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Worship Library

Title: A Brief History of LCMS Hymnals (before *LSB*)

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Category: Church Music

On April 26, 1997 The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod celebrated the 150 years that it has existed under God's grace. To mark the occasion, this brief history of hymnals in the Synod was offered.

The author, Carl Schalk, is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois. Schalk is both a composer of hymn tunes and an author of several books on Lutheran hymnals in America.

Like every group of immigrants who came to America in the 19th century, the German Lutherans brought with them the hymnals of their homelands. Hymnals from Dresden, Marburg, Schleswig, Pommerania, Prussia, Hamburg, Bavaria, and Osnabrueck could be found among the immigrants' treasured possessions.

According to August R. Suelflow, long-time director of Concordia Historical Institute, it would not have been unusual to find four, five, or even six different hymnals in use at one service in a Lutheran congregation. The wording of hymns in the various books was not always the same. Differences in doctrinal content added to the confusion.

The Synod's First Hymnal

The situation was no different among the Saxon immigrant communities in Missouri. In November, 1845, C.F.W. Walther, leader of the Saxon group and pastor of the "federated congregation" in St. Louis, brought the need for a single hymnal to the attention of his congregation.

According to an announcement in *Der Lutheraner*, the hymnal was to be compiled and edited by "several Lutheran pastors in Missouri." Exactly who they were is not certain, although it seems clear that Walther took the leading part. The hymnal, *Kirchengesangbuch fuer Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden ungeaenderter Augburgischer Confession*, appeared in 1847, the same year as the founding of Synod. It contained 437 hymns, a selection of prayers, antiphons, the Preface, Luther's Small Catechism, and the Augsburg Confession.

In appreciation for his work in connection with the hymnbook, Walther's congregation gave him "five cords of winter wood together with a week's salary." The other pastors involved were to receive free copies of the hymnal for their families.

Begun before the Synod had been founded, Walther's hymnal was officially handed over to the church body by the St. Louis congregation in 1862. This collection--virtually unchanged--was to serve in the German services of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod until the transition to the English language.

Walther's hymnbook, containing only texts, attempted to recover the original forms of the texts, many of which had been altered in the intervening centuries. But Walther and his circle also looked to the Reformation to recover the earlier forms of the hymn melodies which had also undergone significant changes over time. The use of the earlier melodic forms would also, it was felt, help reinvigorate congregational singing, helping it recover from the abysmal state into which it had fallen by the middle of the 19th century.

But congregations had to re-learn these older melodies. As a result, already in 1849 Walther's congregation organized regular practice sessions, resolving that "in order to practice the old chorales as they are found in Layriz' Choralbuch, singing periods will be held weekly, Thursday evening above and Friday evening below, from seven to eight o'clock beginning this week."

Music for the organist was provided in separate collections drawn largely from the pioneering work of the German pastor and musicologist Friedrich Layriz. These included the Evangelisch-Lutherisches Choralbuch fuer Kirche und Haus (1863), but especially Heinrich Hoelte's Choralbuch (1886) and Karl Brauer's Mehrstimmiges Choralbuch (1888).

Early English Hymnals

While the greater part of the missionary effort of the Synod in the 1800s was directed to the constant stream of German immigrants flocking to America, the need for English services and an English hymnody was increasingly apparent. Some congregations were beginning to hold occasional English services. English mission festivals were not uncommon.

The transition to the English language began already in the late 1800s. With no English hymn collection readily available, Walther encouraged the use of a small English hymnal--Hymn Book for the use of Evangelical Lutheran Schools and Congregations--published in 1879 by the Norwegians in Decorah, Iowa. Edited and translated by Prof. August Crull of Concordia College, Ft. Wayne, it contained 130 hymns and ten doxologies.

Soon other small English collections began to appear. Their titles indicated the use for which they were intended. These included Lutheran Hymns: For the Use of English Lutheran Missions (1882) containing 18 hymns texts and 15 melodies, and Hymns of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: For the Use of English Lutheran Missions (1886) containing 33 hymns and melodies. A larger collection entitled Hymns for Evangelical Lutheran Missions (1905) contained 199 hymns without music together with some liturgical orders. These early collections were tentative experiments in the period of transition.

The first major effort toward an English hymn book was the work, once again, of August Crull. It was presented to the English Lutheran Conference of Missouri and published in Baltimore as the Evangelical Lutheran Hymn Book (1889). A music edition of this collection was prepared and appeared as the Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book (1912). It became the first official English hymnal of the Synod. This music edition was later often referred to as the "old green hymnal" after the color of its binding.

These early English collections reflect a resolve to transmit the heritage of the Lutheran chorale--both words and music--to a new generation, but now in a new language. While some of these early translations may seem quaint to us today, those early leaders made the attempt. Each successive generation has worked to improve these translations so that new generations might continue to sing the heritage of the chorale in the English language.

The Lutheran Hymnal and Lutheran Worship

In 1929 the Synod authorized a revision of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* with the hope that it might become the English hymn book for the Synodical Conference. The following year an inter-synodical committee began work culminating in the publication of *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), a collection which, the title page indicated, was "Authorized by the Synods Constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America." Initially bound in blue, it was popularly known as the "blue hymnal."

More than a generation following the appearance of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, new social and religious concerns made the need for updating liturgical and hymnic materials necessary. The result was the publication of *Worship Supplement* (1969) which made available new hymnic and liturgical materials in the interim *between* *The Lutheran Hymnal* and the projected joint hymnal for all Lutherans, work on which had begun in 1966.

In 1965 the Synod had invited all Lutherans in America to join together in the production of common worship materials, an invitation ultimately accepted by the great majority of Lutherans in America. It was hoped that a single Lutheran hymn book for all Lutherans in America would result. The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship was formed in 1966 to carry out this project. After over a decade of work they published the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978). One year after its publication, the Synod determined to publish its own revision of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, appearing three years later as *Lutheran Worship* (1982).

Fifteen years after the publication of *Lutheran Worship*, the Synod began the process of preparing a hymn supplement which appeared in 1998. Shortly after that the Synod's Commission on Worship announced its intention to begin work toward the publication of a new hymnal to serve yet another generation of worshippers. That hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book*, joined the repertoire of Lutheran hymnals in 2006.

For additional information on the history of Lutheran hymnody in America, see the following books by Schalk:

- *God's Song in a New Land: Lutheran Hymnals in America* (CPH, 1995)
- *Source Documents in American Lutheran Hymnody* (CPH, 1996)
- *The Roots of Hymnody in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod: The Story of Congregational Song--the Hymnals and the Chorale Books from the Saxon Immigration to the Present* (CPH, 1965)

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