

*Comparing the English language
liturgies of the predecessor churches
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America (ELCA): Their histories and
differences.*

Extended Essay-History

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ABSTRACT

Within a couple of generations of arriving on American shores, Lutherans in the United States were worshipping in the English language. This rapid Anglicization of the Lutheran liturgies from the languages they were originally written in led to the creation of many important Lutheran liturgies, often used in common among many different groups of Lutherans.

The history of the Lutheran liturgies is of great importance. Chronologically, the *Church Book* begins the liturgical use of English en masse in 1868. This work is of great importance because of its use of prior forms of the liturgy in the home countries of Lutheranism. Following in this same vein is the *Common Service*. This book refined and made ubiquitous the reforms of the *Church Book*. The *Common Service* was used exclusively until 1958, when two-thirds of the Lutherans in North America (coincidentally those who became part of the ELCA in the 1980s) began using the *Service Book and Hymnal*, a newer variation of the *Common Service* with more modern language and less formality. Soon after the production of the *Service Book and Hymnal*, the *Lutheran Book of Worship* came into being. In 1978, this joint hymnal was produced by nearly all of the United States' Lutherans was published. However, the *Lutheran Book of Worship* was never used by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and so was not used by any more Lutherans than the *Service Book and Hymnal*.

The wording of these hymnals changed in subtle, but noticeable ways. Most noticeable is a move towards more inclusive and modern language, however a few other things change as well. The formality between the pastor and congregant is reduced significantly in later hymnals, as are many more vengeful interpretations of God.

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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a liturgy as “*a collection of formularies for the conduct of the service of the Holy Eucharist*”. The liturgy is a Christian's first encounter with the tenants of Christianity, and a liturgy is often the most basic theology of the church bodies. Historically speaking, the diversity of liturgies has never been so obvious as in the English-language liturgies of the predecessor church bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). English language liturgies have been used by these Lutheran churches since the end of the 18th century in America¹ and have been the primary liturgies of the predecessor church bodies of the ELCA since the end of the 19th century.

This essay will consider eight of the most used of these liturgies, published between 1868 and 1995. These liturgies will be considered in two sections:

- I. The history of selected Lutheran Liturgies, and their importance
- II. A comparison of the wording of the liturgies

The primary goal of this essay is to illuminate the differences and the changes in the wording of these liturgies, and how these changes in liturgy have impacted these church bodies. This essay will not consider in depth the theological implications of the changes in these Lutheran liturgies or the rationale for these changes.

I. THE HISTORY OF SELECTED LUTHERAN LITURGIES, AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

The first Liturgy to be considered is the *Church Book* of the General Council, published in 1868 in Philadelphia. This Liturgy was first conceived by the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America. The need for “an improved English Hymn Book... more fully in harmony with the spirit of our Church”² was felt by English-speaking Lutherans, for at the time the hymnals in frequent use in English-speaking congregations had a smattering of Calvinistic, Arminian, and

¹ ELCA

² Dr. William J. Mann, quoted in LDR p. 177

Unitarian theology, and were thusly considered by the General Council to be in disrepair. In 1863 such a hymnal was approved, and for the next few years it was prepared by the General Council, culminating with its approval in 1867 and its printing and first usage in 1868. The *Church Book* also included for the first time Matin and Vesper services in an American service for the Lutheran Church. The *Church Book* was the first Lutheran hymnal to consider the Lutheran traditions in Europe and Lutheran theology as it related to the liturgy. This way of considering the liturgy would color the Lutheran understanding of liturgies in America for years to come.³

The second Liturgy of importance to us is a bit of liturgical backtracking. Considering both the pre-*Church Book* hymnals and the *Church Book* itself, the *Book of Worship* of 1880 was published by the General Synod (Church body consisting of English-speaking Lutherans, on the Northern East Coast), and was lacking in liturgical material (with only 16 pages) opting rather for lengthy prayers for family use. The confession was lifted from the Prayer Book of the Episcopal Church, and the *Book of Worship* had abandoned partially the historical liturgical considerations made in the *Church Book*, as well as the consideration of the church year which had begun with the *Church Book*.⁴

