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# Sacramental Hymnody in American Lutheran Hymnals During the Nineteenth Century

Peter C. Cage

"If all our records were destroyed, from our hymnals alone the future historian might learn, at least approximately, the religious, intellectual, and doctrinal history of our Church."<sup>1</sup> A. J. Weddell's words are as true today as they were in 1866. Using his claim as a starting point, this article investigates what can be learned specifically about the sacramental life of the Lutheran church in America by an investigation of the hymnody of the nineteenth century? In the Lutheran church, which embraces its Reformation and confessional heritage without embarrassment, one would expect to find a Christ-centered, incarnational emphasis that confesses Christ Jesus really present to forgive sin and save in His appointed means of grace.

Yet, the question of what constitutes the sum and substance of Lutheran sacramental theology has not always been answered so clearly or with the same emphases by the various strains of Lutheranism in America. Add to the mix the question of language and the reality that faithfully translating hymnic doctrine from old German hymns into English was a difficult and time-consuming task. An attractive and practical alternative was to borrow from existing English hymnody in hopes that it would adequately approximate Lutheran doctrine while giving the people something to sing. How will this American hymnody compare with the hymnody of the earliest Lutherans? If the church sings what she believes, then her hymnody should reveal to some degree what she finds being given in baptism, the Lord's Supper and absolution.

## Context and Caveats

But perhaps we have already assumed too much. What if the congregation does not sing? Wilhelm J. Mann, at the time a pastor in

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<sup>1</sup>A. J. Weddell, review of Frederick M. Bird and Beale M. Schmucker's *Hymns for the use of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* in *Evangelical Review* 17 (April 1866): 211. For a general overview of "Lutheran Hymnody in North America" in the period covered by this study, see R. Harold Terry's article by that name in *Hymnal Companion to the Lutheran Book of Worship*, edited by Marilyn K. Stulken (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 93-99.

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Philadelphia, offered the following lament on the state of worship practice in what he called the "left wing" of American Lutheranism:

To the influence of Puritanism certainly must be attributed the absence, in most of our Lutheran churches and worship in this country, of all those forms by which she is in Europe distinguished from the Reformed. In many places we find *instead of the altar simply a table*; instead of the gown and bands, a plain black coat; *no baptismal font*, no crucifix, no paintings, much less the symbol of light, frequently no steeple, no bells; in short, everything which is supposed to have the least leaning towards Romish customs or superstitions, however innocent, appropriate, and beautiful in itself, is carefully excluded.

Everything is tried by the spiritualizing rule of reason, and subjected to the plummet of the purest, most exact, sanctimonious utility, before being adopted. On this account, and also because individual will and taste strongly predominate, we find but few traces of liturgies; all prayer is to be extemporaneous; *singing is not engaged in by the congregation at large*; *the old German chorals have not been transferred to the worship of our American Lutheran Churches*. These have introduced the idyllion melodies used among the English, in which the objective character retires just as much before the subjective expression of feeling, as is the case with most English hymns when compared with the great German Church-hymn.<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added)

Suspicious of the barest hint of Romanizing tendencies and increasingly ignoring its distinctiveness from Reformed confessions, Mann believed

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<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm J. Mann, *Lutheranism in America: An Essay on the Present Condition of the Lutheran Church in the United States* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1857), 26-27. Since Mann (1819-1892) was a defender of the Augsburg Confession, his opposition to S. S. Schmucker's Definite Platform (1855) in this essay is apparent already in his Preface. Mann identifies with the "centre" of Lutheranism (The Synod of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States, the Joint Synod of Ohio, and the Tennessee Synod) between the extreme poles of Schmucker's General Synod and the "strict" Lutheranism of the "right wing" Missouri and Buffalo Synods. Later a leading theologian and one of the founders of the General Council, Mann was once a pastor of a German Reformed congregation, president of the Pennsylvania Ministerium (1860-1862, 1880), and professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia (1864-1891).

the “left wing” of Lutheranism had compromised its claim to catholicity while “spiritualized” reason and “sanctimonious” utility became the yardstick for what was considered churchly. Even the Reformation heritage of Luther’s “singing church” had gone the way of the untranslated German chorale as congregations, unhindered by confessional identity, chose their own way in a new land. The more subjective hymn typified by the English Isaac Watts (1674-1748) or Charles Wesley (1707-1788) replaced the more sturdy and objective proclamation of the German hymn.<sup>3</sup> Even the sacramental furnishings of the church reflected this shift from the objective to subjective; a church with a mere table in place of an altar and no baptismal font makes, even unintentionally, a clear confession of its Christology. Thus, one wonders whether these churches sang hymns with strong sacramental content?

Accordingly, this survey begins with several caveats. First, not all hymnals, nor hymns in hymnals, are created equal or used equally. A glance at any modern hymnal shows that just because a hymn is placed in a collection does not guarantee that it will be sung at church or in the home. A hymn used often in one congregation may lay dormant in the next. Without a “play list” from individual churches indicating what was actually used from service to service, especially at baptism or the Lord’s Supper, it is virtually impossible to determine which hymn texts most informed the sacramental piety of a given local congregation. In some sense then, inspecting the sacramental hymnody of a given hymnal gives only an artificial perspective of a church’s sacramental piety. At best, the hymns will show the theological bent of the individual(s) who had the most influence in assembling the hymnal.

A further consideration is that, within the hymnals themselves, not every hymn with sacramental language would necessarily be included in the “Means of Grace” section of the hymnal. This means that some

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<sup>3</sup>Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship*, reprinted from the 1915 edition (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1962), writes of the use of English hymnody and the Anglicizing of Lutheran worship in his section on “English Hymns in the Lutheran Church (1756-1859),” 410-420. The omnipresence of the Watts and Wesley legacies in Lutheran hymnals of this period indicates the trend to appropriate available evangelical hymnody without concern for whether or not it embodied Lutheran doctrine. See also Carl F. Schalk, *God’s Song in a New Land: Lutheran Hymnals in America* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 61-62, who contends that Lutheran hymnody never recovered from their influence.

sacramental material could be neglected in this study since the entire hymnal is not in view. Yet, even a hymnal's "Table of Contents" with its descriptive title (for example, "Ordinances," "Means of Grace," or "Sacraments"), its placement of sacramental hymnody in relation to other topics, and the number of hymns offered gives some indication of at least the editor's bias. The pastor and congregation, on the other hand, will use their ultimate veto power to either adopt or cast off hymnal material regardless of what the editor intended.

