

The History of

**THE
COMMON
SERVICE**

of 1888

A Lutheran Liturgical Renewal in America

Church History 3031

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December 17th, 2004

“We believe, teach and confess...” is a well-known formula to most confessional Lutherans.¹ It means to say that what the church believes (its dogma) is the basis for all that it teaches and that what the church teaches is and forms its various public confessions. The three actions form a complete circle so that the beliefs based in the Holy Scriptures permeate the whole life of the church. All actions of the church must serve to teach and confess those beliefs. Thus, the doctrine and the practice of the Lutheran Church never exist independently, but doctrine establishes its practice, practice exercises and preserves its doctrine.

The Church’s teaching and confession are manifest in its public worship. If these practices do not expose the doctrine of a congregation, then they do not help to preserve its doctrine. Once doctrine and practice have been divorced, in the course of time one or the other will become irrelevant.

Confessional Lutherans have always sought to carefully protect the freedom of practice that is part of the Lutheran doctrine. Outward forms in public worship, for example, are not bound on the New Testament Church in the Scriptures and so remain matters of choice for Christians, so long as they support the Church’s dogma. Lutherans confess:

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian Church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian Church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere.²

¹ “Confessional Lutheran” is used here, as in contemporary literature, to refer to those Lutherans who hold in doctrine and practice to the teachings of the Book of Concord, 1580, as a correct exposition of Holy Scriptures.

² Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42. (AC, VII 2,3)

On the other hand, confessional Lutherans have always seen value in the worship practices that have been a part of the New Testament Church nearly since its conception. They believe that certain forms and ceremonies, such as the Historic Liturgy³ of the Church, are useful and valuable to teach Christians the Scriptures and to allow Christians to confess according to their Scriptural beliefs. Consider quotations from the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*:

We also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things...⁴ Ceremonies should be observed so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies.⁵

In the early sixteenth century, Martin Luther and surrounding theologians had reclaimed these purposes for the Church. The Lutheran reformers esteemed the Historic Liturgy because of its Christocentricity and biblical content. Thus they subtracted from the Mass that which did not belong, that which did not match the beliefs of the Lutherans. Luther revised the practice of the Church to match its doctrine. According to the ecclesiastical concept, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (law of prayer is the law of belief, or as the church prays/worships, so she believes), Luther sent the true Word out in the form of the Historic Liturgy:

Luther brought the meaning and power of the Reformation home to the common man by his translations of the Bible, his catechism, his hymns and *his reconstruction of the liturgy*. The rulers of the different states introduced the Reformation and reorganized the church by *means of the Church orders*.⁶ (emphasis added)

³ Throughout this paper the name Historic Liturgy is used to refer to the basest form of the Western Rite as established in the 4th to 6th centuries. This is the five parts of the Ordinary and the Propers.

⁴ Kolb and Wengert, 258. (Apol. XXIV 1)

⁵ *ibid.*, 258. (Apol. XXIV 3)

⁶ Luther D. Reed, "The Common Service in the Life of the Church," *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* XII (January 1939), 4

The preeminence of sound worship practices in the Lutheran Church is thus evident. The Lutheran theologian, Luther Reed, comments:

...the Lutheran Church has always cherished a theory of worship based upon the objective principle of the supremacy of the Word and the efficacy of the Means of Grace as proclaimed and administered in public services with a high development of popular participation. This means liturgical worship. In our communion there will always be a liturgical movement, for liturgical practice development, and reform are all expressions of the living church. This movement holds promise of future growth and influence chiefly because of its evangelical emphasis and energy.⁷

Reed lived through a time of liturgical renewal among Lutheran Churches in America. He was close to some of the men who labored to reclaim biblically and historically sound worship practices for American Lutherans in the nineteenth century. Their work was a reaction to a loss of sound doctrine and practice among Lutherans in America.

It is the purpose of this paper to sketch a background for this liturgical renewal among American Lutherans, to discuss the theologians, guidelines and texts which formed “The Common Service of 1888”, and to briefly evaluate its immediate acceptance in several synods of the Lutheran Church.⁸ While in a few cases suggestions of specific motivations for actions will be offered, it will generally be assumed that those Lutheran Americans who desired and worked for a common English service were moved by common confessional, biblical beliefs.⁹

⁷ Luther D. Reed, “The Common Service in the Life of the Church,” *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* XII (January 1939): 20.

