

Our Liturgy

by Christian Anderson

In paragraph IV of the constitution of the Norwegian Synod we read: "In order to preserve unity in liturgical forms and ceremonies, the Synod advises its congregation to use, as far as possible, the liturgy of 1685 and agenda of 1688 of the Church of Norway, or the new liturgy and agenda adopted by the Synod at Spring Grove, Minn., June, 1899, according as the several congregations may decide." (Synod Report, 1940, p. 51)

This paragraph is taken without any change from the constitution of the Old Norwegian Synod. And the advice which it gave was followed so strictly up to the time of the Merger, that there probably was no other Lutheran body in the country where there was such complete uniformity in the order of service as in the Norwegian Synod. It is true that the majority of the congregations were rather slow in adopting the so-called "New Liturgy and Agenda." This was no doubt due in many cases to their lack of ambition to familiarize themselves with the parts that were added; but perhaps the chief reason is to be found in the fact that so many pastors served a number of congregations, and they were therefore disinclined to add anything to the work at each service.

It ought to be worthwhile for us to know just what the "Liturgy of 1685 and the agenda of 1688" really is. But before calling attention to the make-up of this liturgy it may be well to be reminded of a few historical data in order to explain why this liturgy, which was prepared altogether by churchmen in Denmark, is called the liturgy and agenda of the Church of Norway. In 1397, after the old royal line in Norway had become practically extinct, the so-called "Kalmar Union" was established among the three Scandinavian countries. Sweden soon withdrew from the Union, while Norway continued to be united with Denmark for over 400 years until after the great political upheavals in Europe which were caused by the Napoleonic wars in the beginning of the 19th century. It was originally stipulated that each country, as far as its internal affairs were concerned, was to be independent of the other; their governments were to be headed by the same king. Owing to various circumstances, however, during a greater part of this period, Norway came to be governed more or less as a province of Denmark. In its church affairs it became to a great extent dependent on developments in the sister country.

In Denmark the evangelical doctrines began to be preached soon after Martin Luther broke with the papacy, and it was enthusiastically received by the people. In spite of strenuous opposition by the Roman bishops, Lutheran doctrines were officially adopted as the religion of the country in 1536. As a matter of course the Lutheran Church was declared to be the State church of Norway the following year. Although the Lutheran doctrines were preached in some of the cities, yet, owing to a lack of evangelical preachers and schools, the greater part of the population continued to be Catholic for a considerable time, and they even used violence against the evangelical preachers who were sent to them. However, the large amount of church property controlled by the Roman prelates was confiscated, the peculiar papistic ceremonies were abolished, and the Lutheran liturgy in use in Denmark was established by royal edict.

The Lutheran Reformers began very soon to revise and purify the order of service for their congregations. They did not follow the principals of the early Reformed theologians, to break

away entirely from the usages and ceremonies in use up to that time. They wanted to preserve as much as possible of the orders which were in use in the Catholic Church, much of which dated back to the early days of the Church. But they carefully eliminated or changed whatever contained errors that had arisen in the Church through the Middle Ages.

In 1523 Luther published the treatise, "Von der Ordnung des Gottesdienstes." This was a proposed order of service for daily morning and evening worship consisting of hymn singing, Scripture reading, sermon and prayers, all in the vernacular. In 1526 he published his "Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gottesdienstes." Here he proposed a full liturgy for the main Sunday morning service. This order of service contained the following parts:

1. Opening hymn or introit, during which the pastor goes before the altar.
2. Kyrie eleison, the first stanza of Litany.
3. Chanting or reciting of the collect (*in unisono*).
4. Chanting of the Epistle lesson (*in octavo tono*).
5. After the Epistle a hymn is read [sung?], e.g. "O Holy Ghost to Thee We Pray," (L.H.* 39)[†] or some other hymn.
6. Chanting of the Gospel lesson of the day, (*in quinto tono*). Rules are given for these various chants.
7. After the Gospel lesson the whole congregation sings the Confession of Faith, viz. the hymn, "We All Believe in One True God" (L.H. 71).[‡] According to the Roman liturgy the priest would chant or read the Creed. Luther wanted the whole congregation to have an opportunity to join in this confession, and as this could be done better by singing than by trying to recite along with the priest, he had composed this hymn for the purpose of using it in this way.