Quite possibly the most important American, English-language Lutheran liturgy, the widely used *Common Service* of 1888 was a step in the right direction on the long road toward liturgical unity in the Lutheran church on the North American continent. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, often considered the father of the Lutheran church in North America, in 1783 had hoped for a united Lutheran Church in North America, which used the same order of service.⁵ While the Lutheran denominations in North America were far from united in the late eighteenth century, many of them hoped for unity at some point in the future. Most of them agreed that while they felt that their worship materials were sufficient for the time being, a worship book using the Lutheran liturgies of the

3 LDR 177-181

4 LDR 193

5 LDR 182

sixteenth century would be acceptable and even desirable for the future use of the church. In 1882, after receiving the opinions of the other major Lutheran bodies in North America⁶, the General Synod South began research for what would become the *Common Service*, delving into historical liturgies while still trying to produce a worship book as quickly as possible. In 1883, the General Synod North indicated its desire for the kind of worship book as the General Synod South was taking steps to produce, allowing for a joint committee to achieve this end. In 1884, the General Synod North and South's joint subcommittee began work on the service, and referred their work to a Joint Committee on a Common Service book, with representatives from the General Synod North, the General Synod South and the General Council.⁷ They approved the work of the subcommittee and referred their work to the three General bodies, which in turn approved the work, allowing for the finalization of the work, and its subsequent publication. The final approval came in November 1888, allowing there to be a standard text used in common among English-speaking Lutherans.⁸ The *Common Service*, even more than the *Church Book*, embodied a return to a distinctly European Lutheran liturgical understanding, connecting to Luther and the reformation in the same way as the revivals happening in Europe in the late nineteenth century.⁹ The Common Service, too, helped to bring about one of the nation's largest Lutheran bodies, The United Lutheran Church in America. The Common Service remained the most widely used Lutheran liturgy; uniting Lutherans through worship for over 60 years after its approval in 1888.¹⁰

The next example I bring forward proves the pervasiveness of the *Common Service*. *The Wartburg Hymnal*, published in 1918 by the Iowa Synod (an ethnically German synod in the Upper Midwestern United States). While published as a new hymnal, the liturgy (often a manifestation of new

6 LDR 182-184

7 LDR, p. 184-185

8 LDR, p. 190

9 LDR, p. 193-197

10 LDR, p. 195

theology or minor theological differences) contained no differences from the *Common Service* of 1888.¹¹

As more Midwestern Lutherans were transitioning from their native languages to English, Midwestern Lutheran church bodies began to consider producing a new hymnal which would contain hymns and worship resources for their various congregations. In 1921, eight Lutheran synods from all over the country met to produce a new Lutheran hymnal.¹² This hymnal, called the *American Lutheran Hymnal*, was revolutionary in many ways, however, while these eight synods tried to add hymns from many different Christian traditions and embrace a spirit of ecumenism, they retained the *Common Service* of 1888. This hymnal was one of the most common outlets for the *Common Service* before it was replaced by the liturgy of the *Service Book and Hymnal*.¹³

In 1945, eight of the largest Lutheran church bodies, representing about 2/3 of the Lutherans in the United States¹⁴ (The American Evangelical Lutheran Church, The American Lutheran Church, The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America-Suomi Synod, The Lutheran Free Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and The United Lutheran Church in America)¹⁵ considered the plausibility of working together for a new, common liturgy and hymnal. In doing so, they first produced an important study with these findings: (1) Lutheran services in all bodies are now conducted almost entirely in English; (2) several bodies publish English translations and adaptations of liturgies used in Europe; (3) the *Common Service* is officially recognized and appears in all service books and hymnals; (4) the great majority of Lutherans in this country use only the *Common Service*, though in slightly variant forms; (5) each general body had its own hymnal.¹⁶ From these findings the churches asserted the plausibility