This survey of sacramental hymnody also considers the broad movements that swirled about the American religious scene. Carl Schalk lists rationalism, unionism, and revivalism as the most influential forces that shaped American Lutheran hymnody, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> One can predict the effects on sacramental hymnody of a rationalism that looks to reason while downplaying or ignoring the mystery of a God hidden in means. The Prussian Union of 1817, which forced Lutheran and Reformed intercommunion, extended across the ocean to American hymn books resulting in the effective surrender by some Lutherans of the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper to a Calvinistic notion of "spiritual presence."<sup>5</sup> Likewise, revivalism, in its American flowering on the expanding frontier, also appeared in sacramental hymnody with its skewed anthropology that focused on man's activity over against God's.

This study will follow Schalk in using the *Geistliche Lieder*, also known as the Babst hymnal of 1545, as a standard against which all subsequent Lutheran hymnals can be measured since it contained of the core hymnody of the Lutheran Reformation. Distinguished by a preface written by Luther himself the year before he died, the Babst hymnal contained eighty-nine texts, plus an appendix with forty more texts. It included the following specifically sacramental or catechetical hymns of

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<sup>4</sup> Schalk, *God's Song*, 67-68 with examples from the various hymnals of that period throughout the chapter.

<sup>5</sup> *Das Gemeinschaftliche Gesangbuch* (1817) and *Neues Gemeinschaftliche Gesangbuch* (1849) were both "common books" for use in both Lutheran and Reformed churches in America. With rationalism blurring confessional differences and making them seem unimportant, and congregations of different confessions sharing the same worship facilities, recourse to a shared hymnal seemed most practical. See Schalk, *God's Song*, 75-79, and Carl F. Schalk, editor and translator, *Source Documents in American Lutheran Hymnody*, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 48-52.

Luther: "Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam" (baptism), "Aus tiefer Not" (Confession and Absolution), and "Gott sei gelobet" (Sacrament of the Altar).<sup>6</sup>

### Importing Confessional Lutheranism: Buffalo and Missouri in Brief

Examples of German Lutherans who came to America with a strong confessional identity intact are the Buffalo and Missouri Synods. J. A. A. Grabau's *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Kirchengesangbuch* (1842) and C. F. W. Walther's *Kirchengesangbuch* (1847) serve as models of a self-consciously and intentionally imported confessional hymnody.<sup>7</sup> Both of these German hymnals produced in America contained text only (no music) and reproduced the confessional core of the Babst hymnal.<sup>8</sup>

Grabau's 1842 hymnal for the Prussian immigrants of the Buffalo Synod does not have a table of contents, but uses the church year followed by a roughly catechetical outline in which the sacramental hymns are located. This hymnal uses an arrangement that includes prayers and liturgical orders and other material mixed in with the hymns throughout the book.

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<sup>6</sup>Schalk, *God's Song*, discusses the historical importance of the *Geistliche Lieder* on 25-26 and lists selected hymns from the hymnal in Appendix A on 227. Contemporary hymnals of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod include translations of *Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam* in *Lutheran Worship* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982) [LW], number 223, *Aus Tiefer Not* in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941) [TLH], number 329 and LW number 230, and *Gott sei gelobet* TLH number 313 and LW number 238.

<sup>7</sup>*Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gesang-buch, worin die gebrauchlichsten alten Kirchen-Lieder Dr. M. Lutheri und anderer reinen Lehrer und Zeugen Gottes, zur Befoerderung der wahren Gottseligkeit ohne Abaenderungen enthalten sind, fuer Gemeinen, welche sich zur unveraenderten Augsburgischen Confession bekennen, 2., verm. Ausgabe* (Buffalo: Brunck u. Domedion, 1848). This hymnal was originally published in 1842, three years before the organization of the Buffalo Synod. See Schalk, *God's Song*, 125-128 and *Source Documents*, 66-69 for a full discussion of the hymnal. *Kirchengesangbuch fuer Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden ungeaenderter Augsburgischer Confession darin des seligen D. Martin Luthers und anderer geistreichen Lehrer gebrauchlichste Kirchen-Lieder enthalten sind* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House). The first edition was 1847. See Schalk, *God's Song*, 128-132 and *Source Documents*, 70-73 for a full discussion of the hymnal.

<sup>8</sup>Schalk, *God's Song* presents a bar graph of the "Occurrence of Selected Hymns from the Babst Hymnal (1545) in American Lutheran Hymnals" in Appendix E that indicates that the Missouri and Buffalo Synod hymnals were the most conscientious in transmitting the core Reformation hymnody to nineteenth-century America.

For example, in the section on baptism it prints Luther's "Order of Baptism" followed by directions to turn back to the church year section for the "Baptism of Christ" for Luther's baptismal hymn "Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam" (number 62). The separate section on baptism (XXIV) contains eight hymns. After a brief section on confirmation is the section *Von der Buss, Beichte und Absolution* (XXVI) containing nineteen hymns, including *Aus tiefer Not* (number 304). After an intervening section of hymns on the "Justification of the Poor Sinner Before God" is the section for the Lord's Supper (XXVIII), with ten hymns including Luther's "Gott sei gelobet" (number 329).

The sacramental fare in Missouri's *Kirchengesangbuch* of 1847 is listed in its table of contents under the heading of *Katechismuslieder*, which follows sections on the church year and "The Word of God and the Christian Church." Each of the six chief parts is represented, including six hymns for baptism, two for absolution, and seventeen for the Lord's Supper. The Missouri collection includes Luther's "Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam" (number 186), "Gott sei gelobet" (number 195), and "Aus tiefer Not" (number 214), though this last hymn is located under the separate section on *Buss und Beichtlieder* rather than in the section for absolution.