⁸ There is not space allotted in this essay to discuss musical settings attached to the texts of the Common Service. These settings were for the most part added later and different hymnal committees have selected different settings. This essay discusses the formation of the text. It will not attempt to evaluate its liturgical worth in depth.

⁹ In certain cases, appearances or quotes may seem to suggest a desire among some Lutherans for “unity” through a common worship practice. True unity comes through common beliefs and not an outward form.

Lutheran Liturgics Suffer in America

Post-Reformation worship in Europe degraded in time. The Thirty Years War and the resulting reaction of Pietism and then Rationalism sliced through the liturgical worship that was at the center of the Lutheran Reformation. Lutheran worship practices were scarred by un-Lutheran influences, sometimes scarred beyond recognition, by the middle of the seventeenth century, if not before in many places.¹⁰

For most of the eighteenth century, Lutheran practice in America mirrored the liturgical lethargy that it had no doubt carried with it from its home in Europe. North American Lutheran worship practice might be compared to the days of the Judges, when “everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25). G.U. Wenner, a man integral to the preparation of the Common Service of 1888, made this comment regarding liturgical conditions from 1750 to 1825: “Every locality and every congregation assumed the right to make its own changes and adaptations [in worship practices], and the confusion was great.”¹¹

Perhaps the sad state of public worship was even more miserable in America than in Europe. In America, Lutherans, though at first often isolated from each other, were a mixed pot. They brought with them different church books and customs, they came to the new land at different times and came from different places. “There was dissension in the congregations and the people were constantly imposed upon by irregulars who

¹⁰ For a thorough history, see Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy, Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), chapters fourteen and fifteen.

¹¹ G. U. Wenner, “Christian Worship” *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* XXII (Oct 1892) page 480

claimed to be ordained ministers.”¹² Add to that the “spirit” that a revolutionary group breathes:

A purely American type of church worship was produced. The time of the individualism of the early days of the nation, when the American people held a wide diversity of opinions on practically all subjects of human interest, a condition native to democracy, affected the Church in no small measure. A large variety of forms of worship, in various portions of the Church, existed. This lack of uniformity in worship arrived finally at the point that, ‘not one was a faithful expression of the Lutheran spirit or the rich liturgical heritage of the Church.’¹³

Without worship forms that presented and protected the doctrine of the Church,

The early forms of American Lutheran liturgies reflected more or less the doctrinal position of the bodies that espoused them: the liturgies were lax, because the synods themselves were confessionally unsound, and, on the other hand, the synods advanced heresies, because they imbibed unsound doctrines, in their worship.¹⁴

Again, Pietism, Rationalism and perhaps anti-Romanism surrounded the Lutherans coming to America and in no small way influenced their beliefs, teachings and confessions. They seemed to have lost their identity. “They lacked a sense of what it meant to be Lutheran in this ‘new world.’”¹⁵

A lack of confessional Lutheran leadership in North America worsened the situation among the people. Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799-1873), an example of a non-confessional Lutheran, worked to eliminate Lutheran doctrines. He removed the pastoral declaration of absolution and frequent offering of the Lord’s Supper from the worship service. He supported a hymnal using vague expressions to “break down the partition wall between the Lutherans and Reformed which is only based upon

¹² Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 162

¹³ Paul W. Spaude, *The Lutheran Church Under American Influence* (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1943), 74. Spaude quotes Wentz, A.R.

¹⁴ Spaude, 80.

¹⁵ Timothy H. Maschke, *Gathered Guests* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 96

prejudice.”¹⁶ His effort was to “Americanize” the Church; to take down blocks to ecumenism and evangelism.

