remaining problem areas, but I doubt that there are, strictly speaking, unilateral Lutheran solutions.

From among several possibilities, let me focus on three areas in the Eucharist which require such joint work: (1) the relationship between the Eucharist and confession/ absolution, (2) the concept and language of sacrifice, and (3) appropriate liturgical expressions of the role of the Holy Spirit.

1. As the Lutheran liturgical tradition developed in America, one can observe a move to separate the brief orders for confession/ absolution from the Eucharist itself, making confession/ absolution a preparatory act. Other solutions have been tried and discarded. The first step was to dissociate the confession from the *Kyrie*, freeing the *Kyrie* to perform its intended function in the entrance rite. The second step was taken in the LBW: a separate Brief Order for Confession and

Forgiveness. The Episcopalians proceeded similarly in their revised *Book of Common Prayer*. None of these solutions strikes me as satisfactory pastorally. One might argue as the LBW does that there is no *necessary* connection between such a brief order and the Eucharist itself. To omit the brief order in most places, however, results in no confession/ absolution at all, and that is both pastorally and theologically irresponsible. After the lengthy process of freeing the Eucharist from being functionally an appendage to confession/ absolution, we cannot simply give up confession altogether. Eucharistic joy can only be the product of the consciousness of God's forgiveness. But surely the pastorally responsible answer to people's burden of sin and guilt is not three to four minutes each Sunday morning in an act which, dynamically viewed, is part of the warm-up of the assembly.

Of course, there are "absolutionary" aspects to good preaching and the Holy Communion itself. Forgiveness is offered in any and every encounter with the gospel. But pastoral experience indicates that it is precisely the distressed believer who may not recognize it there. The LBW tries to take confession/ absolution more seriously than its predecessors by offering orders for both personal and corporate confession. But these portions of the book, so far as I know, remain largely unexplored territory.

2. Then there is the issue of sacrifice, about which volumes continue to be written. Sacrifice is a complex and difficult topic, made the more so by enduring memories of bitter confessional disputes. It is an area where Lutherans tend almost instinctively to mistrust Catholics. And yet the language of sacrifice is there from the beginnings of the liturgical tradition as we know it. It cannot simply be brushed aside as decadent or judaizing.

Roman Catholics and Lutherans have together recognized

that in the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ "is present as the Crucified who died for our sins, and rose again for our world" (USA III.I.1a, 188). This sacrifice can be neither continued, nor replaced, nor complemented; but rather it can and should become effective ever anew in the midst of the congregation.<sup>3</sup>

Roman Catholic members understood that joint assertion to be compatible with the words of the Presiding Minister just before the Preface in the Mass:

Pray, brethren, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.

<sup>3</sup>Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission, *The Eucharist* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1980) §56.

To which the congregation responds:

May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all his Church.

What do these words of the Roman Mass mean to express? How do we adequately but carefully express the dynamic presence of Christ *crucified*? Can we speak of entering into Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist? How do we express appropriately the sacrificial service *we*

offer (Rom 12) in our various vocations and ministries, and how should that be related—if at all—to Christ’s sacrifice here present? In respect of sacrifice, how does the offertory relate to the *anamnesis* of the Great Thanksgiving, and how do both relate to the invocation of the Holy Spirit?

If we Lutherans have reached theological agreement with Roman Catholics on eucharistic sacrifice and then leave all sacrificial language out of our liturgies, we have a problem. If, in the light of the same agreement, Catholic liturgical language appears to us as misleading, they have a problem.

BEM speaks of “sacrifice of praise”<sup>4</sup> and also of the presence of Christ in sacrificial terms:

The eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for us.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps most significant is the commentary:

It is in the light of the significance of the eucharist as intercession that references to the eucharist in Catholic theology as “propitiatory sacrifice” may be understood. The understanding is that there is only one expiation, that of the unique sacrifice on the cross, made actual in the eucharist and presented before the Father in the intercession of Christ and the Church for all humanity.<sup>6</sup>

3. The Holy Spirit has been until recently the most neglected person of the Holy Trinity in churches of the “Western” tradition. Since our common “Western” pneumatological tradition has been so weak, we should strive for answers together. How does an invocation of the Spirit (*epiklesis*) on the bread and wine relate to the proclamation/ declaration of the Words of Institution? How does such an invocation relate to invoking the Spirit upon the communicants? Should one invoke the Spirit on the elements at all? Where does the *epiklesis* fit structurally in the Great Thanksgiving? The key to all this is, of course, how pneumatological language relates to the Lutheran concept of *viva vox evangelii*. When we have spoken of the effective and active Word of Christ, have we covertly been talking pneumatologically?