11 ELCA

12 American Lutheran Hymnal p. 3

13 ELCA

14 LDR, p. 205

15 SBH, p. viii

16 LDR p. 207

of this new hymnal, that this new service was intended to be grounded on the primarily German *Common Service* and other Lutheran liturgical traditions, considering the meaning and importance of the worship traditions of the ancient and medieval church, in the newly popular spirit of ecumenism. These church bodies also desired for the inclusion of the Missouri Synod, however the Missouri Synod had just approved a new hymnal, and not wanting to produce another so quickly, they declined to participate.¹⁷ With this basis, the eight church bodies began working on the hymnal, which was finally approved and published in 1958. In the early 1960s, these church bodies became either a part of the Lutheran Church in America or the American Lutheran Church, helping to unify the church once more.

In 1965 the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod invited other Lutheran church bodies to the table to discuss a new service book and liturgy. The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America (about equal in size, formed in 1960 and 1962, respectively) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada agreed to work with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on this new hymnal in 1966, forming the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship.¹⁸ Over the next years, the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship would work together to produce a new hymnal, 1978's *Lutheran Book of Worship*. This hymnal continued the work of the *Service Book and Hymnal*, focusing on Christian history, ecumenical liturgies and traditions, while still being true to its Lutheran heritage. This new hymnal was also intended to be one book for all or nearly all of the United States' Lutherans.¹⁹ In fact, this hymnal would have been the first English hymnal ever to have both the blessing of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the churches soon to be a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. However, this unified liturgy was not to last. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod never printed the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, although they still hold copyright to the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and have their name on the cover page along with the American Lutheran Church and the

17 LDR p. 208

18 LBW, page 7

19 LBW page 8

Lutheran Church in America.²⁰ The users of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, then, began engaging in merger talks. After many years, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was born: their agreement on theology (and on hymnals) helped to create a church with a diverse ethnic heritage, but with shared liturgical traditions going back more than a hundred years.

The 1990s brought new challenges to the producers of new liturgies for Lutheran worship. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* was an older hymnal and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America losing members.²¹ Although the ELCA had not embarked upon the necessary course to prepare a new hymnal, they did want to make available a new liturgy. These desires led to the production of *With One Voice* in 1995. With regards to its heritage and inspiration, the introduction states that *With One Voice* intends to continue the liturgical line extending from the *Church Book* and the *Common Service*, specifically modernizing the *Lutheran Book of Worship* while continuing in its goal of reaffirming the liturgies of the early church and reformation, while still emphasizing Lutheran traditions.

II. A COMPARISON OF THE WORDING OF THE LITURGIES

The wording and structure of the Lutheran liturgies of importance to us in this essay can be broken down into two different types: those with traditional wording and those with a similar, but less complex and more modern wording. This essay will attempt to characterize the state of these different liturgical types and their meaningful changes. For the purposes of this comparison, this essay will not include the liturgical material in the *Wartburg Hymnal* or the *American Lutheran Hymnal*, as the text of those liturgies is the same as that of the *Common Service*.

There are a few different types of invocations used in liturgies. The *Church Book*, the *Common Service*, the *Service Book and Hymnal*, the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, and *With One Voice* all begin with the traditional “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”²² The *Book of*

20 LBW, pp. 3-4

21 <http://www.demographia.com/db-religusa2002.htm>

22 CS p. 1, CB p.1, SBH p.15, LBW p. 56, WOV, p. 10

Worship begins with the same, but also offers 10 other alternatives for maximum adaptability; this is characteristic of the *Book of Worship's* place in liturgical history, one where the writers were unready to commit themselves or their denominations to a particular wording.²³