The leaders of the General Synod supported such an abomination as they resolved in 1864 to have an English liturgy prepared under the following resolution: “Resolved, that on all subjects on which difference of doctrinal sentiment exists, Scripture language suited to either or both views [apparently whatever disagreement exists?!?] is to be employed without comment.”¹⁷

Here it is clear that the General Synod, who since their founding in 1820 had heralded themselves as intent on clinging to the liturgical observances of the past, was really interested in preparing a service that would provide an outward, false unity. The result was an English service titled “The Washington Service” of 1869. Luther Reed makes this evaluation of the “Washington Service” which is telling of the General Synod’s liturgical history: “This liturgy of 1869 may be regarded as ‘the first approximation of anything resembling a historical order of service since the organization of the General Synod.’”¹⁸

In the decades between the 1820’s and 1860’s, minutes of conventions of the General Synod and those of other American Lutheran synods lament their existing conditions, namely, that they had little uniformity in practice.¹⁹

Worship practices, as mentioned, had gone liturgically sour much earlier than the 1820’s however. For example, “liturgical forms suffered erosion (at the end of the 18th century)...The low point was reached in 1817 when Fredrick H. Quitman prepared an

¹⁶ Ibid., 96

¹⁷ Luth Church Quarterly, vol 1930, pg 79

¹⁸ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 175

¹⁹ And seemingly less in doctrinal matters. G. U. Wenner, “Christian Worship” *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* XXII (Oct 1892) page 483

English liturgy for the New York Synod, a work thoroughly poisoned by Rationalism.”²⁰

This liturgy was repeatedly revised, even in 1847 the Pennsylvania Ministerium adopted a revised version of the 1817/1818 Quitman liturgy. Though improved,

...the liturgy itself was most unsatisfactory...No responsive features were included, and there was no evidence of familiarity with the pure, restrained liturgical material of the Lutheran church of the sixteenth century. Cheap sentiment and bombastic phrases in the manner of the Rationalistic era abounded.²¹

Paul W. Spaude, a church historian, comments on the situation and large number of liturgies in the years from 1818 to 1888: “On the liturgical chaos caused by the persistence of the large variety (of liturgies), an authority remarks: ‘Not less than forty different liturgies had been prepared and introduced in various quarters of the Church in less than a century...No one of them had become venerable in use.’”²²

A Liturgical Spark?

While it has been stated that a lack of leadership wounded the Lutheran church in America, a partial exception during the 18th century is noteworthy. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, an American Lutheran patriarch, was interested in liturgical reform (or perhaps the establishment of a liturgical practice) as early as 1748.²³ This year marked the founding of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania. The same year, with the help of his colleagues and co-founders, Reverends Brunnholz and Handschuh, Muhlenberg prepared and presented the first “American liturgy”. The liturgy was largely composed from

²⁰ The General Synod included this liturgy in its 1837 hymnbook.

²¹ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 172

²² Paul W. Spaude, *The Lutheran Church Under American Influence* (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1943), 75. Spaude quotes Church Historian A.R. Wentz.

²³ Luther Reed in *The Lutheran Liturgy* finds this interesting as Muhlenberg had close ties to the Pietists at Halle.

Muhlenberg's memories of the service used at St. Mary's Lutheran Church in London.²⁴

It was only circulated in manuscript form, with perhaps 40 copies, but all of the pastors of the newly founded Ministerium pledged to use it for the sake of uniformity.²⁵

Muhlenberg marked a new era in American Lutheranism in that his reform would trigger more than a decade of revision to worship forms.

While at least offering a decent recreation of the liturgies of 16th century Lutheranism, pieces of the older liturgies were missing from or were misplaced in Muhlenberg's rendition. "The first American liturgy, therefore, was the historic Lutheran order with minor features which show Muhlenberg's own taste and judgment."²⁶

Muhlenberg's dream was for "one church, one book". To him such a common format for worship was a means to unity.²⁷

In a letter of November 5, 1783, four years before his death, he wrote, 'It would be a most delightful and advantageous thing if all the Evangelical Lutehran congregations in North America were united with one another, if they all used the same order of service.' During the century after Muhlenberg's death the expansion of the church led to a multiplication of synods and liturgies. His ideal, however, remained a cherished hope.²⁸

Muhlenberg's order of service started a 140 year continuous flow of liturgical revisions. These services were characterized in the preceding pages. Most of these revisions were atrocities as compared to the Historic Liturgy. Some of the work of the Pennsylvania Ministerium and its preeminent liturgical scholar, Dr. Beale M. Schmucker,

²⁴ The additional orders of service familiar to Muhlenberg were: 1. The Lueneburg Liturgy (1643) 2. The Calenberg Service (1569) 3. The Brandenburg- Magdeburg Service (1739) and 4. The Saxon Order of Service (1712). See Spaude, P. *The Lutheran Church Under American Influence*. Footnote 48, page 74

²⁵ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 164

²⁶ *ibid.*, 168

²⁷ While this is not altogether a bad thought, the theology of worship/theology of liturgics must be the deciding factor in a congregation. As previously mentioned, unity merely in externals is no unity at all. As much as a common liturgy has proved to help preserve the truth among church bodies, it can as easily be a claim for false unity. Whether or not Muhlenberg had unionistic ideas in mind, his liturgy sparked something in America and Lutherans ought to be thankful for this awakening.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 182

however, had tried to keep Lutherans on track toward reclaiming truly Lutheran and historically liturgical worship principles.

