Cooperative Ventures in Liturgy

Philip H. Pfatteicher

Shortly after his election as Bishop of Rome, John xxiii, who at age seventy-seven was expected to be a merely transitional pontiff, announced his intention to convocate a Council of the Roman Church to renew it by “opening the windows to let in some fresh air,” as he put it. The Second Vatican Council began its work in 1962; the first document it produced was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, promulgated by Pope Paul vi on December 4, 1963. A half-century later, its fiftieth anniversary was the occasion of a number of observances and publications evaluating the legacy of the Constitution on the Liturgy. Part of that legacy is the Lutheran Book of Worship of 1978.

The first and most important observation to be made about the LBW is that it was a cooperative venture, and that fact immensely enriched the book. The LBW was the joint work of the principal Lutheran bodies in North America. The initial invitation to begin the work was, as a result of necessary political maneuvers, issued by the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in 1965 to five other Lutheran bodies to join work on a common liturgical book and hymnal: the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Even though the LCMS withdrew from the process just before its completion, the work of its representatives was invaluable throughout the entire process.

The Service Book and Hymnal, itself the product of eight cooperating Lutheran churches, was only seven years old at the time work on the new hymnal began. One might therefore argue that the new one was premature, but developments in the world of liturgy and music were moving quickly. Many Lutherans cherished Henry Melchior Muhlenberg’s hope for one people using one book, and the invitation from the Missouri Synod was too promising to pass up. Moreover, the work on the Common Service (1888) and the Common Service Book (1917–1918) laid the groundwork for the merger that produced the United Lutheran Church in America, and the work on the Service Book and Hymnal prepared the way for the mergers that produced the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America. A new, common liturgical book, it was hoped by many, could prepare for a yet more inclusive Lutheran unity. It was a heady and exciting time.

The work of the Second Vatican Council had brought into focus the liturgical scholarship of the earlier decades of the twentieth century, the changing needs and practices of the culture, and a broadening view of the world. What the Roman church declared in the documents of Vatican II reflected what many Christians outside Rome were also learning and teaching.

The work of the Second Vatican Council had its effect on the Anglican world as well. As Lutherans began work on their book, Episcopalians were working on a revision of the American Book of Common Prayer, continuing its distinctive traditions and making use of the emerging work of the Roman church. There was therefore a remarkable convergence of the effort of three Christian bodies, and the Lutherans were the beneficiaries of the work of the Roman Catholics as well as of the Episcopalians. Lutherans were moving out of the confines of their own traditions and learning to open their eyes to other traditions and practices to the enrichment of their own life and worship. Indeed, one Lutheran pastor, having examined the 1976 Proposed Book of Common Prayer, which was identical to the final form approved in 1979, exclaimed, “Why don’t we save ourselves further work and just adopt this?”

The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship was formally organized in November 1966. The ILCW created four working committees: a Liturgical Text Committee (of which I was a member), a Liturgical Music Committee, a Hymn Text Committee, and a Hymn Music Committee. The four committees met separately two, sometimes three times a year for the ten years it took to draft the new book, and individual studies and work continued throughout the year. The LBW was the product of a long and careful process of creation.
The eventual inclusion of Canadian Lutheran representatives enriched our perspective. Americans had to think carefully about references to the national government; there were two countries to be considered, with two different forms of rule. A classic and instructive example of the use of language comes to my mind. One American representative, in the interest of straightforward language, suggested replacing “purificator” with “napkin.” The Canadian member of the committee responded, “Why would you ever want to do that?” “For clarity and simplicity.” “But,” the Canadian continued, “a napkin is what you call a ‘diaper’; it’s a ‘nappie’ for a baby or a ‘sanitary napkin’ for a menstruating woman.” “Oh,” said the American. “What then do you call what Americans call a ‘napkin’?” “Serviete.” So the word remained “purificator.”

A basic principle for the liturgical work, enunciated by Hans Boehrer of the LCMS, was that the new book should be no less inclusive than the previous books. So the Athanasian Creed, although not often used, was included, as it had been in The Lutheran Hymnal of the LCMS. Some wanted to exclude Matins, Vespers, and the Litany because they were seldom employed in congregational practice any more, but the principle held: they had been in all the predecessor Lutheran books, and so they were retained. In addition, the daily offices were enriched by the emerging revisions of the Roman and Episcopal churches.

