

*A COMPENDIUM OF
CORPORATE CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION
FROM SELECTED
AMERICAN LUTHERAN LITURGIES*

Church History 331
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So many hymnals! When I chose this topic, I never imagined that church bodies—great or small—could have printed and used so many different hymnals. Therefore I have limited my research to American Lutheran hymnals contained in the libraries of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary-Mequon, Wisconsin; and Concordia University-River Forest, Illinois. While this only scratches the surface on the topic, it nevertheless has given the author somewhat of an insight into the worship life of Lutherans in America from the beginning of our country up to the present time.

In this paper I will give a brief background on the history of confession in worship. I will also summarize religious life from after the Reformation and to the printing of first American Lutheran hymnal at the close of the eighteenth century. I will then list a number of confessions and absolutions, giving special attention to the Muhlenberg Liturgy of 1748 and the Common Service of 1888.

While private confession has been around since the birth of the New Testament Church, worship has contained one form of confession or another since the ninth century. The first form was called *Confiteor*, which is Latin for “I confess.” Just before the service would begin, while donning the liturgical vestments in the sacristy, the priest would, on behalf of the congregation, confess his sin and then pronounce an optative absolution (May almighty God...). Later developments placed the priest at the base of the altar when he said the *Confiteor*, while the choir intoned the Introit.

During the tenth century an optional form of confession was implemented. This form was called the *Offene Schuld*. This general confession was usually after the sermon and contained either an optative or declaratory (God has forgiven...) absolution.

Many churches varied the forms and usage of both the *Confiteor* and the *Offene Schuld* in their worship. However, private confession was still the most common way the penitent could receive the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. These three forms of confession continued to be practiced until the early seventeenth century, when the Thirty Years' War turned the Lutheran world on its ear.

Because of the devastation the Thirty Years' War caused, a generation grew up that had no formal religious education. There was a spiritual vacuum. That vacuum was filled when P.J. Spener published his *Pia Desideria* in 1675. Pietism was born. Hans Schubert's judgment is that "German Pietism is certainly to be regarded as an overflow of the Calvinistic spirit into the territory of Lutheranism."¹ The shift in religion went from "Christ for us" to "Christ in us." The emphasis on liturgy and sacraments was replaced with a focus on prayer and small group Bible study. Personal experience and morality took the foreground, while the meritorious work of Christ took a back seat. Since the penitent felt that his personal confession should be before God alone, all forms of confession and absolution became scarce. Pietism lasted until the end of the eighteenth century.

As pietism reached mid-life, rationalism came to the fore. The founding of rationalism is traced to the University of Halle when, in 1740, formerly banished professor Christian Wolff returned to the university in triumph. This era is also called the "Age of Enlightenment." During this time everything was analyzed in the light of human reason. This also held true for religion. Whatever the Bible said that reason could not understand was discarded. Rationalism minimized the nature of sin and maximized morality and the virtuous life. In worship the emphasis was on the sermon and its moral

instruction. If and when Lord's Supper was celebrated, the message of the eucharist became "be good" rather than "God is good."² Like pietism, rationalism lasted until the end of the eighteenth century.

Hand-in-hand with rationalism came unionism. This movement developed in part because of the spirit of religious indifference nourished by the inroads of rationalism. Unionism continues to this day, under the auspices of "ecumenism." It follows the path of least resistance, attempting to bring everyone together into one big, happy family of believers at the cost of doctrinal purity. As we shall see later, in an attempt to unite the church with one hymnal, the liturgy had to be doctrinally diluted.

As the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation approached, the state of the Lutheran Church was pitiful. Pietism, rationalism and unionism had stripped the church of its doctrinal purity and its liturgical heritage. With Claus Harm's *95 Theses* in 1817, a Reformation resurgence began. This movement, called restorationism, attempted to bring the Lutheran Church back to its religious roots doctrinally and liturgically. The ^{was a Confessional} ~~The~~ ^{movement} period of restorationism lasted until the mid-twentieth century. It is in this time frame, for the most part, that this paper will focus on corporate confession absolution in American Lutheran liturgy.

The first American Lutheran liturgy was written by Henry Melchior Muhlenberg for the Pennsylvania Ministerium in 1748. While Muhlenberg claims that the liturgy was based on one used by a Savoy Church in London, the liturgy was gleaned from a

¹ Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 146.

² James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 53.

conglomeration of many liturgies.³ The text of the Confession was taken in part from the Calenberg Order (1569).

Muhlenberg's liturgy reflects pietism rooted in orthodox liturgy of the sixteenth century. By drawing on Reformation-era texts, Muhlenberg laid the foundation for a common liturgy.