Liturgical Awakening

Again, during the first half of the nineteenth century Lutherans lamented a lack of unity. At least in worship practice, unity was lost and liturgical chaos ruled.

Yet the many liturgical efforts since Muhlenberg's time had been an educational process for the church. Liturgical scholars had been developed and sound liturgical tastes had been cultivated. It had become clear that, to find general acceptance in the Lutheran church, a liturgy must conserve the treasures of the past and also adapt them to the devotional needs of the present. The time was ripe at last for preparation of a common order of service...²⁹

Several factors aided the Lutheran church in America in reaching this point.

Beginning in the year 1817, a confessional and liturgical awakening had taken place in Germany under men such as Klaus Harms and Wilhelm Loehe. It was largely a reaction to the Prussian Union. The Prussian Union itself occasioned a reclamation of the 16th century Lutheran liturgies as well. Fredrick William III had a liturgy prepared which closely followed the 16th century German liturgies.³⁰ As Germans were given permission to emigrate in 1840, they came in waves to America, many settling in the Midwest. This group included confessional men such as C.F.W. Walther and Johann Grabau.³¹ These immigrants came with a sense of identity; they knew what it meant to be a Lutheran. With a proliferation of new synods and growing number of members of the established

²⁹ A.R. Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), 225

³⁰ A pretty solidly Lutheran service, though not generally accepted by orthodox Lutherans because it was a move to unify Lutherans and Reformed.

³¹ These immigrants quickly outnumbered the Lutherans already settled by millions.

synods, as well as the issue of slavery, the Lutherans began to debate and divide on doctrinal issues.³²

Furthermore, England had met the Oxford movement in these years. Its emphasis on connection between church and liturgy and social action had spread. This was perhaps an influence to Lutherans on the continent such as Theodor Kliefoth, who promoted and sustained a very ritualistic liturgical movement in Germany.³³ This movement found its way to America via German immigrants as well.

While his father, Samuel Schmucker, had been an ecumenist, Beale Schmucker lived through this era of Lutheran renewal brought to America. He was a leader of the reaction to unclear Lutheran doctrines and practice.³⁴ As early as 1847, B. Schmucker and Dr. Charles P. Krauth, both of the Virginia Synod at the time, had begun liturgical studies. In 1863, then a member of the Pennsylvania Ministerium and liturgical leader in that group, B. Schmucker proposed a new hymnal with a sound Lutheran liturgy. His proposal was accepted and he, Fredrick Mayer Bird, Joseph Augustus Seiss and Dr. Henry E. Jacobs, all of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, prepared the *Church Book*.³⁵ Luther Reed comments on the work of these men: "...we must realize the strong reaction of leaders within the Ministerium of Pennsylvania against the unhistorical and un-

³² For example, S. Schmucker's definite platform which may be seen as a cause of the Pennsylvania Ministerium's withdrawal from the General Synod and founding of the General Council.

³³ Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy, Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 579.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 586, calls B. Schmucker "the confessionally minded and liturgically interested son of S.S. Schmucker"

³⁵ The Pennsylvania Ministerium, in cooperation with the New York Synod, had published a liturgy in the 1855 *Liturgie und Agende*. It was strongly influenced by Loehe's service in Neuendettelsau. It was evidence of the liturgical renewal there. This service was translated to English in 1860 as *A Liturgy for the use of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia). The Church Book of 1868 was a further revision of this.

Lutheran type of service which had reached its extreme form in the New York Liturgy of 1818.”³⁶

The *Church Book* was adopted by the Ministerium at their founding in 1867. This service restored essential historic features of Lutheran liturgy. It was “unquestionably the best liturgy and hymnal which the Lutheran church in America had yet produced.”³⁷ It was a leap in the direction of restoring sound Lutheran worship practice to the struggling congregations in America.