From his place in the center, Mann's 1857 evaluation of the "strict Lutherans" of Missouri and Buffalo is evident in his back-handed compliment:

In like manner do we regard it as a mistake, that their just and commendable attachment to the good old ways and customs should incline some of the brethren to deal somewhat unjustly with whatever is new. As an instance of this we refer to the Hymn Book [of the Buffalo Synod]. . . . Highly as we value the old and unadulterated treasures of the hymns of our Lutheran Church, we yet believe that the gracious gifts which the Lord has bestowed upon our Church in our own time are also deserving of notice. But in this too we only regard the *ultra* opinion as a mistake, and an act of injustice against the Church and her members. . . . Wise moderation and the utmost precaution in the application of whatever is new, is proper, yea, even a duty. That, however, these brethren lay too much stress upon the principle of sound doctrine, on mere

orthodoxy, on the letter, does not appear from the actual condition, order, activity, and self-denying labors of their congregations.<sup>9</sup>

Mann offered wise counsel that anything new need not automatically be dismissed, but also shows that his concern for "sound doctrine," was not as passionate and serious as the brethren from Saxony and Prussia. Indeed, Mann had no scruples about having pastors from German Reformed churches occupy Lutheran pulpits when a "suitable opportunity presented itself." Yet even Mann drew the line with those "loose" Lutherans who would "even invite the avowed enemies of infant baptism into their pulpits." This disconnect between doctrine and practice naturally translated into his ideas about a proper hymnal. Since Mann could not see going the way of the Missouri Synod who "admit none but the hymns composed by Lutherans into their collection," he applauded the Pennsylvania Ministerium's *Deutsches Gesangbuch* of 1849 because it contained a "goodly number of the best church hymns of German Reformed authors."<sup>10</sup> This leads well into an investigation of the sacramental theology of the hymnals of other Lutheran church bodies during nineteenth-century America to see how flexible they could be with "sound doctrine" and at what point, if any, their toleration of an alien Reformed theology found its limit.

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<sup>9</sup>Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 84.

<sup>10</sup>*Deutsches Gesangbuch für die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Philadelphia: L. A. Wollenweber, 1849). According to Edward C. Wolf "Lutheran Hymnody and Music Published in America 1700-1850: A Descriptive Bibliography," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 50 (Winter 1977): 175, the *Deutsches Gesangbuch* was jointly sponsored by the Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the New York and West Pennsylvania synods and offered a well-rounded selection of German hymnody from the Reformation through the early 1800s. See also Schalk's description of this hymnal, known as the "New Pennsylvania Hymnbook," or the "Wollenweber book" in *God's Song*, 135-138. Schalk makes reference to a series of articles in *Der Lutheraner* (1850) in which this new hymnal was criticized by the Missouri Synod for altering the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, omitting some hymns and deleting stanzas in others. One hymn that was altered was Luther's *Christ unser Herr zu Jordan kam* (number 282), which did not please William M. Reynolds. In Reynolds's review, "The New German Hymn-book," *Evangelical Review* (April 1850), he objected to changes in the last verse of the hymn since he preferred Luther's "smoothness and beauty" to the editorial committee's effort. Yet, Reynolds did not object to the omission of the second, third, fourth, and sixth stanzas of Luther's hymn, stating "we think that their great length is the great fault of German hymns generally," 75-76. Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 90.

### Hymnals to 1816: Williston, Quitman, and Henkel

Ralph Williston, a former Methodist serving as pastor in the English Lutheran Church in New York, compiled *A Choice Selection of Evangelical Hymns* in 1806.<sup>11</sup> Despite his claim that "No doctrine . . . will be found in this selection, which is not accordant with the doctrines taught in our church," he seems unfamiliar with or unconvinced by Lutheran doctrine.<sup>12</sup> This is borne out by the following samples from the "Ordinances" section near the end of the hymnal which contain four baptismal and six eucharistic hymns. From the section on baptism:

He sits upon the eternal hills, With grace and pardon in his hands,  
And sends his cov'nant with the seals, To bless the distant heathen  
lands.

"Repent and be baptized," he saith, "For the remission of your sins";  
And thus our sense assists our faith and shows us what his gospel  
means.

Thus we engage ourselves to thee and seal our cov'nant with the  
Lord

O may the great Eternal Three in heaven our solemn vows record.<sup>13</sup>

In this hymn the real action is going on in heaven, parceled out by some sovereign Lord rather than in the earthly water He has connected to His promise. Divine monergism also suffers as "our sense assists" God, and man does his part to "seal our cov'nant." In a hymn for the Lord's Supper, Calvin's imprint stands out with the words, "How can heav'nly spirits rise, / By earthly matter fed" (number 385:1). The inclusion of such language diminishes even the most fervent effort to put the best construction on other less overtly offensive material. As Benson remarks of this collection, "neither its arrangements nor contents suggest Lutheranism."<sup>14</sup> Even with more earthy language like, "The flesh of thy Redeemer eat; / Drink with the wine his heavenly blood, / And feast on the Incarnate God" (number 386:2), the incarnate certainty of God's

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<sup>11</sup>Ralph Williston, *A Choice Selection of Evangelical Hymns from Various Authors: For the Use of the English Evangelical Lutheran Church in New-York* (New York: J. C. Totten, 1806).

<sup>12</sup>Schalk, *Source Documents*, 38.

<sup>13</sup>Number 378:2, 3, and 5.

<sup>14</sup>Benson, *The English Hymn*, 143.

proffer of forgiveness by means is undone by the theology of the other hymns in this bland collection. Frederick M. Bird, in his survey of Lutheran Hymnals in a series of articles in the 1865 *Evangelical Review*, is too gentle when he writes of the hymnal, "The whole plan and temper of the work . . . are Presbyterian, Methodist, cosmopolite English, Broad Church, anything else, as much as Lutheran. The authorship of the hymns shows this."<sup>15</sup> It is no surprise that just a few years later, in 1810, Williston took his congregation into the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Frederick Quitman (1760-1832), a convinced rationalist, was the driving force behind *A Collection of Hymns, and a Liturgy* (1814), which became the official hymnal of the New York Ministerium.<sup>16</sup> The separate sections on baptism (XXIII) and the Lord's Supper (XXIV) are placed near the end of the table of contents right before hymns for "Particular Occasions and Circumstances" (for example, Morning, Evening, New Year). There are four baptismal hymns in this collection, but, as Benson points out, consistent with Quitman's rationalistic aversion to the doctrine, he excised the section on "The Trinity" from Williston's earlier hymnal.<sup>17</sup> Thus Quitman's collection makes no reference to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and even in his baptismal section uses mostly the names "God" or "Lord." Quitman's antagonism to confessional Lutheran doctrine is apparent enough with text like, "Let plenteous grace descend on those / Who, hoping in his word / This day have publicly declar'd / That Jesus is their Lord" (number 382:2). In a hymn for the baptism of children, the high Arminian regard for the power of human strivings after God is evident in such texts as, "Lord! What our ears have heard/Our eyes delighted trace/Thy love in long succession shown/To ev'ry virtuous race" and "Thy cov'nant may they keep," which give fallen sinners credit for their god-ward longings and commitments (number 383:1, 3).