Muhlenberg Liturgy, 1748

Beloved in the Lord!

Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones: I will not always chide, neither will I keep anger forever: only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Accompany me therefore in making confession of sins, saying:

I, a poor sinner, confess unto God, my heavenly Father, that I have grievously and in various ways sinned against him; not only by outward and gross sins, but much more by inward blindness of heart, unbelief, doubt, despondency, impatience, pride, selfishness, carnal lusts, avarice, envy, hatred, and malice, and by other sinful passions which are naked and open in the sight of my Lord and God, but which, alas! cannot so fully understand. But I do sincerely repent, in deep sorrow, for these my sins; and with my whole heart I cry for mercy from the Lord, through his dear Son Jesus Christ, being resolved, with the help of the Holy Ghost, to amend my sinful life. Amen.

Lord God the Father in heaven, have mercy upon us. Lord God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us. Lord God the Holy Ghost, have mercy upon us and grant us Thy peace. Amen.⁴

Muhlenberg's liturgy was never printed. However, handwritten manuscripts were circulated. When Muhlenberg edited the *Erbauliche Liedersammlung* (1786), the first Lutheran hymnal printed in America, he altered his earlier liturgy. Influenced more fully by pietism, he shortened it so that the sermon could receive more time. Nevertheless,

³ Reed, 166.

⁴ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *American Church History*, Vol. 4 (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1893), 270.

either version of Muhlenberg's liturgy was the best American Lutheranism had to offer for quite some time.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, liturgy was thought of simply as a minor feature in the hymnal. Rarely were liturgies printed. If they were, the order of service was a bare bones sketch; the service was printed in full in the pastor's *Agenda*. That way pastors could pick and choose what they wanted to use.

In 1868 the General Council's *Church Book* marked a return to the Muhlenberg Liturgy of 1748. Luther D. Reed calls the *Church Book* "unquestionably the best liturgy and hymnal which the Lutheran church in America had yet produced."⁵ The project director was Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth. The hymnal was based on the Oxford Movement's *Hymns Ancient and Modern* of 1861.

The General Council had a profound interest in liturgics and so applied it, making their new hymnal more elaborate, basing it upon the Lutheran liturgics of the sixteenth century.

Listed below is a translation of the confession and absolution of the 1877 *Kirchenbuch*, a German edition of the *Church Book*.

Kirchenbuch, 1877

Minister: Beloved in the Lord. Open your hearts, let us confess our sins to God and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ask for forgiveness.

Minister: Our help remains in the name of the Lord.

Congregation: Who has made heaven and earth.

Minister: I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.

Congregation: Since you have forgiven me the crime of my sin.

Minister: I, a poor, sinful human being confess to God, the Almighty, my Creator and Redeemer, that I have not only sinned with thoughts, words or actions, but also I have been conceived and born in sin; that also all my nature and ways are punishable and damning before your righteousness. Therefore I flee to

⁵ Reed, 179.

your boundless mercy, seeking and asking for grace. Lord, be merciful to me, a poor sinner.

Congregation: The merciful God wishes to have mercy on us and forgive us our sin and to give us the Holy Spirit, that we through Him may accomplish his godly will and receive eternal life. Amen.

Minister: The almighty, merciful God has had mercy on us, and has given his only Son into death for our sin and according to his will has pardoned us. Also, to those who believe on his Name, he has given power to be children of God, and has promised the Holy Spirit. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Grant this, God, to us all.

Congregation: Amen.⁶

While the General Synod was older than the General Council, it waited until a year after the *Church Book* was published before they printed “the first approximation of anything resembling a historical order of service since the organization of the General Synod.”⁷ Prior to this, the General Synod used whatever worship materials the Pennsylvania Ministerium published. The project director for the *Book of Worship* was B.M. Schmucker, son of S.S. Schmucker.

Listed below is the confession and absolution for the 1870 edition of the *Book of Worship*.

Book of Worship, 1870

Dearly beloved: the Holy Scriptures declare, that if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us, therefore, confess our sins unto our Heavenly Father, with sincere, humble, and obedient hearts, that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by His infinite goodness and mercy.

Almighty and most merciful Father, unto whom all hearts are open, and all desires are known, all whose commandments are just, necessary and good; we confess unto Thee, that we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But enter not, we beseech Thee, into judgment with us; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified. As Thou desirest not the death of a sinner, but

⁶ *Kirchenbuch fuer Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden*, (Reading, PA: Pilger Buchhandlung, 1877), 3-4.