I find the Roman Catholic solution unsatisfactory structurally. The Roman Mass invokes the Spirit on the elements just prior to the Words of Institution and then on the people after the *anamnesis*. The LBW fudges at this point by a certain ambiguity, though it does have the proper trinitarian sequence.

Perhaps the Episcopalians have gotten it right both on sacrifice and *epiklesis*. In the first of the eucharistic prayers, following the *verba*, comes this *anamnesis* and *epiklesis*:

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of

<sup>4</sup>BEM, E.4.

<sup>5</sup>BEM, E.8.

<sup>6</sup>BEM, Commentary to E.8.

praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

#### IV. ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The motor of the movement we have been describing, leading to a large measure of liturgical and ecclesiological convergence, is eschatology. As recently as my own seminary days, eschatology was merely the final chapter in dogmatics: a consideration of the “last things.” It is that, of course, but we hadn’t yet learned to read the dogmatics from back to front. In a very few decades we have come to see eschatology as the all-pervasive perspective of the New Testament. It is the proclamation of the breakthrough in Jesus of God’s Kingdom. Jesus’ own preaching and above all his passover from death to resurrection life constitute the revelation of God’s purpose for the whole creation. The Christian life is lived, therefore, from the future: a future, however, that is tied forever to an historical past—to Jesus, the first-century Jew, and to the community of the faithful to whom he gave his Spirit.

The eschatological perspective has revolutionized how we worship and how we reflect upon it. Baptism gets new attention as the means whereby the pilgrim people of God is birthed, the means whereby persons share in Christ’s passover from death to life. The life of Jesus from death to resurrection, the life of the Christian community from Pentecost to Parousia, the life of a believer from baptismal death to physical death, which is at the same time resurrection—all these exemplify what Peter Brunner called the “eschatological *transitus*.” And they are all aspects of the same event; they cannot be separated into neat components nor can one make of them an easily graspable sequence.

Baptism, then, cannot be viewed individualistically; it is at the center of the life of the *community*. Nor can baptism be viewed simply as one step in a biographical sequence. It is paradigmatic for the person and for the community because it implants us into a community which lives from the future—from the resurrection life we grasp even now by faith. As the format of the LBW tries to show, Baptism is not an *occasional* service; it is fundamental to all worship, to all piety. The connection between Baptism and Eucharist as the thanksgiving meal of the baptized community, but also the baptismal character of confession and of burial—all of this flows from the eschatological perspective.

This eschatological perspective keeps the action language of worship from degenerating into a preoccupation with human works. The Lutheran Reformers rightly emphasized the gift-character of preaching and the sacraments over against a medieval Christendom which had turned the church into an emporium dispensing grace. This emphasis on gift and grace was never intended, however, to lead to either quietism or individualism.

Neither post-Reformation Catholicism nor post-Reformation Lutheranism had a truly corporate understanding of worship and the sacra-

ments. They exemplified two different routes toward individual salvation which meant primarily rescue from damnation. No doubt this is something of a caricature of both groups, but not entirely. Individualism, whether of a rationalistic or pietistic variety, simply contradicts the concept of a worshiping community viewed from the eschatological perspective. Though the Christian life is intensely personal, it is always corporate in its fundamental orientation.

Not only has the eschatological perspective helped us resolve many problems in ecclesiology, it has created—or begun to create—in all the churches a new understanding of Word and sacraments as community-generating and community-reinforcing actions. For in the congregation gathered for worship in Jesus' name we have a sign set for the world of God's Kingdom. The participants are granted a "foretaste of the feast to come."