The desire for cooperation and furthering unity also influenced the inclusion of the entire Psalter (in the Ministers Desk Edition) in the translation of the American Book of Common Prayer (with just one word changed, in Psalm 8:1, from “Govern-or” to “Lord”), and the borrowing of the two-year daily lectionary from the BCP with only minor alterations and additions to provide alternative readings for those who did not use the Apocrypha. The introduction of the three-year eucharistic lectionary by the Lutheran Hymnal was quickly accepted and adapted by Anglicans and Lutherans and eventually by other denominations as well. As we worked on the text of the liturgy, we found ourselves constantly looking over the shoulders of our Roman and Anglican colleagues to see what they were doing, how they were handling difficult issues, which texts they were altering. The work was thoroughly cooperative and, indeed, generally congenial.

Lutherans expect their service book to be two books in one: a liturgical book and a hymnal. When the Missouri Synod proposed a joint

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effort, the invitation was to work on a common liturgy and at least a common core of hymns. It was assumed that Lutherans could agree on the liturgy without much controversy. After all, the Common Service of 1888 had been adopted by most of the Lutheran bodies in North America. But it was assumed that we probably could not agree on a common collection of hymns, perhaps because of the various ethnic traditions represented in American Lutheranism: German, Scandinavian, Slovak, English. The work on the hymn collection took into account a proposal by the Consultation on Ecumenical Hymnody recommending 150 hymns and tunes to serve as a common core of hymnals of the various denominations. Eighty additional hymns and tunes were also recommended. These hymns recommended by the Ecumenical Consultation (Mandus Egge, Executive Director of the Commission on Worship of the ALC, was the prime mover in this effort) are identified by an asterisk in the index of first lines in the Lbw. Unfortunately, the Lbw was the only hymnal to employ the recommendations.

Although the ecumenical convergence was exciting, it was not a promising time for the English language. Nearly everyone by the time of the publication of the Lbw had turned from the Tudor forms such as “beseech thee” to contemporary usage like “ask you.” But it was also a time of relaxing standards of speech as well as dress and manners. Elegance of language, which includes precision, clarity, and rhythm, was losing its appeal. The makers of the Service Book and Hymnal could agree that their goal in the collection of hymns was to make “not simply the finest Lutheran hymnal but the finest English-language hymnal.”

Such an expectation and hope of excellence was not on the horizon for the drafters of the Lbw. Jean-François Lyotard, in The Postmodern Condition (1984), lamented that our “epoch is one of slackening.”

With the changing language came also a changing sensitivity to the emerging issues in society and culture. In the third stanza of hymn 519, the description of God as “father” in The Lutheran Hymnal’s translation was replaced with “mother,” an interesting but awkward step toward inclusiveness, especially since the pronoun following was “his,” but “mother,” present in the original German (Mutterhänden) of hymn 285 in the Common Service Book of 1917–1918 and accurately translated by Frances Elizabeth Cox, was removed in the adaptation of Cox’s translation of that hymn (Lbw 542). Some of the changes and rewritings were clear triumphs. The translation of Bartholomäus Ringwaldt’s “The Day Is Surely Drawing Near” (321) is a distinct improvement on the previous English translation in The Lutheran Hymnal. “And hungry flames shall ravage earth/As Scripture long has warned us,” for example, powerfully expresses the terror of the Last Day. Other textual changes weakened
the original. In William Chatterton Dix’s wonderful Ascension hymn “Alleluia! Sing to Jesus” (158), the LBW, in a generally commendable intention to shy away from the personal emphasis of too many popular hymns, rewrote the original of the third stanza, “Intercessor, friend of sinners, Earth’s redeemer, plead for me,” to “Earth’s redeemer, hear our plea,” completely ignoring the references to intercessor and friend of sinners. The point is that the risen Lord, now returned to heaven, intercedes for the church that remains on earth. In this case, the intense personal cry for Jesus’ intercession—“plead for me”—is exactly and powerfully right.

With every change there is loss as well as gain. The adoption of the three-year eucharistic lectionary introduced by the Catholic church was widely welcomed across the spectrum of Christianity as a way of getting more Scripture heard by the people in an increasingly biblically illiterate age. Its use did indeed invigorate preaching and encourage congregational Bible study. The former one-year lectionary, nonetheless, had certain strengths that now are lost except in a handful of LCMS congregations. The use of the same readings year after year provided close familiarity with the passages that were read throughout the year; I can still say many of them, especially the Epistles, from memory. That, however, is a necessary loss in achieving the greater gain of a truly ecumenical lectionary. A more important concern is that, in the present lectionary, the continuous reading of various books of the Bible presumes first that people will be in church every Sunday, and second that they will pay close attention to the reading, and third that they will remember from week to week what has been read on the preceding Sunday. “Lectio continua [continuous reading] requires audiatio continua [continuous listening].” George Muenich used to say. The present lectionary ought to be an encouragement to attentive attendance every Sunday.