⁷ Reed, 175.

rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live—have mercy, O Lord, upon us, miserable offenders. Spare Thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore Thou those who are truly penitent, according to Thy gracious promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous and sober life, to the glory of Thy holy name, through Thy blessed Son, our Mediator and Redeemer.

O God, the Father in Heaven, have mercy upon us!

O God, the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us!

O God, the Holy Ghost, have mercy upon us, and grant us Thy peace!

Amen.⁸

Both the *Church Book* and the *Book of Worship* were very influential in formulating the Common Service of 1888. We will now consider that Common Service.

The General Council began work on a “new” liturgy in reaction against the “new Measures” of revivalism and the “American Lutheranism” of S.S. Schmucker. Its standard was to be the common consent of sixteenth century Lutheran liturgy, much like Muhlenberg’s order of service.

This liturgy was to be reflective of Luther’s *Formula Missae* of 1523 and his *Deutsche Messe* of 1526. However, its project leaders, Charles Porterfield Krauth, Matthias Loy and C.F.W. Walther, saw the need to make this liturgy one that was well-rounded and had scriptural and cultural depth. The result was the Common Service of 1888.

Because of some slight disagreements and time factors, the Common Service was introduced with three variant versions to the three participating church bodies: The General Synod, the General Council and the United Synod South. These variations were not resolved until the three bodies merged into the ULCA in 1918.

The text which we today call the Common Service is the version from the United Synod South.

⁸ *Book of Worship*, (Baltimore: T. Newton Kurtz, 1873), 14-15.

Common Service, 1888

Minister: Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart, and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to grant us forgiveness.

Minister: Our help is in the Name of the Lord.

Congregation: Who made heaven and earth.

Minister: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord.

Congregation: And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

Minister: Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee, that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against Thee, by thought, word, and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Congregation: O most merciful God, who hast given Thine Only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us, and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins; and by Thy Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of Thee, and of Thy will, and true obedience to Thy Word, to the end that by Thy grace we may come to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Minister: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, hath had mercy upon us, and hath given His Only Son to die for us, and for His sake forgiveth us all our sins. To them that believe on His Name, He giveth power to become the sons of God, and hath promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved. Grant this, Lord, unto us all.

Congregation: Amen.⁹

Luther D. Reed elaborates on the results of the Common Service:

The Common Service distilled the devotional experiences of the Western church from the days of the apostles to its own times in clear canticles of praise and well-constructed prayers... The church had never produced in any land or time another vernacular liturgy so full-bodied and completely developed.¹⁰

While the Common Service was the best liturgy of the time, the Scandinavian church bodies retained their unique liturgies well after the Common Service's publication.

The Augustana Synod's first liturgy was based on the 1811 liturgy of the Church of Sweden. However, it was so unsatisfactory that pastors frequently edited it. When the Church of Sweden revised its liturgy in 1894, the Augustana Synod hastily adapted and

⁹ *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 5-6.

translated it. Prepared only as a temporary arrangement until an adequate hymnal could be published, the music edition of the *Hymnal and Order of Service for Churches and Sunday-Schools* was hastily put together in 1901. Below is the confession portion of the liturgy.

Hymnal and Order of Service, 1901

Minister & Congregation: We poor miserable sinners, conceived and born in sin, with all our heart confess unto Thee, holy and righteous God, merciful Father, that we, in manifold ways during all our life, have offended against Thee. We have not loved Thee above all things, nor our neighbor as ourselves. Against Thee and Thy holy commandments have we sinned by thought, word, and deed, and we humbly acknowledge before Thee that, according to Thy justice and our sins, we have deserved eternal condemnation. But Thou, Heavenly Father, hast promised to receive with tender mercy all penitent sinners, who return unto Thee and with living faith flee for refuge to Thy fatherly compassion and to the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Their transgressions Thou wilt not regard, nor impute unto them their sins. Relying upon Thy promise, we poor sinners confidently beseech Thee to be merciful and gracious unto us and forgive us all our sins to the praise and glory of Thy holy Name.

May the Almighty, Everlasting God, in His infinite mercy and for the sake of our Saviour Jesus Christ, forgive all our sins, and grant us grace that we may amend our lives, and finally with Him obtain eternal life. Amen.¹¹

When the Augustana Synod had taken its time to prepare an adequate hymnal, the result was the 1925 *Hymnal and Order of Service*. Its liturgy was the Common Service.

The Danish Lutheran Church and the United Danish Lutheran Church collaborated to produce an English hymnal. The result was the *Hymnal for Church and Home* in 1927. This liturgy contained, after the regular service was complete, a confessional service. This service had an additional sermon, along with an order of confession and absolution. The service would then proceed into the communion liturgy. The liturgy of the hymnal's third edition was the much shorter Common Service.