So far Luther followed the Gregorian order. Here the Gregorian liturgy proceeded with the sacrifice of the mass for those who were to partake of the Sacrament of the Altar, which now followed immediately. Luther now proceeded with

8. The sermon on the Gospel lesson. The sermon was followed by a paraphrase on the Lord's Prayer, which was later succeeded by a general prayer. After this follows an Exhortation to the Communicants either from the pulpit or from the altar. If there is no one to partake of the Sacrament the service is closed with a collect, hymn and benediction.

In the administration of the Sacrament Luther could not make use of the form of the words of institution found in the Gregorian liturgy, because it contained human additions and even

* *The Lutheran Hymnary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1913/1935.

[†] *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary [ELH]* #33 "We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost." Also #6 below.

[‡] *ELH* #38.

glaring errors. He therefore worked out a harmony of the passages in questions, which we still have in the *Small Catechism* and use at our services. After the distribution the *Sanctus* was sung in the language of the people, and the service was closed with a collect, the so-called *Complenda*, which we still use.

During the years which followed, a large number of orders of service came into use in various cities and provinces of Germany. Later on efforts were made with more or less success to agree on a definite order which could be used by all the Lutheran congregations in the country.

In Denmark an order of service based on Luther's "Deutsche Messe" was printed and in use as early as 1528, only two years after Luther's work was published. It was reprinted together with a collection of hymns, and in 1535 was published as a special book in which the special general prayer was added, which has been in use ever since.

After the Lutheran Church was officially made the State religion in 1536, a royal ordinance or "Constitution" was prepared with the aid of Luther's co-worker, Bugenhagen, to govern the affairs of the church. In this ordinance a definite order of service was stipulated which was followed with very little change until the ritual of 1685 was adopted. Copies of these various agenda are found in our Memorial library, and many of our pastors will find it interesting to examine them.

The liturgy of 1685 or *Ritual*, as it is called, contains a great number of regulations about preparation for the opening of service, ringing of the church bells, prelude, entering and behavior in the church, vestments to be worn by the pastor in performing the different functions of his office and so on. It contains much valuable pastoral theology which is well worth studying. We limit ourselves to a consideration of its liturgy for the morning service:

1. Instead of the introit the Ritual introduced the opening prayer which together with the Lord's Prayer was to be read by the deacon while the pastor kneeled before the altar. The service closed in the same way with the closing prayer. These prayers are known to have been used since shortly after the Reformation. They are used in some German agenda as collects, and in Denmark they were recommended for private use long before they were included as a part of the regular liturgy.
2. Singing of the Kyrie, the first stanza of the Litany with variations according to the seasons of the church year. During the age of Rationalism in the latter part of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, the Kyrie was dropped from the order of service.
3. After the singing of the Kyrie the pastor began singing the first line of the hymn, "All Glory Be to God on High," and the congregation joined in and sang the hymn to the close. This corresponds with our singing of the Major Gloria or the *Hymnus angelicus*. After the Kyrie was dropped this became the opening hymn, and in the course of time this led to the use of other opening hymns so that the Gloria was virtually eliminated from the liturgy.
4. After the singing of this hymn, the pastor faces the congregation and chants the salutation, "The Lord be with you," and the congregation responds, "And with thy spirit." Then the pastor turns to the altar and chants the collect for the day, and the congregation sings Amen.

Originally the Danish church used the ancient collects which are still used in the "Common Service." In an agenda published in 1555 a second series of collects was added, which were prayers for each Sunday found in a collection of sermons by Veit Dietrich to which the usual doxology was added. In later editions the ancient collects were eliminated, and so we find in the agenda of 1688 only the second series used.