Looking back on our work, it is regrettable—to me anyway—that we did not consider more carefully making the assignments of the Prayer of the Day in the LBW match more closely the revised course of the Collects in the Roman and Episcopal liturgies. We missed an opportunity for further strengthening the unity we seek.

A great contribution of the LBW was the expanded calendar of commemorations with its implied teaching that the saints of God did not cease with the close of the New Testament period and that God is at work in the church throughout the centuries. The result of this expansion continues in both ELW and the LSB.

The LBW was the product of an exciting convergence and cooperation of three church bodies: Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran. The influence of the first two on the third is evident throughout the LBW. In one case, we can be pleased to boast, the Lutherans were ahead of Rome. The LBW was the first liturgical book to add Pope John xxiii to its calendar; in 2014 he was canonized and is now on the Catholic calendar as St. John xxiii. His inclusion by Lutherans was, among other things, a tribute to his calling of the Second Vatican Council, which across denominational lines did indeed breathe fresh and invigorating air into a languishing church.

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Notes
2. See the explanation by Henry E. Horn given in Philip H. Pfatteicher, Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship: Lutheran Liturgy in Its Ecumenical Context (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 5.

TREASURED HYMNS UN-earthed or Buried

Gracia Grindal

It was an invitation that would change my life: a letter from Mandus Egge, the executive in charge of worship in the ALC. Would I serve on the Hymn Text Committee of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship? The next meeting would be in St. Louis during the first week of January 1973. I was twenty-nine, settling into my work as Associate Professor in the English department of Luther College, where I taught creative writing and freshman English. I had been recommended to Egge by two of my teachers at Augsburg College, Gerald Thorson and Leland B. Sateren, both also serving on committees of the ILCW.

I flew to St. Louis on a Braniff, one of the luxuries of the day—half-empty planes, good food, and passengers dressed to the nines. The place we were to meet was a cheerless motel near the airport. There had been a snowstorm before we arrived and life in the city just reviving. We met in a room with full-length windows looking out into the blinding snow. It was freezing so we requested blankets. When they came we wrapped ourselves in them and began, looking rather like a Native American powwow.

Our first task was revising a hymn for the Key ’73 evangelism campaign. The committee didn’t like the theology of the proposed hymn, banal and “hymnish,” too much
chiliasm and semi-Pelagianism. Maybe as a kind of hazing, they assigned me the task of rescuing it. I returned to my room after the evening meeting and began working it over, trying to invigorate it with images, irony, and other good things from the world of poesy. All for naught. The next morning my work was greeted with polite dismissal—first of all, they sniffed, hymns were not poems. I would spend the next three decades trying to desery what a hymn was.

In the succeeding days, the committee continued to reject my revisions, but finally it made little difference because, on the second day, an official from the ILCW (maybe Gilbert Doan) burst into the room and announced that it had just voted that the time had come for a new hymnal, one put together by the three major Lutheran churches involved in the ILCW, a fulfillment of Muhlenberg’s dream of “one book, one church.” The thrill was palpable. We were standing on the edge of history. We were sent to our rooms to nominate hymns for this new work and spent the next day going through old favorite hymnals nominating the obvious hymns necessary for a Lutheran hymnal—the German Kernlieder of the Reformation, the English and American hymns the sbh had helped many Lutherans cherish—and then seeking redress for past omissions, most keenly felt by the Danes and Norwegians who had never recovered from the sbh’s failure to include Grundtvig’s “O Day Full of Grace,” among others. That was the beginning of the lesson I learned quickly: each hymnal is something of an attack on the previous hymnal.

The hymns we nominated became part of a long list of potential hymns, each of which was taken seriously by the committee. I can’t remember how many, but as we began winnowing the lists we kept count of how many hymns received how many votes. Not surprisingly, the German Kernlieder all received twelve votes—there were four people from each major church on the committees—since no one would ever think of making a Lutheran hymnal without significant numbers of hymns by Luther, Philip Nicolai, Nicolas Decius, Paul Gerhardt, Johann Heerman, and so on. Even Chinese Lutheran hymnals begin with them. The ones that received only three to four votes were the Scandinavian treasures unknown to the Germans.

When we had winnowed enough to have about four hundred hymns, which was the goal at the time, we were then assigned the task of editing several of them to present to the larger committee for examination and reworking. As that time approached we began to wonder about editorial guidelines. There was little doubt that we had to update the Tudor language of the King James Version of the Bible with its thees and thous, since few people understood that these second-person pronouns were originally the intimate singular forms, unlike “you,” which started out its grammatical life as plural. Although I disliked having to do this, when we did, it was our goal to make sure that the changes were poetic.