¹⁰ Reed, 197.

¹¹ *Hymnal and Order of Service for Churches and Sunday-Schools* (Rock Island, IL: Lutheran Augustana Book Concern, 1901), 7.

The Norwegian church bodies had a wide variety of liturgical practice due to individualism and their variety of organization.¹² However, the first hymnal to be published in the twentieth century was the result of an amalgamation of the Norwegian churches. The United Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church and the Hauge Lutheran Synod combined to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. The hymnal they produced was *the Lutheran Hymnary* of 1913. The confessional liturgy is a modification of the Common Service.

The Lutheran Hymnary, 1913

Minister: Let us bow before the Lord and confess our sins.

Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee, that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Or:

O most merciful God, who hast given Thine only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us, and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins; and by Thy Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of Thee, and of Thy will, and true obedience to Thy word, to the end that by Thy grace we may come to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Congregation: (sung or said) O God, the Father in Heaven, have mercy upon us! O God, the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us! O God, the Holy Ghost, true Comforter, have mercy upon us!

Minister: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, hath had mercy upon us, and hath given His Only Son to die for us, and for His sake forgiveth us all our sins. To them that believe on His name, He giveth power to become the sons of God, and hath promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.

Grant this, O Lord, unto us all.¹³

While the Ohio Synod's publications may seem out of place, given they date before the Common Service, their usefulness lasted well into the twentieth century. Their first publication is the synod's only German hymnbook, the *Gesangbuch* of 1879. Its

¹² Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 236.

liturgy was based on the Saxon and Pommeranian orders. A translation of the confession of sins is listed below.

Gesangbuch, 1879

Pastor: Let us confess our sins and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ask God for forgiveness. For if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sin, God is faithful and true, that he forgives us our sin and purifies us from all unrighteousness. Therefore speak with me also:

I, a poor sinful human confess to God the Almighty, my Creator and Redeemer, that I have sinned not only in thoughts, words and actions, but also I have been conceived and born in sin; also, that all my nature and ways are punishable and damning before your righteousness. Therefore I flee to your boundless mercy, seeking and asking for grace. Lord, be gracious to me, a poor sinner!

Congregation: Lord, have mercy on us! Christ, have mercy on us! Lord, have mercy on us!

Pastor: The almighty and merciful God has had mercy on us, and has given his only Son into death for our sins, and according to his will has pardoned us; also, to all those who believe on his Name, he gives power to be children of God, and promises the Holy Spirit. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Grant this, God, to us all!

Congregation: Amen.¹⁴

In 1880 and 1908 the Ohio Synod published English hymnal, both with the titles *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal*. These worship books were typical of the unionism and rationalism of its day. *on what way?*

Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal, 1880

Minister: Dearly Beloved! The Holy Scriptures declare, that when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart. To the Lord belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him. Let us, therefore, confess our sins unto our Father, with sincere, humble, and obedient hearts, that we may obtain remission of the same, by His infinite goodness and mercy.

Almighty and most merciful Father, unto whom all hearts are open, and all desires are known, all whose commandments are just, necessary and good; we

¹³ *The Lutheran Hymnary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1913), 7-8.

¹⁴ *Gesangbuch fuer Gemeinden des evangelisch Lutherischen Bekenntnisses* (Columbus, OH: Druck von Schulze und Gaszmann, 1879) ix-x.

confess unto Thee, that we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But enter not, we beseech Thee, into judgment with us; nor in Thy sight shall no man living be justified. As Thou hatest nothing which Thou hast made, and desirest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from him wickedness and live,--have mercy, O Lord, upon us miserable offenders. Spare Thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore Thou those who are truly penitent, according to Thy gracious promises, declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of Thy holy name, through Thy blessed Son, our Mediator and Redeemer.

Congregation: (sung) O God the Father in heaven, have mercy upon us! O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us! O God the Holy Ghost, have mercy upon us, and grant us thy peace.

Minister: Almighty God our heavenly Father hath had mercy upon us, and hath given His only Son to die for our sins, and doth for His sake graciously pardon us; He also giveth unto all them that believe in His name the power to become His children, and promises to bestow upon them His Holy Spirit. Praise the Lord; praise ye the name of the Lord.¹⁵

Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal, 1908

Short Form

Let us confess our sins unto God and pray for forgiveness for Christ's sake. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us, therefore, make confession unto God, saying:

Almighty God, our Maker and redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee, that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Long Form

Dearly Beloved! The Holy Scriptures declare, that, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart. To the Lord belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him. Let us, therefore, confess our sins unto our Father, with sincere, humble, and obedient hearts, that we may obtain remission of the same, by His infinite goodness and mercy.