The real breakthrough toward a restored Lutheran liturgy and hymnal... was the *Church Book* prepared for the newly formed General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (1868). The influence of Beale M. Schmucker was also to be seen in the revised *Book of Worship* of the General Synod South (1867) and in an improved Service of the old General Synod (the Washington Service, 1869). These set the stage for the cooperative work of the General Council, the General Synod, and the United Synod of the South leading to the preparation and adoption of the Common Service of 1888.³⁸

Three Synods, Three Men, One Service

Dr. John Bachman, a South Carolina pastor, is credited with providing the impetus for the Common Service of 1888. In a letter to the General Synod in 1870 he wrote: “I have ventured to suggest to our Synod the appointment of delegates to meet those of other Synods in consultation, for the purpose of promoting a greater uniformity in our Books of Worship, than at present exists...”³⁹

His proposal found acceptance in a Savannah, Georgia convention of the General Synod South in 1876:

Resolved, that with the view to promote uniformity in worship and strengthening the bonds of unity throughout all our churches, the

³⁶ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 178

³⁷ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 179

³⁸ Senn, 586

³⁹ As quoted in Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 184

committee on the Revision of the Book of Worship, be instructed to confer with the Evangelical Lutheran General Synod (North) in the United States, and with the Evangelical Lutheran General Council in America, in regard to the feasibility of adopting but one Book containing the same hymns and the same order of services and Liturgic forms to be used in the public Worship of God in all the English-speaking Evang. Lutheran Churches of the United States.⁴⁰

The General Council responded to the General Synod South's request in 1879 at Zanesville, Ohio:

Resolved, that the inquiry of the General Synod South in regard to our cooperation with them in the preparation of a Service Book, be referred to the Church Book Committee, with authority to take such steps as may seem best to them...Report of Committee on Church books, that the General Council consents to cooperate in the preparation of an Order of Service for the use of Evangelical Lutheran Congregations, provided that the rule which shall decide all questions arising in its preparation shall be: The common consent of the pure Lutheran Liturgies of the sixteenth century, and where there is not an entire agreement among them, the consent of the largest number of those of the greatest weight.⁴¹

Finally, with pressure from its constituents, the General Synod North adopted this resolution in May of 1883:

Resolved, that we hail as one of the most auspicious outlooks of our Church in America the prospects of securing a 'Common Service for all English-Speaking Lutherans.' Believing such a service to be feasible upon the generic and well-defined basis of 'the common consent of the pure Lutheran liturgies of the sixteenth century,' we hereby declare our readiness to labor to this end.⁴²

A committee was appointed: Dr. Beale M. Schmucker (General Synod) as Chairman, Mr. Edward T. Horn (General Synod South) as Secretary, and Rev. George U. Wenner (General Synod). At their first meeting at Horn's home in South Carolina in

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Sixth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran General Synod in North America, 1876, page 29.

⁴¹ Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 253-254.

⁴² Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 184

April of 1884, they adopted what has become known as “the General Council rule”. As quoted above, it states, “The common consent of the pure Lutheran Liturgies of the sixteenth century, and where there is not an entire agreement among them, the consent of the largest number of those of the greatest weight.” This was to be the guiding principle for their work.⁴³ Also, they adopted the following principles:

1. It is the understanding of the whole Joint Committee that the result of our labors must be referred to the Bodies we represent.
2. We dare make no service binding on the Congregation, and no part of a service should be used any longer than it serves to edification.
3. We agree to furnish the full Lutheran service, with all its provisions, for all who wish to use it.⁴⁴

In such an endeavor the desire was to reclaim what no liturgy produced in America had done: return to the Lutheran liturgies of Reformation times so that those congregations desiring such a service could and would have something of worth to use. Dr. Reed on the profitability of the committee: “The framers of the Common Service went beyond Muhlenberg to the Reformers themselves for their principles and their models.”⁴⁵ George U. Wenner, one of the three committee members, explained the point of the General Council Rule in a lecture he gave in 1892: “A backward step was taken in order that, from a known and acknowledged standpoint, we might go forward in safe paths, untrammelled by the foreign and unhealthy developments of intervening generations.”⁴⁶

Edward Horn later wrote of the work of his committee in the *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. His comments reflect the outlook of the committee:

⁴³ For a listing of all of the services of the 16th Century which the committee studied and for detailed information on those liturgies, see E.T. Horn, “The Lutheran Sources of the Common Service,” *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, XXI (April 1891): 239-268.