5. The pastor then turns to the congregation and announces and chants the Epistle lesson of the day. When he has finished this, the pastor turns to the altar, and a short hymn with contents akin to the lesson is sung.
6. After this hymn is sung, the Ritual stipulates that the hymn "O Holy Ghost to Thee We Pray" be sung, except at certain seasons of the church year, when other hymns are recommended. Then the pastor turns to the congregation and announces the Gospel lesson of the day to which the congregation responds, "God be praised for His glad tidings!" Then the lesson is chanted to the end, after which the congregation sings the hymn, "We All Believe in One True God."
7. After this confession of faith a short hymn is sung and the pastor enters the pulpit. He begins with a short prayer asking God's blessings upon the consideration of His word and closes with the Lord's Prayer. A short hymn may then be sung. On the great festivals certain stanzas are prescribed, which are to be sung three times. The pastor usually introduces this hymn with the so-called Exordium. Then the text is read and the sermon delivered, which, as a later edict stipulates, shall not last over one hour. After the sermon follows the general prayer in accordance with 1 Tim. 2:1-2 and the Lord's Prayer. The congregation rises and the pastor pronounces the Aaronic blessing.
8. A hymn is now sung. Several hymns are suggested for the various seasons of the church year. After this hymn follows baptism of children and communion. If there are no communicants, the collect for the Word is chanted preceded by the salutation and response. (During Lent a special collect is used.) After that, turning to the congregation, after the salutation and response, the pastor chants the Benediction, and the congregation sings Amen.
9. The service is closed with the singing of a hymn and the closing prayer by the deacon while the pastor kneels at the altar. This prayer is followed by the Lord's Prayer. The Communion liturgy is the same as that which we use according to the so-called shorter form.

Since the singing of the Kyrie was officially abolished in 1802, and the regular singing of the Gloria and the Creed gradually was being left out except on the great festivals, the liturgy eventually took the form of the so-called "Shorter Order," which seems to have been in common use in Norway at the time when the Norwegian Synod was organized.

However, the desire for a more extensive liturgy was expressed from time to time. This led to the adoption in Norway of the so-called New Liturgy in 1887. The committee appointed in the Norwegian Synod to work out a more complete liturgy recommended the adoption of this liturgy with a few changes, such as adding the Absolution after the confession and Kyrie. This recommendation was adopted at the Synodical convention in Spring Grove in 1899.

It may be in place to state that the translation to English which we have in the *Lutheran Hymnary* has never been officially adopted by the Norwegian Synod, and in a few instances it is not fully in accordance with what was adopted by the convention in Spring Grove. And when "The Order of Morning Service or Communion" was printed in the *Hymnary*, it was not because of any official resolution to that effect, but the committee decided to print it for the convenience of those who wanted to use this order, since, after all, the matter of the liturgy is an adiaphoron so long as it does not contain or help to promote false doctrine. The agenda printed by the United Norwegian Lutheran Church seems to be altogether a translation of the new liturgy adopted in Norway except that there are a few necessary changes in the general prayer. Hence it is not in every point an authority by which we can determine exactly what the new liturgy adopted by our Synod is.

It is in place to touch on a few questions of the general order and decorum before entering upon a discussion of the different parts of the liturgy. The liturgist before the altar is both a representative of the congregation before God and the one who brings a message from God to the congregation. When he leads the congregation in prayer and praise to God, he faces the altar; but when he brings his message from God, he faces the congregation. In this highly dignified worship it is not in place to bring in other things. Before the altar and behind the altar-railing is not the proper place to make announcements or give various pieces of information. When the pastor has to announce the hymns, he should do this from the "Chancel door" as it is called in Norwegian, or outside of the altar area. It may be necessary for the pastor to announce a hymn while he stands before the altar, but this should be an exception and not the rule.

The revised liturgy as adopted is as follows:

1. While the prelude is being played, the pastor proceeds to the altar and kneels before it. He remains kneeling while the deacon or assistant, as he is called in the *Hymnary*, leads in the opening prayer, which is followed by the Lord's Prayer. Today it seems that the office of deacon has been silently abolished by common consent. There may be some valid reason for this. At all events, when there is no deacon, the pastor himself must perform this function. It is proper that he does this kneeling, but he ought to inform the congregation that he is going to pray, so that those who may be engaged in conversation may be ready to join in the prayer from the start. He usually introduces the praying of the other collects by saying, "Let us all pray," or "Let us give thanks and pray"; why should he not do it before the opening and closing prayers? It goes without saying that he remains standing until the end of the prelude, and kneels after he has announced the prayer.