In the Confessions²⁴, many various forms are used. The *Church Book*, the *Common Service* and the *Service Book and Hymnal* all use a traditional version. This version is contrasted by the version in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, which uses much more contemporary language and syntax. Consider the difference in language between phrases like “we are by nature sinful and unclean”, from the *Church Book*, the *Common Service*, and the *Service Book and Hymnal* to “we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves”, and a simpler, consideration of “sin” in *With One Voice*, and surprisingly in the *Book of Worship* as well. This change in language, along with a switch to easier to read language (“Most merciful God” in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and “Gracious God” in *With One Voice* versus “O Most merciful God” in the others, as well reflect a change to more modern language, and in the *Book of Worship* reflect a liturgy less influenced by the reformation and its liturgical traditions.

The Gloria Patri²⁵ is manifested quite differently in different hymnals. In the older, more traditional hymnals(The *Church Book*, the *Common Service*, the *Book of Worship*, and the *Service Book and Hymnal*) the form “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end”, whereas in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice* opt for a hymn of praise, merging the Gloria in Excelsis with the Gloria Patri. This part of the liturgy especially exhibits the major changes made by the writers of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

The Kyrie²⁶ has experienced some significant changes in phrasing. The *Church Book* uses:

23 BW p.9

24 See CB p. 2, CS pp 1-2, SBH p. 16, BOW p. 11-12 LBW p.56 WOV pp10-11

25 See CB p. 3, CS pp 3-4, SBH p 17 BOW p.11, LBW pp 58-61 WOV pp 14-16

26 See CB p 3, CS pp 4-6, BOW pp 12-13 SBH pp 18-19 LBW pp 57-58 WOV p 28

“Lord have mercy upon us.” “Christ have mercy upon us.” and “Lord have mercy upon us” with the petition repeated verbatim by the congregation after each. However, the *Book of Worship* uses this form: **“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!**”, with the minister and the congregation saying the petitions together. This particular Kyrie smacks of the Gloria Patri and is significantly different from the other Lutheran liturgies discussed in this paper. In the *Common Service*, many versions are presented, all extremely similar to that in the *Church Book*. However, in the *Service Book and Hymnal*, the Kyrie is presented in a very new way:

In peace let us pray to the Lord
 For the peace that is from above, and for the salvation of our souls, let us
 pray to the Lord.
 For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the churches of
 God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.
 For this holy house and for them that in faith, piety and fear of God offer
 here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.
 Help, save, pity and defend us, O God, by thy grace.
Lord have mercy.

This newer setting is presented along with a setting similar to that of the *Church Book* or the *Common Service*. The *Lutheran Book of Worship's* Kyrie updates the first Kyrie of the *Service Book and Hymnal* with more modern language (“pity and defend us” in the *Service Book and Hymnal* becomes “comfort and defend us” in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, along with some other minor changes) and a new understanding of the church catholic (“churches of God” becomes “Church of God”). Interestingly, *With One Voice*, intended as a simpler and more modern liturgy, uses the Kyrie text from the *Church Book* and *Common Service*.

The Gloria in Excelsis²⁷ (called solely the Hymn of Praise by the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice*) is a major feature of the Lutheran liturgies. All the liturgies before and including the *Service Book and Hymnal* use this phrasing:

²⁷ See CB pp 4-5, CS pp 6-7, BOW p 13 SBH pp 19-23 LBW pp 58-61 WOV p 29-30

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will towards men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.

O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.

For Thou only art holy, Thou only art the Lord; Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* changes this a bit, with the main changes being a change to more hymn-like phrasing and a transition from the older grammar to modern grammar, consistent with the rest of the hymnal. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* also allows for another version, which is similar, but uses a strophic form with a refrain: (**This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**)

With One Voice adapts the strophic version from the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and uses this refrain: (Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God in the highest; glory to God, glory to God, and peace to God's people on earth.)