Quitman's section on the Lord's Supper contains twelve texts. Schalk believes that Quitman's liturgical section clearly shows his rationalistic and deistic leanings. The Lord's Supper becomes a "Memorial of Christ's death and a means of improving his disciples in their attachment and obedience to his divine religion."<sup>18</sup> This is evident in the following hymn:

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<sup>15</sup>Frederick M. Bird, "Lutheran Hymnology," *Evangelical Review*, Vol. XVI (January 1865), 33.

<sup>16</sup>See Schalk, *Source Documents*, 44-47 and *God's Song*, 68-75.

<sup>17</sup>Benson, *The English Hymn*, 414.

<sup>18</sup>Schalk, *Source Documents*, footnote 7, 47.

Ye foll'wers of the Prince of Peace Who round his table draw!  
Remember what his spirit was, What his peculiar law.

And do you love him? do you feel Your warm affections move?  
This is the proof which he demands, That you each other love.

Let each the sacred law fulfill Like his be ev'ry mind;  
Be ev'ry temper form'd by love And ev'ry action kind.

Let none, who call themselves his friends, Disgrace the honour'd  
name;

But by a near resemblance prove The title which they claim.<sup>19</sup>

This is nothing more than exhortation to moral improvement, completely divorced from the means that alone can accomplish it. Of course, when the Lord's Supper is reduced to a memorial meal for a departed Savior (for example, "Eat, drink, in mem'ry of your friend! / Such was our Master's last request" [number 388], "This feast was Jesus' high behest / This cup of thanks his last request" [number 389], and "And, to refresh our minds, he gave / These kind memorials of his grace" [number 392:2]) nothing is given or received except misdirected religious hankerings for some benevolent deity ("Come, let us join our souls to God," "Come, let us seal, without delay / The cov'nant of his grace," "Thus may our rising offspring haste / To seek their fathers' God / Nor e'er forsake the happy path / Their youthful feet have trod" [number 386]). Certainly for Quitman, Christ was not present in bread and wine and the forgiveness of sins was obviated by the promise of human potentiality.

Paul Henkel (1754-1825), from a family noted for its pronounce orthodoxy during a time when much of American Lutheranism was adrift from its confessional moorings, produced one German (1810) and one English hymnal, the *Church Hymn Book* (1816).<sup>20</sup> His family's industrious printing office in New Market, Virginia, the Henkel Press, published these texts for the Tennessee Synod. Henkel did not try to translate the German chorales into English so we find none of Luther's sacramental hymns. Their absence is filled by over 300 hymns from

<sup>19</sup>Number 391:1, 3-5.

<sup>20</sup>*Church Hymn Book, consisting of newly composed hymns, with an addition of hymns and psalms, from other authors, carefully adapted for the use of public worship, and many other occasions by Paul Henkel* (New-Market: Solomon Henkel, 1816).

Henkel's own pen, some of which Benson describes as "nothing more than didactic prose broken up into short phrases that serve as lines of verse."<sup>21</sup> Henkel's concern for the teaching function of hymnody is underscored even if they lack artistry.<sup>22</sup> The table of contents lists: 33. On Christian Baptism (four hymns); 34. Baptism of those of riper years (three hymns); 35. On Confession of Sins (four hymns); 36. For the Holy Communion (eleven hymns).

In Henkel's hymnal, baptism is often related in Old Testament terms of sealing God's covenant:

God did to father Abrah'm say I am a God to thee  
And I will bless thy race and thee Shall be a seed for me.

Thus Abrah'm b'lieved the promise true and gave his sons to God  
As water seals the promise now, It then was seal'd with blood.

Its offspring then were circumcis'd To' none, but just the male:  
But male and female are baptiz'd; Baptism is the seal.

Then as the water is appli'd, And God his gifts impart;  
The creature then is sanctifi'd, And circumcis'd at heart.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Benson, *The English Hymn*, 415.

<sup>22</sup>Schalk calls the collection "undistinguished" and discounts its influence as "most likely used only by a small number of congregations." Schalk, *God's Song*, 63. Schalk's discussion of the two Henkel hymnals (62-65) ends with his surmise that Henkel's hymnbook "had little, if any, effect on the general development of Lutheran hymnody in America, its use being confined largely to the Tennessee Synod, formed in 1820. . . ." Bird, "Lutheran Hymnology," *Evangelical Review* 16 (April 1865): 199, "[Henkel's] productions might possibly edify a converted backwoodsman or a slave of the Uncle Tom type, — though we think this would be more readily done by the Campmeeting lyrics to which the Hardshell Baptists and sometimes Methodists greatly do incline, — but they never could come into anything like recognized use, among civilized people, in this nineteenth century. But Edward C. Wolf, "Lutheran Church Music in America During the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1960), draws a different conclusion. Wolf says the related North Carolina Synod recommended this collection (with later editions in 1838, 1850 and 1857) for use in 1817 and adds, "This collection was of much greater influence around the middle of the century than at the time of its first publication, undoubtedly because its success had to wait for a larger number of English speaking churches," 358. According to Benson, these later editions included more hymns from non-Lutheran sources like "Watts and his school, Charles Wesley, and the writers of the Evangelical Revival, with Watts predominant," 415.

<sup>23</sup>Number 172:1, 2, 4, and 7.

Leaving aside its occasionally strained and sing-song rhyme, Henkel rightly stresses the reality of gifts being given in baptism "as the water is appli'd." These gifts are tied to the atonement with such words as, "The treasures Christ to us has will'd/For which he bled and died/ Are by his ordinances seal'd/ Confirm'd and ratifi'd" (number 176:2). Henkel's Holy Communion hymns clearly confess the real presence and the salvific gifts given with:

O bless the Saviour, ye that eat, With royal dainties fed.  
Not heaven affords a costlier treat, For Jesus is the bread!

And

O! eat and drink with thankfulness, Partake the bounties of his  
grace.

Receive what he will freely give Who died for you that you should  
live.

O come ye then, partake the feast, O come and be the Saviour's  
guest.

Though bread and wine appears but giv'n 'Tis life itself, come down  
from heaven.

Or

Jesus this feast himself ordain'd, Great are the blessings here  
obtain'd.

The choicest and the richest food, Is his dear body and his blood.