## V. A LITURGICAL PIETY

The LBW has not been understood until it is seen to foster such a communal, eschatological concept of the church itself and of that church's worship. The piety it shapes cannot be individualistic. People who are still fixated on "Jesus as my *personal* savior" and heaven as a personal goal simply cannot understand why corporate worship should be baptismal and eucharistic. They can conceive of both sacraments only as intensely individual moments with God. The barrier of individualism cuts off the vision of the congregation as more than a voluntary religious organization, or of "church" beyond the congregation, to say nothing of a global Christian community. The *koinonia* shared in Christ by the church is not the additive total of individual believers; it is an organism, a corporate entity.

If the services of the LBW function properly—and that probably depends on whether the leaders of worship have themselves been grasped by the vision—they confront people repeatedly with the true nature of the church. It is not possible to use the LBW on its own terms and miss the fundamental and paradigmatic character of baptism. And the centrality of the Eucharist as the thanksgiving meal of the eschatological community is equally obvious. Such confrontation week in, week out, especially if it includes supportive preaching and is accompanied by appropriate teaching and the service of others, should have begun at least to reshape the piety of our congregations.

On the other hand, if the LBW has been used simply as a resource book for "business as usual" in worship, or if the liturgy is not reinforced by appropriate preaching and teaching, the cohesive picture its liturgical corpus projects will be blurred beyond recognition. Worship alone cannot carry the burden of *koinonia*. That requires that the congregation's witness, its social ministry, its counseling ministry, and its teaching ministry are also fundamentally baptismal in orientation. Otherwise a weekly period of corporate worship has little chance to break through. Piety is a quality of the whole Christian life.

It is important, I think, how the church deals with the debilitating problem of individualistic piety. In our proper emphasis on interdependence and community, we must not hold forth as goal some sort of mindless collectivism or mass obedience to an authoritarian teaching office. Both are threats to proper



personal freedom and responsibility. The eschatological vision balances personal responsibility with the mutual communion in Christ and holds both in tension.

A piety which has baptism as its foundation entails a familial or corporate understanding of the Christian life. A baptismal piety is marked by daily return to baptism, a daily drowning and coming forth, as Luther pointed out. And a piety nourished by the Eucharist must repeatedly confront the double relationship with God-in-Christ and with one another, the dynamic of which is the Holy Spirit. That complex of relationships is what is meant by partaking even now of the life of God's coming Kingdom. Thus is the worshiping community a sign of that Kingdom to the world.

But the Eucharist also keeps the *koinonia* from becoming introverted and self-sufficient. It uses the fruits of the earth in the form of products of human labor, and thus it points outward to the whole of life and the whole of creation.

The eucharist opens up the vision of the divine rule which has been promised as the final renewal of creation, and is a foretaste of it...<sup>7</sup>

The world, to which renewal is promised, is present in the whole eucharistic celebration.<sup>8</sup>

Preaching and teaching too have a crucial role in this style of piety. The proclaimed Word repeatedly confronts us with God's call to faith, repentance, and conversion. It is a call to live baptismally, to live the life of faith: to live from the future, from the promises of God. Preaching also keeps the life of God's people focused in the context of their world. Being God's sign to the rest of humanity is not an abstract, changeless matter. A sign can only be effective to the extent to which it communicates with those who need it. Thus it is not merely the quality of the church's life which counts; it is also the quality of the church's service.

Finally, a liturgical piety is ecumenical. A piety founded on baptism requires us to embrace all others whom God has called and made our sisters and brothers. Given the fundamental character of baptism it is curious that ecumenical efforts focus on eucharistic sharing and leave largely uncontested our highly parochial practice of baptism. We don't yet actualize the all-encompassing character of the community birthed in water and the Spirit.

Has the LBW begun to change things over the decade past? The deep things of the Spirit? It is too soon to tell, and the claims of one group would likely be contradicted by testimony from another. That is not a cause for concern, since the point is hardly the success of the book itself! But the context and movement of which the LBW is the recent benchmark—that is important. That movement has the potential, by God's Spirit, to usher us into anew era in the life and witness of God's church.

As it is entirely the gift of God, the eucharist brings into the present age a new reality which transforms Christians into the image of Christ and therefore makes them his effective witnesses...<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>BEM, E.22.

<sup>8</sup>BEM, E.23.

<sup>9</sup>BEM, E.26.