⁴⁴ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 185 or see “The Lutheran sources of the Common Service,” E.T. Horn

⁴⁵ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 196

⁴⁶ Wenner, 483

The Common Service is not the transcript of any Lutheran Service of the Sixteenth Century. The Orders from which it is derived afford precedents for many things, which it does not adopt. While it exhibits *consensus* [italics original] of the pure Lutheran Liturgies of that age, in strict accordance with the spirit of Christianity embodied in our Confessions it freely rejects what was temporary and adapts the whole to this new age.⁴⁷

It must be observed that the Common Service has omitted what was inapplicable or inexpedient; retained what is edifying; and avoided any prescriptions which were not needful to show the right use of the parts of the Service.⁴⁸

The three men of this committee worked carefully and quickly to prepare a first draft of the Common Service and present it to a larger Joint Committee of the three synods in May of 1885. The Joint Committee unanimously adopted the first draft and synodical representatives on the Joint Committee presented a draft in a sixteen page pamphlet to their respective Synods. The three Synods approved and moved for continued work. The General Synod proposed forty-five changes to the text. The General Council thirty. Most were minor.

The proposed liturgy was as below:

- I. Introit
- II. Kyrie
- III. Gloria in Excelsis
- IV. Collect
- V. Epistle
- VI. Alleluia
- VII. Gospel
- VIII. Creed
- IX. Sermon
- X. General Prayer
- XI. Preface
- XII. Sanctus and Hosanna
- XIII. Exhortation to Communicants
- XIV. Lord's Prayer and Words of Institution *or* Words of Institution and Lord's Prayer

⁴⁷ E.T. Horn, "The Lutheran Sources of the Common Service," *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, XXI (April 1891): 248.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 248

- XV. Agnus Dei
- XVI. Distribution
- XVII. Collect of Thanksgiving
- XVIII. Benediction⁴⁹

Three additions, though not integral parts of the service were also listed:

1. *At the beginning*: a hymn of invocation of the Holy Ghost; the words, In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and the confession of sins;
2. *After the Creed*: the principal hymn; and
3. *After the General Prayer*: another hymn.⁵⁰

Three points of contention are noteworthy. First, the committee was not in agreement over the inclusion of the confession of sins and absolution. It was common practice in Lutheran worship in America to have a general confession and absolution in the service, but these were not included in some of the “weightier” sixteenth century Lutheran orders of service. Because the American Lutherans were “used to” the confession of sins in their services, the final decision was made to include it in the *Common Service*.

Another issue was the placement of the Lord’s Prayer in respect to the Words of Institution. “Weighty” Lutheran orders disagreed on the positioning. The question was debated over two years of the Joint Committee’s meetings. George Wenner was in the end the only one to vote against the committee’s resolution of the matter:

“Resolved, that we acknowledge that the authorities adduced for the placing of the Verba before the Lord’s Prayer are of great worth; but the authorities for the opposite arrangement seem to us of greater weight.”

⁴⁹ This list is from E.T. Horn “The Lutheran Sources of the Common Service” in *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, vol. XXI, April 1891, page 244.

⁵⁰ E.T. Horn, “The Lutheran Sources of the Common Service,” *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, XXI (April 1891): 248.

Finally, the committee disagreed over the use of the *Nunc dimittis* as a post-communion canticle. It was decided simply to include it as an option.

Wentz observes: “The *Common Service* was completed in 1888, ‘not without a painful sacrifice of personal views and prejudices on the part of every member of the joint committee.’”⁵¹ It is remarkable that these men were able to come to such consensus considering their different backgrounds and the differences in the bodies they represented.