He institutes this ordinance, This do to my remembrance:

My body broke, my blood was spilt to take away your sins and guilt.

But O! thy righteous will alone, That only O! that must be done.

To drink this cup, this is the plan, To save the fallen race of man.

Conversely, one hymn also imports some lyrics that stress the Lord's Supper as a command to be obeyed, rather than chiefly as a means of grace. The following verse is very law-oriented:

Lord here I am to do thy will, Incline my heart to thee.

O! may I willingly fulfil [sic] What thou commandest me.

To eat this bread and drink this cup, As thy bless'd orders are  
To work in me a living hope, Humility and fear.<sup>24</sup>

Unique and remarkable because it is largely the work of one man, Henkel's strong theology did not always translate smoothly into his sacramental hymnody. In his Preface he writes, "I am confident it contains no erroneous or injurious doctrine, but the real order and plan of salvation expressed in a plain, simple and familiar style."<sup>25</sup> If only his fine sacramental theology could have filtered more substantively into these often less than hymnic hymns. While glad for what the hymnal does contain, from a family with a tradition and reputation of strong confessionalism, one cannot help but to have hoped for more and better.

### From the General Synod – 1828

The best indicator of the theological orientation of the General Synod, which was organized in 1820 as a loose federation of Lutheran synods, is that their *Hymns, Selected and Original* (1828) reserved a place for "In a state of Revival" hymnody in its table of contents.<sup>26</sup> Becoming the nearest thing to a common hymn book of English-speaking Lutherans, Benson assesses it:

Its successive editions mark the progress of the Anglicizing process, and cover a period in which the ways of surrounding denominations prevailed over Lutheran traditions. The Hymnody itself is not Lutheran, but is drawn from the outside; it may rather be described as well within the lines of the Evangelical Hymnody, though somewhat heightened in color through revivalistic influences.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Number 185:2; number 190:6, 12; number 190:3, 7, and 9; number 192:1-2, respectively.

<sup>25</sup>Henkel, *Church Hymn Book*, vi.

<sup>26</sup>General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, *Hymns, Selected and Original, for Public and Private Worship* (Baltimore: James Lucas and E. K. Deaver, 1832). Largely the work of S. S. Schmucker (1799-1873), who would have been only twenty-nine years old when the hymnal was first released, Benson reports (416) that the title was very misleading since the "original" material consisted of a trifling two hymns by Schmucker. The first edition was 1828 and a new edition was published in 1850. See Schalk, *Source Documents*, 53-61, and *God's Song*, 80-89, for his discussion of this "retrogression" in Lutheran hymnody.

<sup>27</sup>Benson, *English Hymns*, 418-419.

Not surprisingly, sacramental theology suffered in such an inhospitable context. Indeed, it *must* when the Christian is directed to where it is most sinfully natural for him to be directed, back into himself, rather than to the means of grace. Yet, ironically, the "Tabular View of Contents" of *Hymns, Selected and Original* is the first to use the title "Means of Grace" for its "sacramental" section. However, these "means of grace" include, after the word of God, hymns for "Prayer, private" and "Social" and "Public Worship" before it ever mentions "Baptism of infants," "Of adults," and "The Lord's Supper" (where the worshiper is also directed back to hymns 99 to 171 inclusive for additional hymns from the sections on "Christ" and the "Names and Character of Christ"). The section on "Means of Grace" is placed well after sections on "The Gospel Call" (XI) and "Christian Experience" (XV) but before "Particular Occasions and Circumstances" (XVIII) and end-time concerns. The section on baptism contains five hymns, three of which are from Quitman's collection. The section on the Lord's Supper contains fifteen hymns, eight of which are from Quitman's collection, including the omnipresent hymn of Watts, "'Twas on that dreadful, doleful night" (number 514).

One of the hymns for infant baptism is typical for what it does *not* say in its six stanzas. After beginning with the words, "Behold what condescending love Jesus on earth displays! / To babes and suckling he extends The riches of his grace!" (number 510), it cannot enumerate even one concrete benefit of baptism beyond the vague: "Young children in his arms he takes, and calls them heirs of heaven." The baptism of this hymn is short on the benefits of forgiveness, rescue and salvation, and thus devoid of tangible "riches." All baptism does here is bring a child to Jesus with a prayer that He should "form his soul for God."

The least offensive baptismal hymn is one for adults. Rebounding from Quitman's unrepentant rationalism, it confesses the Trinity and gives each Person a verse. Despite the compiler's use of borrowed Reformed vocabulary (sign, ordinance), some of the language is appealing:

Father, in these reveal thy Son, In these for whom we seek thy face,  
The hidden mystery make known, The inward, pure, baptizing  
grace.

Jesus, with us Thou always are, Establish now the sacred sign,  
The gift unspeakable impart, And bless thine ordinance divine.

Spirit divine, descend from high, Baptizer of our spirits Thou,  
The sacramental seed apply, And witness with the water now.

Oh! That the souls baptiz'd herein, May now thy truth and mercy  
feel:

Arise and wash away their sin – Come, Holy Ghost, their pardon  
seal.<sup>28</sup>

Even if this hymn uses the emotion-centered jargon that the newly baptized adult may “truth and mercy feel,” at least it appears to attach the forgiveness of sin to God’s promise given in the sacramental mystery of water, an “unspeakable” gift imparted by God’s command. Still, that Schmucker would be uncomfortable in suggesting this hymn for use at *infant* baptism is reason enough to question the motive of his editorial decision.

In one hymn for the Lord’s Supper (number 513) the following musical questions are posed:

What heavenly man, or lovely God, Comes marching downward  
from the skies?

Array’d in garments roll’d in blood, With joy and pity in his eyes?

And then the answer: “The Lord! the Saviour! yes, ‘tis he! / I know him by the smiles he wears!” While perhaps confessing the two natures of Christ, it suggests that Christ’s coming in the Supper is in a manner more glorious (“marching downward”) than hidden in the humble means on the altar. The stanza below, though weak by Lutheran standards, suggests that the author considers *something* to be happening in the Supper, even if his native theology rejected the supernatural and incomprehensible character of the Sacrament.

Whence flow these favors so divine? Lord! why so lavish of thy  
blood?

Why for such earthly souls as mine, This heavenly wine, this sacred  
food?<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, this is a confession that even Calvin could make when the last verse says: “Then let us taste the Saviour’s love / Come, Faith, and feed upon the Lord.” Likewise, a Calvinist-friendly confession of souls

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<sup>28</sup>Number 512:3-6.