Not so pressing, but out there, was the question of inclusive language. The Presbyterians had just published their Worship Book (1972), which had modernized the language but kept the references to “man” and “brothers.” The revisions sounded jarring. I had heard that some women were planning to sue the Presbyterians for the book’s male-dominated language. We passed the motion that we should seek, wherever possible, to change such language as poetically as possible. Members of the committee agreed to change the offending terms in the versions they presented to us.

We came to call them “MCP problems” (“male chauvinist pig”). The question of inclusive language for God had not yet been broached.

It is also important to note that the generation of men sitting in the room with me were moderns and had been influenced by the historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible, especially Rudolph Bultmann and his demythologizing. For most, the three-storey universe was gone. To speak of heaven as up and hell as down was proscribed. They could not think of the biblical language and the language of many hymns as being literally true—and any suggestion to the contrary pained them. (Postmoderns would see this attempt to revise everything to fit with their new worldview as culturally imperialistic.) The call of Tillich and others like him for a new language of worship and preaching was imprinted on their minds. In addition, they were fighting the Pietism of their mothers and disapproved of sentimentality. They were embarrassed at the failure of the church to stand up to Nazism and deplored the “quietism” of their youth. Altogether they wanted a hymnal that was more socially engaged than the hymnals of their childhood. Most had been madly for Adlai Stevenson in their emergence from the conservative Republicanism usual for Lutherans at the time. All these prejudices were at work in the deliberations of the committee.

As we were assigned texts to retranslate or reedit, we received a packet of all of the former translations and original-language versions that staff assistant Theodore Delaney could find. While a marvelous thing to have, the copies of these documents were daunting. I remember a pile stacked on a shelf in my office that was two feet high!

There were few new texts to consider, since the hymn explosion of the 1960s via Great Britain had not quite made itself felt among Lutherans in America. Most regrettable, neither had the very rich explosion of new texts from Scandinavia, which might have been a refreshing contrast to the
worst of the new that was inflicted upon us. Fred Kaan and F. Pratt Green were just becoming known in America. Almost nothing from the world church appeared, although we were conscious of needing to include some hymns from the African-American tradition, mostly Negro spirituals.

We would work on our individual texts, send them in, and then come to the week-long meetings in St. Louis at the Missouri Athletic Club where each was the personal guest of J. A. O. Preus. The club had a number of places—elevators, swimming pools, rooms—where “ladies” were not permitted, and when they were it would be only for one meal and then the space would be closed off again. It made me nervous. We often labored from eight in the morning to eleven at night. In many ways the meetings turned into something like writing workshops. We were keenly aware that Lutherans had only recently lost their accents, and so the translations we had inherited were not always the best. Had it not been for the Englishwoman Catherine Winkworth, there would have been very little good German hymnody in the English language at all. The Scandinavian languages had not benefited from such a talent, so their translations tended to be unacceptable to the others except for some of the work of E. E. Ryden, whose command of both Swedish and English made his translations sound authentic. The best the Norwegians and Danes got was Carl Døving who, on the whole, was pretty good but still struck eastern Lutherans as fustian.

As we worked, we would hear of the passions of the Hymn Music Committee, who had strong prejudices regarding texts as much as they did regarding music—musical thirds and the sentimental gospel songs of their childhood repelled them. Once we received a note from them to the effect that the Ancient of Days was an inaccurate picture of God, to which we retorted, “Send us an accurate one!”

This went on for three years, about four weeks out of every year, hard work and exhausting to those of us with real jobs. Only gradually did I begin to realize that simply finding appropriate hymns for our congregations to sing, which had been the major work of previous hymnals, was not the major work of the iLCW. There was a movement of which I had been blissfully unaware: the new liturgical revival, fueled by Vatican II. It had thrilled the older generation sitting with me—now they could kiss Catholics! Ecumenism was as powerful an engine as was the liturgical revival, and in many ways the same force. A hymn could be included if it was ecumenical, meaning already known. It was my naive notion that we all brought our different treasures to the feast, but I soon discovered this would not be the case, especially for those from the smaller streams of American Lutheranism.

More surprising to me was that those who espoused the liturgical revival wanted to create an ecumenical church by using a similar version of the mass—which meant rejecting five hundred years of Lutheran practice—with a eucharistic prayer, the bringing forward of the gifts, and an increased emphasis on baptism and the sacrament of the altar. While as members of the hymn committee we had very little to do with these battles, we did overhear them and found we had to provide more hymns for both baptism and communion.

