

The Hymnal

Introduction to the Common Hymnal

THE birth of Jesus was announced in song, and the last act of worship of our Lord and his Disciples was the singing of a hymn. Sacred song, rooted in the Hebrew tradition, occupied from the first a preeminent position in Christian worship. The earliest hymns were psalms and canticles. Initially the people sang them, though by the fourth century in the East, and by the seventh in the West, they had become part of the liturgy and a matter for the clergy and the choirs. Not again until the time of the Reformation was the hymn restored to the people as their rightful heritage in worship.

In 1524, Luther published the *Achtliederbuch* which led the way for an outburst of evangelical hymnody in the countries of Northern and Central Europe. Next there came a new type of music, the chorale, based sometimes on plainsong, sometimes on secular melodies. The hymn was incorporated into the services of the Church and once more was congregational. In sharp contrast, the Reformed churches employed only the Psalter, often crudely paraphrased, and it was not until the eighteenth century that the hymn made its way in the English-speaking world.

When Lutherans came to the New World, they brought with them the hymnals of their homelands, but as their descendants grew up in an English-speaking environment, English Lutheran hymnals began to appear. Attempts were made to translate hymns of the Lutheran heritage and to incorporate the finest English hymns. Each Lutheran body used its own hymnal, but there was a growing feeling that there was a body of common hymnody sufficient to permit the preparation of a common hymnal. In 1944, the United Lutheran Church directed its Common Service Book Committee (which had been engaged for four years in studies envisaging the revision of its own hymnal) "to seek the fullest possible cooperation with other Lutheran bodies, in the hope of producing a Common Lutheran Hymnal in America." Upon the subsequent invitation, representatives of the American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Lutheran Church, met in Pittsburgh, Pa., June, 1945, to inaugurate *this* work.

The Commission on a Common Hymnal followed these basic principles:

the Common Hymnal must be a new work, not simply a conflation of the existing hymnals; it must contain only good hymns providing, as a companion to the liturgy, for the full round of the Christian Year and the Christian Life; the hymns should be devotional rather than didactic or homiletical, and their direction Godward, not manward; the hymnal must be ecumenical in character, expressing the continuity and catholicity of the life of the Church; the final criterion is not Lutheran authorship, but agreement with the teachings of the Word of God; the hymnal must have the highest standards of literary excellence, and each hymn, being an act of worship, should be exalted in language, noble in thought and reverent in feeling.

One of the most difficult problems was the application of this final principle, especially to hymns of our own heritage where pressure was great for their inclusion. Inferior translations have been accepted in the past because of the affection felt for the original, or because of a majestic chorale tune with which the original text was associated. What is often forgotten, or perhaps charitably overlooked, is the fact that a translation seldom succeeds in recreating either the poetic beauty or depth of message of the original. The Commission has found it necessary to edit and, in some cases, re-translate, some of these hymns. It hopes that it has thus enriched the hymnal by many hymns from sources largely unknown in the New World, and that some of these may eventually become part of the ecumenical treasury of Christian hymnody.

In addition to hymns of Lutheran provenance, and the best of the ancient Greek and Latin hymns, nearly two-thirds of the hymns are of English and American authorship. Many of them have been in our hymnals for years, and the nearly eighty of American authorship will correct a weakness common to

our hymnals. A few original hymns appear here for the first time. In general, the Commission has respected the original texts of the authors, though in some cases, generally-accepted alterations have been adopted. Where this has been done, *a.* (altered) follows the author's name.

As far as possible, hymns have been placed where they will be of the greatest general use, and only a minimum appear under the more restrictive rubrics of the Church Year. Extensive cross-references at the end of each section of the hymnal, and indexes at the end of the book, afford an increased selection of hymns for particular occasions.

The music, like the texts, is ecumenical. The characteristic Lutheran form, the chorale, is well-represented in rhythmic, isometric and Bach arrangements. An increased number of plainsong melodies on the one hand, and some Gospel hymns on the other, will provide for a wide variety of taste among our people. About two hundred fifty hymns have tunes of English origin, including both the standard tunes of the nineteenth century and some by contemporary composers. Psalm tunes from English, Scottish, Swiss and French sources appear, as well as eight Welsh tunes and a number of French tunes based on plainsong. Carols and more than thirty folksongs, largely from North European sources, add much new and interesting music. American composers are well represented, some by tunes which appear here for the first time.

The Commission has tried not to disturb the association of certain hymns with certain tunes, except in instances where the traditional tune has become worn by usage. In such cases a second tune has been provided in the hope of lending new freshness to the text, and often, where a new tune appears, a cross-reference indicates where the older tune may be located. The pitch of many of the hymns has been lowered *to* encourage

congregational singing by men as well as women. Solid notes have usually been employed in notation, except in the case of psalm tunes, some chorales and modern compositions of grave character. Eighth notes have been used in plain-song. For every hymn, a direction indicates the mood and tempo of the tune, and organists and choirmasters should note these suggestions carefully. *Amen* has not been provided for hymns which are didactic, hortatory, narrative or contemplative, but it appears, properly, at the conclusion of hymns which end in prayer or praise. Double bars are employed at the end of musical rather than textual phrases.

The Commission expresses its appreciation to all who have granted permission for the use of copyrighted material, and hopes that all such material has been properly credited. It also records, with a deep sense of sorrow and loss, the death of five of its members since the inception of its work: the Rev. Paul Zeller Stro-dach, D.D., of the United Lutheran Church; the Rev. C. A. Wendell, D.D., Litt.D., and the Rev. Carl J. Sodergren, D.D., both of the Augustana Lutheran Church; and the Rev. Albert Jagnow, Ph.D., and the Rev. Leonard O. Burry, both of the American Lutheran Church. All of them made important contributions and it is to be regretted that they did not live to see the completion of this work.

Since 1945, four additional bodies of Lutherans have become associated in this project: the Lutheran Free Church, The United Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. This assures the use of the Common Hymnal by more than two-thirds of the Lutherans in the United States and Canada. After the appearance of the Common Liturgy and Hymnal, a permanent Commission on the Liturgy and Hymnal, will come into being and will have full jurisdiction over this book, other and subsequent editions and companion volumes.

The Lutheran Churches in America are in process of becoming the Lutheran Church in America. We share the rich endowments of a common faith, a common history, a common heritage of liturgy and hymnody, and the recognition of a common mission and destiny in the New World. This book will contribute to the unity of our Church and to the advent of the day when Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's vision of "one Church and one book" will become a reality. May God accept the worship this volume brings. To his glory we dedicate the *Service Book and Hymnal* with the prayer that he may bless it and use it as an instrument of his grace and power for the advancement of his kingdom.