<sup>29</sup>Number 513:4.

rising to heaven for communion could find room in the texts: "E'en now we mournfully enjoy / Communion with our Lord / As though we every one / Beneath his cross had stood," and "By faith his flesh we'll eat / Who here his passion show / And God out of his holy seat / Shall all his gifts bestow" (number 518:2- 3). This is no sturdy confession of Christ present now on the altar in bread and wine, but an encouragement for the Christian to go elsewhere, to the cross or up to the heavenly seat, where God has not promised to be present to forgive.

Another noteworthy attribute of some of the Supper hymns is the graphic depiction of the sufferings of Christ. Phrases like "And seen him heave, and heard him groan, And felt his gushing blood," (number 518:3), "His body torn with rudest hands" (number 525:3) or "His blood, that from each op'ning vein in purple torrents ran," (number 525:4) seem designed to cultivate sorrowful emotion rather than proclaiming the objective facts of what the Supper is and does. There is, however, a consistency with Schmucker's rejection of the real presence, for the communicant, if he is to receive any blessing from the sacrament, must receive by reflection on the work of the absent Christ. Nevertheless, these hymns lack a clear confession of Christ really present in the bread and wine to pardon sinners.

Schmucker's collection only masquerades as Lutheranism. His hymnal uncritically embraced its American setting to the detriment of a clear Lutheran Confession, and to the propagation of the American-shaped Lutheranism that he would so fondly advocate. As Bird, putting the most constructive face on it, said in his critique of Schmucker's 1841 edition: "Very good men sometimes do very bad deeds: our business is with the deeds, not the men."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Bird, "Lutheran Hymnology," 206. In the summary of Carlton York Smith's "Early Lutheran Hymnody in America from the Colonial Period to the Year 1850" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1956), Smith makes the odd claim that the predominant presence of Watts and his school over Wesley and the revivalists in the English Lutheran hymnals of the first half of the nineteenth century "seems to reflect the conservatism of the Lutheran church and its theology." Smith then asks the question whether or not the doctrine of the Lutheran tradition (which he boils down to a minimal: 1. Justification by faith. 2. The Trinity. 3. The Divinity of Christ. 4. The Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. 5. The Real Presence in Holy Communion, plus the Lutheran tendency "to emphasize the person and function of Christ while Calvinists are more concerned with the sovereignty of God") was adequately covered in the change to English texts chosen

### Books of the General Synod

The 1860s saw the General Synod diminished by the organization of the General Synod of the South and the General Council. Still, the General Synod came out with various editions of different hymnals. We will discuss two. The *Book of Worship* was issued in 1871, but drew heavily from the old 1852 edition of *Hymns, Selected and Original* previously discussed.<sup>31</sup> Schalk claims that it was simply more of the same with "no significant improvement upon the earlier editions."<sup>32</sup> Benson writes, "The hymns, both by omissions and additions, show growth in discrimination, but none toward churchliness."<sup>33</sup> An inspection of the table of contents shows perhaps an inching forward of the aptly titled section on "The Means of Grace" (VII), but, as a whole, this hymnal is a continuation of the past practices of the General Synod. Hymn sections on such First Article concerns as "God" (II) and "Creation and Providence" (III) begin the list. "Grace and Redemption" (V) covers Christ. The church year is a brief section near the end of the section on the "Church" (VI) and covers only major festivals (Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost), but even this is preempted by hymns for "Revivals" which appears prior. The direction of this hymnal is well established by hymns for the "Order of Salvation" (VIII) as well as the large section on "Christian Life and Experience" (IX), which goes on for more than 100 pages of hymns.

*Book of Worship* contains five baptismal hymns, three of which are taken over (with some editing) from the old *Hymns, Selected and Original*

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by the Lutheran church in America. As a specimen of sacramental hymnody, Smith uses Watt's communion hymn about the institution of the Lord's Supper, "'Twas on that dark, that doleful night." Smith rightly suggests: "Since Watts was of the Calvinistic persuasion, no hymn of his expresses the Lutheran belief of the Real Presence in the Holy Communion," but then from that datum, which Smith apparently considers close enough, he draws the odd conclusion: "From the above listing it may be seen that the hymns of Watts selected for use by the English Lutheran churches in America expressed most of the Lutheran doctrines," 281-287.

<sup>31</sup>*Book of Worship*, published by the General Synod of the Lutheran Church in the United States. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Board of Publication. Baltimore: T. Newton Kurtz, 1875). As near as can be discerned, the edition used in this study is a later edition of the 1871 original.

<sup>32</sup>Schalk, *God's Song*, 89.

<sup>33</sup>Benson, *English Hymns*, 561.

(evident by the inclusion of the hymn number from the old hymnal). One "new" baptismal hymn (no author given in the index) reads:

Confiding in Thy truth alone, Here, on the steps of Jesus throne,  
We lay the treasure Thou hast given, To be received and rear'd for  
heaven.

Lent to us for a season, we Lend him forever, Lord, to Thee,  
Assured that if to Thee he live, We gain in what we seem to give.

Large and abundant blessings shed, Warm as these prayers, upon  
his head;  
And on his soul the dews of grace, Fresh as these drops upon his  
face.<sup>34</sup>

For a hymn on baptism, Christ's work and benefits given in baptism are summarily absent. This absence is typified by the bare imagery of the hymn itself as it speaks of the mere "drops" upon the face and the undefined "abundant blessings" and "dews of grace." The focus of the hymn centers on man's (the parents'?) actions of "we lay," "we lend him to Thee," "we gain in what we seem to give," in hopes that our "warm prayers" may serve to encourage God to reward our altruism in giving up this child to "live for Jesus."

This same approach, where Christ is seen as rather incidental to the work of His means of grace, is also seen in the section on the Lord's Supper. It contains nine hymns, with at least four having made a previous appearance in other General Synod hymnals. Again, Watts' "'Twas on that dreadful, doleful night" (number 262) is present with four verses. The following offering from James Montgomery (1771-1854), with a most un-Lutheran accent repeated in every stanza, blatantly regards man's noble "remembering" of Christ's passion as being more decisive for faith than by participating in it or receiving from it in any sacramental way.

According to Thy gracious word, In meek humility  
This will I do, my dying Lord, I will remember Thee.

Thy body, broken for my sake, My bread from heaven shall be;  
Thy testamental cup I take, And thus remember Thee.