The Alleluia²⁸ is the response to the biblical lessons of the day. In the *Church Book*, a “simple” **Hallelujah** is prescribed for all seasons other than for the Passion (or Lenten) season, where **Christ hath humbled Himself, and become obedient unto death: even the death of the Cross.** The *Book of Worship*, interestingly enough, doesn't allow for an Alleluia. The *Common Service* and the *Common Service* use the same wording as the *Church Book*, with a few changes made to allow for the differing musical settings amongst them. In the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice*, however, **Alleluia. Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. Alleluia.** is used during all times of the church year except Lent, when **Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and abounding in steadfast love.** is used instead.

28 See CB p 5-6, CS pp 8-12, SBH p 24 LBW pp 62-63 WOV pp 31-32

The liturgical annunciation of the Gospel²⁹ has been fairly constant. All but the *Book of Worship* use some sort of annunciation, and these use some slight variation in this text: **Glory be to Thee, O Lord** (Gospel Reading) **Praise be to Thee, O Christ.**

The Creeds (Apostles' and Nicene)³⁰, being historically based back to the beginnings of Christianity, have been changed very little. The few changes that have been made have been in the sphere of more modern language in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice*. These changes are consistent with the changes throughout the rest of the hymnal.

The Peace³¹ was consistent until the publication of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Until that time, it had read as such: The Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. In the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice* it reads: The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.** This is interesting, mainly because the gender-neutral language “The Peace of God” in the older hymnals becomes “The Peace of the Lord” in the newer ones.

The Offertory³² is presented in many ways. All the hymnals up until the *Service Book and Hymnal* include an offertory considering our sacrifices of God and our sacrifices and another offertory supplicating God to grant his spirit unto you. The *Service Book and Hymnal* and the *Lutheran Book of Worship* include an offertory which considers what we shall give to God. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice* include an allegory to the vineyards and the fields of God, alluding to the offering in the sense that it is giving thanks for Christ and for Communion. While the subjects vary, the theme is the same: our thankfulness for the sacrifice of God.

The Prayer of the Church³³ vary greatly between the hymnals; for example, the *Service Book*

29 See CB pp 6-7 CS p 13, SBH p 25 LBW p 63 WOV p 32

30 See CB pp 7-9 BOW pp 13-14 CS p 14 SBH p 25 LBW pp 64-65 WOV pp 32-33

31 See CB p 9 CS p 14 SBH p 25 LBW p 66 WOV p 34

32 See CB pp 9-10 CS pp 14-16 SBH pp 26-28 LBW pp 66-67 WOV p 35

33 See CB pp 10-12 CS pp 16-17 SBH p 28 LBW p 65 WOV p 34

and Hymnal and its predecessors place the prayer after the Offertory, while the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice* place it after the Offertory. In the *Church Book* and the *Common Service*, the prayer is prescribed, however in the *Service Book and Hymnal* and after the prayer is written by the pastor each week.

The Holy Communion- the sacrament on which our liturgy is based, actually has changed very little in the incarnations presented in this essay. The *Common Service*, *Church Book*, and *Service Book and Hymnal* all use very traditional language consistent with the rest of the service. With the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice*, more modern language is used; however very little has changed. The only moderately interesting thing is the lack of a service of communion in the *Book of Worship*; it seems that a service of Holy Communion in the way it is used now emerged anew with the *Church Book*.

CONCLUSION

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its predecessor church bodies began the road towards shared liturgies many years ago. These liturgies, all of which were used widely among these churches, began with the *Church Book* and the *Common Service's* approach to producing a wholly new Lutheran liturgy in America, a tradition which continued for years to come. Liturgies to follow from the original and historical liturgies of the church considered the best way to moderate a new approach to the church with its history. A new change in the liturgy would never replace a well-used liturgical theme immediately. The history of the liturgy is the history of moderate and considerate changes applied to an old model conservatively. This moderation is why common themes can be seen between the oldest services and the newest services; the church has changed little, especially in its most important rites, such as the creeds and holy communion. These shared liturgies and moderation in change laid the foundation for large church mergers and the considerable theological grounds for them.

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