It should also be mentioned that the framers of the *Common Service* initiated a trend in American church language. They borrowed almost exclusively from the King James (Authorized) Version of the Bible and the Anglican/Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* (1549). The Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, the Creeds, the Prefaces, Lord’s Prayer, and Collects were all nearly exact replicates of the Anglican translations. Future hymnal committees working with the *Common Service* continued this practice; many borrowed Anglican chant settings as well. The Lutherans justify their usage of such,

on the grounds that the Thomas Cranmer had drawn upon the Lutheran church orders (16th century orders) in the preparation of the Edwardian Prayer Books (especially 1549), and now that Lutherans were ready to worship and pray in English they could receive back these texts in worthy English translations.⁵²

The subcommittee of three scholars presented their polished work to the Joint Committee in late 1887. Though a few minor points were still debated, the *Common Service* was delivered to the three synods in 1888. The manuscripts included a version of the service with communion and one without as well as orders for Matins, Vespers, the Litany and propers.

⁵¹ Wentz, 226

⁵² Senn, 588. Senn is summarizing Henry E. Jacobs position.

Finding Acceptance

Each Synod made minor changes to the service resulting in three “official variants”, but each Synod accepted and adopted the *Common Service*. The United Synod published the *Common Service* nearly immediately. It was printed in their *Book of Worship* in Holy Week of 1888. The General Synod printed it in their *Book of Worship* in Whitsuntide of 1888.⁵³ Though the General Council had also approved the *Common Service* by October of 1888, the publication of their *Church Book* was delayed. Beale Schmucker ran from his home on October 15th, 1888 to catch a train to Philadelphia in order to present the final manuscript to the printer. Schmucker got on the train but died enroute from overexertion.⁵⁴

“The shock of Schmucker’s death immobilized the General Council’s committee for a time, and then with one eye on opposition to the Common Service in some part of the General Synod, tampered with the text to make it more like its 1868 *Church Book*.” The committee was apparently persuaded to wait and see if the service gained acceptance in the other synods before printing the service itself. With minor revisions, the service finally went to print in 1892 in the General Council’s new *Church Book*.⁵⁵

At one point in the midst of years of committee work, Schmucker made this comment:

If the coming generations of Lutherans have put into their mouths and hearts the pure, strong, moving words of our church’s Service from week to week and year to year, they will be brought up in the pure teaching of

⁵³ Interestingly, there was some debate about the service and so it was decided to continue to print the *Washington Service* of 1869 alongside the new *Common Service*.

⁵⁴ In a eulogy written shortly after Schmucker’s death, a friend, Dr. Krotel, wrote: “The completed service fell from his hands as he fell into the arms of death.”

⁵⁵ The Service in this Hymnal is printed in the Addenda to this paper.

the church, and the church of the future will be a genuine Lutheran Church.⁵⁶

Schmucker cared about doctrine and practice. He had the dream that the Church's confession and teaching would again match their beliefs, and that those beliefs would be Scriptural and confessional. His dream was partially realized in the wide-spread acceptance of the *Common Service*.

The service spread rapidly throughout American Lutheran congregations. An 1891 publication about the still "new" *Common Service* says: "Two years after the first appearance of the *Common Service* 5,000 copies had been sold, and including the Books of Worship containing it the number exceeded 12,000."⁵⁷

Not everyone embraced the new Service, however. For example, in 1890 Dr. James Richard, liturgics professor at Gettysburg Seminary, wrote a very critical article in the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*. He claimed that there is "no such thing as consensus in the 16th century liturgies."⁵⁸ Both Dr. Wenner and Mr. Horn wrote lengthy responses to Dr. Richard and those who held his view that the *Common Service* was too elaborate for people and was based on Southern German liturgies which are not the "weighty" liturgies of the sixteenth century.⁵⁹ Dr. Richard continued, but his objections seem to go unnoticed as the *Common Service* became more and more widely accepted.

Henry Jacobs was among many church leaders who esteemed the *Common Service* and encouraged its use in the congregations of the General Synod:

⁵⁶ Luther D. Reed, "The Common Service in the Life of the Church," *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* XII (January 1939): 9-10

⁵⁷ J.B. Remensnyder, "A Practical View of the Common Service," *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. XXI, April 1891, page 232 footnote

⁵⁸ James Richard, "A Liturgical Question" *Lutheran Quarterly Review* (1890)

⁵⁹ Dr Richard also had problems with the option of with or without communion services, the general confession and the listing of all the Propers.