I believe that all will agree that it is highly proper to begin the service with such a collective prayer. That surely does not preclude that the individuals offer their silent prayers as they enter into the church. Every earnest Christian will feel the need of this, and still he will be edified by a common opening prayer, which impresses the ordinary man more than the introits generally used. The Committee on Hymnology and Liturgics received many urgent requests from individuals to add these prayers to the liturgy to be printed in the new *Hymnal*.

According to the Spring Grove resolutions the Lord's Prayer is to be retained here. I believe,

however, that a majority of the congregation have in course of time decided to leave it out as it is in the new liturgy adopted in Norway. It is granted that when there is Baptism and Communion, there will be rather too many repetitions of the Lord's Prayer at the same service. But the matter should be decided jointly by the congregation and pastor.

2. After the opening prayer the pastor rises and stands before the altar while the opening hymn is sung. If he has to announce the hymn, he ought to leave the altar during the singing of the hymn.
3. If the pastor has left the altar to announce the hymn, he returns after its close and, facing the congregation, says: "Let us bow before God and confess our sins." Then, kneeling before the altar, he leads the congregation in the Confession of Sin. Two different forms of confession are given. The first form, which is also used in the Common Service, is almost verbatim a translation of the *Confiteor* which the priest offered up silently at the altar, while the congregation sang the Introit. The congregation rises before the Confession of Sin and remains standing until after the Confession of Faith, unless a hymn is sung after the Epistle lesson.

The confession ended, the congregation sings either the first or the second stanza of the Litany. The fourth stanza is the one used in the Common Service, while the second stanza, given in the *Lutheran Hymnary*, is the one most commonly used at the Norwegian services, no doubt because it is the most comprehensive.

Then the minister turns to the congregation and pronounces the Absolution. In the Norwegian it begins with the words, "Lift up your hearts unto the Lord," and then continues as it reads in translation in the *Hymnary*. Some turn to the altar as they recite the prayer in the last line. This may be quite proper, although I doubt that this was the intention of these who added this line.

This Absolution is not found in the official revised liturgy of the Church of Norway. It is likewise left out in the agenda published by the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. At the Norwegian services broadcast from the St. Olaf College radio station the following form is read: "Be it known unto you therefore, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39). This would seem to indicate a fear of proclaiming an unconditional Gospel.

4. The minister again turns to the altar and sings the first part of the *Major Gloria*, the *Hymnus angelicus*, and the congregation sings the last two parts. This gloria may be omitted during the Lenten season. On the three great festivals the congregation shall sing the hymn, "All Glory Be to God on High."
5. After the gloria, or when this hymn has been sung, the minister turns to the congregation and chants: "The Lord be with you," and the congregation responds, "And with thy spirit." Then the minister chants, "Let us all pray," and turning to the altar he chants the collect of the day, and the congregation sings Amen.

6. The minister shall then turn to the congregation and chant, "The Epistle lesson of the day is recorded by etc.," and then chant the lesson.
7. After the Epistle lesson a stanza or two, with contents related to it shall be sung. This takes the place of the Gradual which is commonly used.
8. The minister again turns to the congregation and chants: "The holy Gospel is recorded by etc.," and the congregation sings, "God be praised for His glad tidings." The minister then chants the Gospel lesson. If the minister chants the Epistle lesson, it should be preceded by the Salutation and Response. Likewise the Gospel lesson, if a hymn is sung after the Epistle lesson. If the pastor preaches on the Gospel lesson, the reading or chanting of it before the altar may be omitted. Likewise the Epistle lesson.

It seems that by common consent the chanting of the Gospel and Epistle lessons has not been carried out except perhaps at the great festivals. If these pericopes are read, the Salutation and Response are omitted.

9. After the chanting or reading of the Scripture lessons of the day the minister says: "Let us confess our holy faith," and, turning to the altar, he together with the congregation recites the Apostles' Creed.
10. Now follows the hymn before the sermon, which, together with the following hymn, should be carefully selected so as to be in harmony with the text and the contents of the sermon.
11. During the singing of the last stanza the pastor enters the pulpit and offers a short *ex corde* prayer. What can be more fitting just at this point than with a few well chosen words to implore God's blessing upon the message which is about to be delivered? It goes without saying that this should not be taken as an opportunity for a display of oratory. Only a humble supplication will put the pastor and congregation in the right state of mind to deliver and receive the divine message. Here the Lord's Prayer should not be used.