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<sup>34</sup>Number 260:1-3.

Gethsemane can I forget? Or there Thy conflict see,  
Thine agony and bloody sweat, And not remember Thee?

When to the cross I turn mine eyes, And rest on Calvary,  
O lamb of God, my sacrifice! I must remember Thee:—

Remember Thee and all Thy pains, And all Thy love to me;  
Yea, while a breath, a pulse remains, Will I remember Thee<sup>35</sup>

Even the vaguely sacramental language of body, blood, bread, and cup is swamped by the rampant subjectivism that defines faith as some kind of mental exercise, and the proclamation that Christ and real forgiveness are elsewhere, and merely to be “recalled.” Another hymn likewise effectively removes Christ from His altar and puts Him in heaven: “From heaven, th’ eternal mercy seat / On us Thy blessing pour,” and “With this immortal food from heaven / Lord, let our souls be fed,” (number 266:1, 2). All such language eliminates any bodily presence for the communicant at the altar. Left with only a memorial meal, there is no benefit to body and soul, other than that which the subject achieves for himself by reflecting on the historic work of the absent Christ.

Noteworthy in this hymnal is that its final two hymns in the section on the Lord’s Supper are texts of a more “catholic” nature. Texts attributed to Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux both make an appearance in translation (numbers 267 and 268). Yet, taken with the omnipresent Reformed emphases, even this beautiful and suggestive Christian poetry by authors who believed in the real presence often speaks more generally about the Supper and could probably be understood as speaking just as much to mere “spiritual eating” as to the hidden realities on the earthly altar. From St. Bernard:

We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread, And long to feast upon Thee  
still;

We drink of Thee, the Fountain Head, And thirst our souls from  
Thee to fill.<sup>36</sup>

And credited to Aquinas (translated by Ray Palmer):

O Bread to pilgrims given, Richer than angels eat  
O Manna sent from heaven, For heaven-born natures meet!

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<sup>35</sup>Number 261:1-5.

<sup>36</sup>Number 267:3.

Jesus, this feast receiving, We Thee unseen adore;  
Thy faithful word believing, We take, and doubt no more;<sup>37</sup>

Such hymns would take on richer meaning in company with more truly sacramental hymns, but do not teach with any sturdy clarity by themselves. Their inclusion here does not redeem the rest of the sacramental hymnody of this collection but certainly merits comment.

The General Synod's end-of-the-century *Book of Worship: Hymns and Tunes* (1899) is another hymnal devoid of Luther's sacramental emphasis.<sup>38</sup> Described by Benson as a

modern collection, still strong in the XVIIIth century Evangelical Hymnody, and with more of the Anglican than the Lutheran hymns. In the tunes . . . parlor music type, as well as the Anglican, are largely represented; the German chorals more sparingly. The church year is much more liberally provided for, and the sacramental tone is somewhat higher.<sup>39</sup>

The sacramental hymnody in this hymnal is found in the table of contents under "The Church" and has baptism and the Lord's Supper listed under that heading in the midst of other hymns on "Her Foundation and Nature," "Her Ministry," "Missions," and "Triumph." The sacramental section is comprised of six baptismal hymns (with two coming from the older *Book of Worship*) and twelve for the Lord's Supper (with five coming from the *Book of Worship*, including the Bernard of Clairvaux, number 330, and the "Aquinas" hymn text mentioned above which remains untouched, but now has only Ray Palmer's name associated with it, number 326).

One "new" baptismal hymn, "Shepherd of Tender Youth," (number 317) by Clement of Alexandria (translated by Henry M. Dexter) makes no actual reference to baptism other than the presumably unstated principle that God brings little children to Himself through baptism.<sup>40</sup> Another

<sup>37</sup>Number 268, from verses 1 and 3.

<sup>38</sup>*Book of Worship with hymns and tunes, published by the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899).

<sup>39</sup>Benson, *English Hymns*, 563.

<sup>40</sup>This hymn, translated by H. M. Dexter, later appears as TLH number 628 under the heading of "Christian Education." Polack declares Dexter's effort "a rather free translation, if it can be called that, of one of our oldest Christian hymns, . . ." 450.

hymn making an appearance in English is, "I am baptized into Thy name," (*Ich bin getauft auf deinem Namen*) by the German Pietist Johann J. Rambach (1693-1735).<sup>41</sup> Using the language of Romans 6, it speaks of being "buried with Christ and dead to sin" and the connection that the baptized person has with Christ on account of baptism. But it also takes the focus too soon off Christ and puts it on the decidedly firm resolution of the baptized individual with

I bring Thee here, my God, anew, Of all I am or have the whole;  
Quicken my life and make me true, Take full possession of my  
soul.<sup>42</sup>

Montgomery's hymn, "According to Thy gracious word" (number 324), maintains the emphasis on the subjective in the Lord's Supper with its repetitive, misdirected chorus of "I will remember Thee" discussed above. In hymn number 328, the congregation asks God to increase their sense of God's "body-less" presence with: "O God unseen, yet ever near / Thy presence may we *feel* / And thus, inspired with holy fear / Before thine altar kneel" (emphasis added). Another stanza (verse 3) focuses on the sacramental command rather than on the gift and its benefits with: "We come, obedient to Thy Word / To feast on heavenly food / Our meat the Body of the Lord / Our drink, His precious Blood," and so once more, even with a recognition of Christ as, in some respect, present, forgiveness of sins is removed as a purpose of the Supper. A more familiar hymn, though in different verse form, is present in John M. Neale's translation of "Draw nigh and take the body of your Lord" (number 324). With the completion of the first line, "And drink the holy blood for you outpoured" there is a confession of the real presence. Subsequent verses speak of eternal life being given, and hunger and thirst being satisfied in these "pledges of salvation here." This is certainly one of the more satisfactory hymns in the collection, but it suffers by standing next to so many other hymns that miss or detract from the incarnational, salvific realities presented to the Christian in the Sacrament.

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<sup>41</sup>This hymn, in an alternate form of the same translation by Catherine Winkworth, appears in *TLH*'s weak section on baptism (number 298), with stanzas 3 and 5 speaking highly of the baptized person's vows to obey God. *LW* number 224 has the hymn in a four stanza version, which is a slight improvement over *TLH*.

<sup>42</sup>From number 320:3.

