

Evaluation of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations Concerning the Lutheran Service Book

As per the request of the 2002 Convention of Synod, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations has examined the materials presented in the Missouri Synod's Lutheran Hymnal Project (now referred to as the *Lutheran Service Book*), and has come to the following conclusions:

After study of the materials as they were presented to the 2004 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the commission is pleased to recommend the use of the hymnal and agenda, and commend them to the congregations of Lutheran Church—Canada.

The commission also does note some items of concern, which deal both with hymns and items in the agenda. Specifically:

We have concern regarding the expansion of the Eucharistic prayer in the first two settings of Divine Service. While the words of institution are not placed in a relative clause, which would embed them into the prayer, we are concerned that bracketing the words with prayers of thanksgiving muddies the distinction between thanksgiving and sacrament, which is the very problem that has caused us historically to reject the Eucharistic prayer. While prayers of thanksgiving in conjunction with the Sacrament are appropriate, the earlier form which has prayers of thanksgiving before the words and then after the Sacrament itself makes a clearer distinction and does not turn the Sacramental gift into our act of thanks. We question the necessity of including this option.

Second, the prayer for the anniversary of a baptism, on page 57 of the proposal prepared for the LCMS convention, is problematic when it asks that the one who has been baptized “may faithfully keep the covenant into which he/she has been called.” Since our perseverance is by God's grace, it would be better to ask that the person *be kept in his/her baptismal grace*, or that God would keep them in that grace as the prayer in the rite of holy baptism in LW and LSB (page 46 of the proposal) puts it.

We also have concern about the option of the use of oil in the rite of Baptism as mentioned (proposal page 46, top of 785). Such use of an element in addition to the water (the only element commanded by God) can only create confusion, and in a worst case scenario be seen as bringing the Eastern Orthodox rite of chrismation in by the back door (for which reason we suspect it was introduced into LBW but omitted in LW.)

Regarding a few of the hymns, the commission does note that the LCMS has embarked upon an effort to include hymns from significant ethnic or cultural groups found within its membership that do not equally match the cultural diversity of Lutheran Church—Canada. This is of course understandable.

Regarding specific hymns, the commission wonders why, with the reversion to the TLH text of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” it was decided not to retain “Mild He leaves His throne on high” (proposal page 136) as there is a concern that “Mild He lays His glory by” may be interpreted as kenotic, a losing of His glory rather than a mere renunciation of its use. So also in “We Praise and Acknowledge You, O God,” 3.3.

We believe also that the first verse of “We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight” (proposal page 163) contradicts the rest of the hymn and its beautiful means of grace theology. We do indeed hear his gracious Word, even though we do not see Him. It would be far more accurate to say, “We walk by faith and not by sight, but gracious words we hear, from Him who spoke as none e'er spoke, for we believe Him near.”

We have problems in general with “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” which confuses the Kingdoms of the Left Hand and Right Hand. While slavery is indeed a metaphor for our sinful condition, the hymn puts its focus on the redemption through warfare from physical slavery, which is not the experience of everyone who would be singing this hymn. The best of hymns speak to the universal condition of humanity, so that anyone who picks them up can relate to them. This would not be the case here.

There are other “hymns” (actually, “spiritual songs”) which are shallow and simplistic, obviously included because people love them. If used sparingly they may be of some use, but there is a danger that some will make of them a regular diet, which would be spiritually detrimental. In some cases they cannot be considered to contain false doctrine because they really don’t say anything at all (the spiritual equivalent of empty calories).

Having said this, however, the commission believes that these concerns address matters which could be better said but do not in the end overturn true doctrine. The concerns have been conveyed by letter to the LCMS Commission on Worship. Should the above changes be made, we would be most grateful.

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Commission on Theology and Church Relations