On the three great festivals and Ascension Day, after a brief introduction, a fitting stanza should be sung by the congregation standing before the text is read. Here a definite formula for announcing the hymn is given. After the text is read the pastor shall say: "These were the words, Holy Father, Sanctify us through Thy truth, Thy Word is truth. Amen." The congregation is then seated. When using Bible passages in such connections, the exact words ought to be used and not a paraphrase. We should not permit ourselves to make the least change. Then it is suggested that the pastor begin his sermon with the Apostolic greeting.

The sermon ends with the minor gloria or the *Gloria Patri*.

Then comes the general prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer. After the prayer the congregation rises, and the pastor pronounces the Apostolic Blessing.

Objections have been made, and not without some reason, against praying this general prayer from the pulpit and not before the altar. Arguments may be used pro and con. Yet,

after all, if the pastor has succeeded in moving the congregation by his sermon, there is no better time to get the congregation along in this prayer than while they are still warmed up, and he is still facing them. But then the prayer must not be read carelessly. Even if the pastor is a little tired by this time, he must hold out to the end and put as much spirit into his prayer as he did in his sermon. We were urged by our professor in Homiletics to commit this prayer to memory, and I am very sorry to this day that I did not follow this advice while I was still able to retain that much in my memory. It was quite common among the older pastors at that time to pray this general prayer without the use of the book.

12. Then comes the hymn after the sermon. If this hymn is well chosen it will help materially to strengthen the impressions left by the sermon. Nothing of a general nature should be permitted to take away the opportunity which we have here, as it were, to clinch the message which has been brought home by the sermon. An anthem or solo, or even the offertory, will only serve to disturb the line of thought which is going on in the minds of the congregation at this time. Later in the service this is in place.

After this hymn comes offerings, taking up of collections, baptism of children, and catechisations, if such are held.

13. Then follows the Communion service. First a hymn, "O Lamb of God Most Holy"* or some other communion hymn. Or in place of this hymn the Preface, which dates back to the ancient Church may be used: the minister facing the congregation chants, "The Lord be with you." R. "And with thy spirit." M. "Lift up your hearts unto the Lord." R. "We lift up our hearts unto the Lord." M. "Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God." R. "It is meet and right so to do." Then the minister turns to the altar and chants; "It is truly meet etc." After this the congregation sings the *Sanctus*. The tune used in the *Hymnary* and in the Norwegian Koral books is by Bach, and this is also used in the liturgy of the United Lutheran Church. A marvelous hymn!
14. The communicants then gather about the altar and the minister reads the Exhortation before Communion. It is no doubt well that this reminder is repeated at every Communion service. The minister then says, "Let us all pray." The minister then turning to the altar while the communicants, as many as find room, kneel,
15. Chants the Lord's Prayer, to which the congregation responds Amen.
16. The minister continues to chant the Words of Institution.
17. While a Communion hymn is sung, the minister distributes the elements, saying to each one, "This is the true body of Christ," "This is the true blood of Christ." When the distribution to each group is ended the minister says, "The crucified and risen Lord etc."
18. A hymn of thanksgiving is sung, and then follows

* ELH #41 "Lamb of God, Pure and Holy."

19. The chanting of the collect of Thanksgiving with customary Salutation and Response and the Benediction.
20. Closing hymn and
21. Closing prayer with the Lord's Prayer, spoken by the deacon while the minister kneels at the altar.

When there are no communicants, in place of the Communion service, the minister chants the special collect for the Word, or during Lent the lenten collect with Salutation and Response, and after the collect the congregation sings Amen. Then the minister turning to the congregation chants the Salutation and Benediction, after which the congregation sings the triple Amen.

(Printed in the October 1957 *Clergy Bulletin* [Vol. XVII, No. 2], published monthly by Authority of the General Pastoral Conference of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church)