Almighty and most merciful Father, unto whom all hearts are open, and all desires are known, all whose commandments are just, necessary and good; we confess unto Thee, that we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep.

¹⁵ *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1880), vii-ix.

We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But enter not, we beseech Thee, into judgment with us; nor in Thy sight shall no man living be justified. As Thou hatest nothing which Thou hast made, and desirest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from him wickedness and live,--have mercy, O Lord, upon us miserable offenders. Spare Thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore Thou those who are truly penitent, according to Thy gracious promises, declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of Thy holy name, through Thy blessed Son, our Mediator and Redeemer.

Congregation: (sung) O God the Father in heaven, have mercy upon us! O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us! O God the Holy Ghost, have mercy upon us, and grant us thy peace.

Minister: Almighty God our heavenly Father hath had mercy upon us, and hath given His only Son to die for us, and for His sake forgiveth us all our sins. To them that believe on His name, He also giveth power to become the sons of God, and bestoweth upon them His Holy Spirit. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Grant this, O Lord, unto us all.

Congregation: (sung) Amen.¹⁶

The Missouri Synod was not without its share of hymnals, either. It's first hymnal was the *Kirchengesangbuch* of 1847. However, a liturgy was not produced until the 1856 *Kirchen-Agende*. This liturgy was based on the Saxon Agenda of 1812, which they had brought with them from Germany. Unfortunately, pietistic and rationalistic elements from the Saxon Agenda made their way into the *Kirchen-Agende*.¹⁷ In this agenda, the confession and absolution were reserved until after the sermon.

However, with the publication of their 1889 *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book*, Missouri had the "most distinctively Lutheran of all the hymn books."¹⁸ While its liturgy was the Common Service, its hymnody represented Lutheranism's best, thereby making

¹⁶ *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1908), 10.

¹⁷ Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 92.

¹⁸ Carl F. Schalk, *God's Song in a New Land: Lutheran Hymnals in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 147.

it “distinctively Lutheran.” Since 1889, the Common Service has served as the liturgy for every official hymnal of the Missouri Synod.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Wisconsin Synod. They were still trying to get fully-printed liturgies into the hymnals! A 1931 *Book of Hymns* I pulled off the Seminary library shelf had just a basic outline of the service. For confession and absolution there was simply printed the following (music omitted):

Minister: Confession of Sins
Congregation: (sung) Kyrie
Minister: Absolution
Congregation: (sung) Amen.¹⁹

Yet, attached to the inside cover was an insert containing the Common Service. While the order of service was left us to the pastor’s whim, it is good to know that some were using the Common Service.

However, before the Common Service there were other orders. Here is a translation of confession and absolution in the *Evangelische-Lutherisches Gesangbuch* of 1872.

Evangelische-Lutherisches Gesangbuch, 1872.

Pastor: Our Lord God, we lift up our eyes to the hills, from them comes our help. Our help comes from You, who has made heaven and earth. O Lord, do not go into judgment with your servants, do not punish us in your righteous wrath. If You kept a record of sins, who could stand? Be merciful to us poor, sinful human beings as Jesus Christ wills.

Congregation: Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison! Kyrie eleison!

Pastor: Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has sought and found his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation, and has remembered his holy covenant. He has rescued us from the hand of all our foes and has set our feet on the way of peace. My mouth shall sing the Lord’s praise and all flesh shall praise his holy Name forever and ever. Glory to God in the highest.

Congregation: To God alone in the highest be glory!²⁰

¹⁹ *Book of Hymns for the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1931), xxviii-xxix.

²⁰ *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gesangbuch* (Milwaukee: George Brumder, 1872), N/A

There have been many other Lutheran hymnals published since the Common Service's inception in 1888. Many of those hymnals contain that liturgy. Some additional hymnals that used the Common Service are the General Council's *Church Book* of 1891; the ULCA's *Common Service Book* of 1917; the ALC's *American Lutheran Hymnal* of 1930; and The Lutheran Hymnal of the Synodical Conference.

Since 1950, five significant Lutheran hymnals have been produced: *Service Book and Hymnal* (LCA, 1958), *Lutheran Book of Worship* (ELCA, 1978), *Lutheran Worship* (LCMS, 1982), *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (WELS, 1993) and *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (ELS, 1996). Looking at each one's opening liturgy, one can not help but see the resemblance each has to the Common Service (some almost word-for-word) as well as to the Muhlenberg Liturgy and the liturgies of the sixteenth century. While hymnals and liturgies come and go, may law and gospel, sin and grace always be proclaimed in them. Preserve your Word, O Savior!

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