### The General Council: A Glimmer of Hope

A brighter spot in the production of American Lutheran hymn books was the work done by the General Council which was formed in 1867 as a result of a rising confessionalism and as a response to the dissatisfaction with the weak American Lutheranism of the General Synod. The General Council published two hymnals, the *Church Book* (1868), which was considered by many to be the best English Lutheran hymn book created to that time, and the German *Kirchenbuch* (1877).<sup>43</sup> It is the German hymn book, the last major collection of German Lutheran hymns produced in America, which will be examined in this study.

The hymnody of this text-only hymnal of the General Council is organized around the church year. Immediately following the church year hymns are sections on *Kirche* and *Wort Gottes*. Then comes the sacramental section: *Taufe* (XIII), which has eight hymns (but also includes sub-sections with five hymns on confirmation and one on absolution<sup>44</sup>), and *Abendmahl* (XIV), with fourteen hymns. The reclaiming of all three of Luther's sacramental/catechetical hymns (*Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam*, number 219, *Gott sei gelobet* number 243, and *Aus Teifer Not* number 248) shows an incredible reversal of the decline of American Lutheranism at least for those who still worshiped in German. Gone are the simple four-line verses of the English ditty. Back are some of the long German hymns and an "emphasis on the original forms of the hymn texts . . . in rather direct contrast to the procedure in . . . *Deutsches Gesangbuch* of 1849."<sup>45</sup> In comparison to the intentionally confessional hymnody of Walther's and Grabau's hymnal efforts from mid-century, all but two baptismal hymns (numbers 223 and 226) can be found in either in Missouri's or Buffalo's hymnals. All but three of the Lord's Supper hymns (numbers 241, 245, and 247) can be found in Missouri's hymnal.

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<sup>43</sup>*Kirchenbuch fuer Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden* (Philadelphia: J. L. File, 1885). The General Council's English *Church Book* is discussed with the *Kirchenbuch* in Schalk's, *God's Song*, 142-150, and *Source Documents*, 92-99.

<sup>44</sup>Nicolaus Selnecker's *Wir danken dir, O treuer Gott* is found in TLH number 321, where Selnecker's strong second stanza *Durch's Beicht'gers Mund sprichst du: Mein Kind, Dir alle Suend' vergeben sind* is translated less directly as "Thy servant now declares to me: 'Thy sins are all forgiven thee.'"

<sup>45</sup>Schalk, *God's Song*, 148. See footnote 11 on the Pennsylvania Ministerium's *Deutsches Gesangbuch* of 1849.

The sacramental hymns in the *Kirchenbuch* show a preference for sixteenth and seventeenth century texts, although there are also a few from the eighteenth century (from as late as 1767) in the baptismal section. The hymnal is apparently not concerned about being current, but in recapturing the treasure of the German hymn for a German-American church that had lost it for so many years.

### Conclusion

Charles Porterfield Krauth in *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* observes how even those who find the Lutheran teaching of the Lord's Supper repugnant cannot but help to occasionally speak in its way:

How New Testament-like, how Lutheran have sounded the sacramental hymns and devotional breathings of men whose theory of the Lord's Supper embodied little of its divine glory. . . . When they treat of sacramental communion, and of the mystical union, they give evidence, that, with their deep faith in the atonement, there is connected, in spite of the rationalizing tendency which inheres in their system, a hearty acknowledgment of the supernatural and incomprehensible character of the Lord's Supper.<sup>46</sup>

In the nineteenth-century hymnals of American Lutheranism featured in this study, we have seen glimpses of this in a phrase here or a verse there. Often, however, what was sung in one verse was taken away in another. Rationalism tried to remove the holy mysteries and substitute reasonable ordinances in their place. Unionism ignored real confessional differences. Revivalism pushed Christ aside to focus on the individual and his religious experience. Each of these necessarily eroded the confession of Christ, the understanding of the atonement and so the sacraments. Surrounded by all these forces, it is predictable that their influence found a way into the church's sacramental song.

It is in the self-consciously confessional hymnody of the Missouri and Buffalo Synods, churches whose identity was more firmly in place and fiercely guarded, that we find hymns not as susceptible to those influences. Confessionally-minded Lutherans were reluctant to give up

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<sup>46</sup>Charles P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1913), 656.

their strong German hymnody and so were able to maintain their comparatively stronger christological center with its sacramental crown. Even groups moving towards a more confessional stance like the General Council, with their fine English (1868) and German (1877) hymnals, were literally confessional "on paper" as they recaptured the core hymnody of the Reformation, but theirs was a strange and unwelcome voice against the drive of American Lutheranism.

The American Lutherans had a different sensibility when it came to the importance of the sung confession. It suggested that nearly *anything* can be sung, even if it is false and misleading and robs Christ of His glory, as long as it is easy, familiar, and short. It is this kind of "flexibility" that brought in the empty sacramentology of the Reformed tradition into modern Lutheran hymnals, proving that borrowed hymns lead to borrowed doctrine. How is it that English song writers like Watts and Wesley, for whom the incarnate reality of the sacraments was not of central concern, could make such lasting inroads with hymns that could never be mistaken for Lutheran, but were received uncritically by those searching for any material in English?

Perhaps Benson's summary, written at the beginning of the twentieth century, still makes the point today, no longer in connection to old immigration concerns, but to the aspirations of the confessional movement.

The English-speaking congregations wished to use the hymns of their American neighbors, and even in adopting for church use the version of German hymns by Miss Winkworth, Mills, Massie and others, they have been followers rather than leaders. American Lutheranism presents a curious case of an immigrant Church merging its inheritance and traditions in its new surrounding until spurred by the pressure of new immigrations to recover what it had lost. And it may be that the real Lutheran influence on American hymnody lies in the future.<sup>47</sup>

Well-intentioned pastors can hold out their preference of sacramental hymnody, but the democratically aware people in the pew will often decide what gets sung. Of course, there will always be pockets where the great Lutheran inheritance is competently taught and embraced by

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<sup>47</sup>Benson, *English Hymns*, 562-563.

grateful congregations who rejoice in their rich sacramental theology in song. But this will only be the case if the hymnody is taught to each generation at the same time that new hymnody is encouraged and critically evaluated for appropriateness in the Divine Service. It may well be that the "real Lutheran influence on American hymnody lies in its future," but only if it consciously recovers and makes use of what is always tottering on the brink of extinction — its vigorous confession of the incarnate God serving His church of all time with His means of grace. In this way "future historians" who study our present and future hymnals may judge "at least approximately" our place in the doctrinal history of our church.