As an organist using both the Concordia and the Service Book and Hymnal, I had some sense of the way the traditional services went and was interested in things liturgical, having even had an ecstatic reading of Dom Gregory’s The Shape of the Liturgy as a sophomore, but I never felt at home in it. As one who grew up in a tradition (like most Lutherans at the time) where the Lord’s Supper was twice a year and somberly penitential, I could not get accustomed to having it every time I went to a retreat or every Sunday. Suddenly it was everywhere. As the battle over the eucharistic prayer became more and more pitched, I went looking for help. I read Oliver Olson’s argument about the direction of the prayer and understood it immediately. From that time, I began to think differently about the hymnal we were creating and even noticed that its title was The Lutheran Book of Worship. “Hymnal” had been abolished, although that is what most Lutherans still called it when it came out, the “new green hymnal.”
By the time we were putting the book to bed, in 1976, Missouri was starting to pull away because they realized the other truth about hymnals among Lutherans—they had almost always preceded mergers. If Missouri congregations had the LBW, soon their people would be asking why they were a separate church. So while we were meeting at the Missouri Athletic Club, enjoying our preprandials in the rather well-stocked club, we noticed a serious group of men at the back of the room carefully going through our work. The Committee on Doctrine, I believe it was called. Although the committee members from the Missouri Synod remained—especially Jaroslav Vajda, whose career as a hymnwriter was launched by this committee—their pulling away became part of the drama of the hymnal. We had bent to their will and included many Lutheran chorales that had not been part of the other hymnal traditions of the ALC and ICA. These became something of the pièce de résistance of the LBW, which meanwhile had kept out several classics of Scandinavia that I had hoped to bring to the table.

Not long after the book was published, another old Lutheran debate came to the fore, one I did not understand until I began learning more and more about older Lutheran hymnals. While Lutherans have had a healthy appreciation for American gospel songs, which they published in songbooks and sang at Sunday schools, Bible camps, and evening meetings, these songs could not be found in the classic Sunday morning hymnals of any Lutheran church in America, except maybe the Swedish Augustana’s 1925 Hymnal, which included a surprising number of gospel songs. The LBW was a book for Sunday morning, so none of those songs appeared except for “How Great Thou Art” and “Amazing Grace,” which popular taste made it necessary to include. (I will never forget Leonard Flachman bursting into our room, announcing with excitement that we had gotten permission to print “How Great Thou Art.” The hymnal would succeed!) But now things were changing. People did not go to church on Sunday or Wednesday evenings anymore; they worshiped at the altar of the television instead. When they did go to church on Sunday mornings, they wanted these old camp songs as well, although the musicians and the pastors did not. The worship wars broke out as “contemporary” musicians such as John Ylvisaker and others began producing their own songbooks, using old folk tunes and melodies that had a beat and seemed more immediate to many congregants. People began to attend either the “contemporary” or the “traditional” services, and rarely did the twain meet. While both were deeply a part of Lutheran experience and tradition, this conflict was mostly a question of musical style, not language or theology. The LBW worship settings were products of the liturgical revival and set to music more familiar to the concert hall, with difficult neo-Renaissance tunes. The folk tunes of the contemporary musicians were anything but contemporary; usually they were old folk tunes, or at least like them. The worship wars were fought over the wrong issue. Lutheran worship should be possible in any musical style. What matters are the words and shape of the liturgy.

Leland Sateren and I talked about the LBW once, and for different reasons, I suspect, we agreed that it could be thought of as an “archive with an attitude.” He wanted more contemporary, difficult music. I wanted it to have been more open to things that people actually liked and treasured. As one on the committee said when we realized we had to increase from four hundred hymns to six hundred, “We don’t hurt people by what we put in, but by what we leave out.” In my work with those who have made hymnals over the past thirty years, I have always been struck by their missionary zeal to give people new things they should like, rather than the old favorites they love. It is something like an oat-bran theology of worship—you may not like this, but it’s good for you! Taking a song away from a people is a terrible thing to do. A couple of years ago, at a meeting of the Hymn Society, I was amazed to hear a band playing old hymns set to contemporary sounds—texts that couldn’t be found in any of the hymnals its audience had prepared. I found it funny. Earnest young people wailing on their saxophones and guitars, singing hymns filled with the blood of Jesus and the bride of Christ, heaven shining through the texts, and their audience filled with experts who had done their level best to spare the next generation these bad hymns. They looked on dourly, unable to grasp that the new generation was passing them by.

All this being said, it is important to say that the letter I got in late 1972 shaped the rest of my life for the good. I became a frequent speaker and writer on language in the church, I began translating and writing my own hymns, and I was asked to join the Luther Seminary faculty where I could continue to pursue these issues, learning more and more as time went on about a tradition I wish I had known better when I entered that brightly shining but cold room in St. Louis in 1973.

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