Let it be remembered that every item in the service has been most carefully considered, and is the ripe fruit of the experience of the Church for centuries, and that while there is a place for the exercise of Christian liberty, such liberty should not be used arbitrarily, but intelligently. Where the Church Book is regarded only as a very valuable storehouse of liturgical material, from which the pastor may draw at pleasure, much certainly is lacking in knowledge of the book.⁶⁰

And yet, in a very complementary article on this “new Common Service”, a secular source, the *New York Observer*, observed in 1891 (among others):

“Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this service is that it is not commanded but commended to the use of the churches for which it was provided.”⁶¹

The *Common Service* had in many ways proved itself. After relating several testimonials of how “fitting, appropriate, devotional and beautiful” the service is, a Reverend in New York summarized the value of the service:

From these and many like instances, it is evident that one year’s use of the Common Service in New York City has done more to give the Christian public a definite idea of the Lutheran Church, to effect the recognition of her distinctive character, and to secure a favorable and creditable impression of her moderate liturgical worship, than decades of our past nondescript and indeterminate modes of worship.⁶²

The *Common Service* can claim wide-spread use and has passed the test of time. It was translated and carried across oceans to serve in a half of a dozen mission fields within the first twenty years. The *Common Service* was used in the formation of liturgies that appeared in six different hymnal productions in the twentieth century. It has in some cases survived nearly verbatim into the twenty-first century. “A church which had been

⁶⁰ Henry E. Jacobs, “The Making of the Church Book.” *The Lutheran Church Review*. XXXI (October 1912): 597-622

⁶¹ J.B. Remensnyder, “A Practical View of the Common Service,” *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* XXI, (April 1891) 238.

⁶² *Ibid.*, page 219.

confused in its thinking, unfamiliar with its own history, uncertain of its objectives, and its weak organization was brought to self respect and united endeavor.”⁶³

What had the framers of the *Common Service* accomplished that so appealed to Lutherans? In the words of Luther Reed,

The Common Service distilled the devotional experiences of the church from the days of the Apostles to its own times in clear canticles of praise and perfect prayers; it was a work full-bodied and complete, at least in its textual provisions. The principles which determined its preparation rejected the local and the temporary and gave classic expression to the complete services of the church.

[I] repeat a remark made several years ago by a distinguished professor in one of the larger theological seminaries usually regarded as ‘liberal.’ He said: ‘You Lutherans may well thank God for your liturgy.’⁶⁴

It is the author’s observation that the Lutheran Church is not fighting a unique challenge today as it deals with variety of worship practices. Turn back only to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and find chaos. Practice was divorced from doctrine under the auspices of a “new” or “better” way. All the Lutherans eventually found was that they had nearly lost everything that it means to be a Lutheran.

By God’s grace, in the midst of confusion and loss, the Lutheran Church, at least in part, regained many of its beliefs, I believe, in no small part, because of a return to the liturgical practices that were at the heart of the Lutheran Reformation and the heart of apostolic teaching. At least in part, a confessional Lutheran liturgical service brought God’s plan of salvation back before the eyes of the people each week.⁶⁵ Worship was again focused on Word and Sacrament. Lutherans remembered that the Lutheran Church

⁶³ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 198

⁶⁴ Luther D. Reed, “The Common Service in the Life of the Church,” *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* XII (January 1939): 14, 20.

⁶⁵ This is of course the chicken and egg question. Which came first? Restored doctrine or restored practice? Either way, they go hand in hand. It is problematic to seek one without the other.

is a liturgical church. This is part of its rich gospel heritage. It harmonizes with their “we believe, teach and confess...” formula.

In an address at the 100th anniversary of the *Common Service*, Prof. James Tiefel commended the service for “serving us well for half a century.”⁶⁶ We do well to give it thanks as it reaches its 100th birthday. Realistically, it has its problems. We hope that our new liturgies can solve them beautifully, practically and devotionally.”⁶⁷ The Wisconsin Synod hymnal committee attempted that by not only returning to the Common Service, but also returning to the Lutheran liturgies of the Reformation, and yet farther back in the history of the Western Rite. The 1993 hymnal, *Christian Worship*, keeps the Common Service alive among this section of the Lutheran Church. I pray that our congregations will.

⁶⁶ The Wisconsin Synod became familiar with the *Common Service* at the publication of *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941).

⁶⁷ James P. Tiefel, *Christian Worship: 100 Years of the Common Service*. Available at Essay Files of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, www.wls.wels.net

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