

Moslems and the History of Lutheran Liturgy: *Documentation*

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Outline

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Introduction

The encounter of Christians with Moslems over the centuries has influenced the history of Lutheran liturgy. This relatively little known aspect of liturgical history deserves to be re-examined today, as Christians increasingly become aware of Islam and as efforts are being made on many fronts to promote good relations between Christians and Moslems.

Here I present references and documents that show ways in which Moslems influenced and were referred to in the Lutheran liturgy in the sixteenth century and in the twentieth.

The presentation of these texts is part of a broader investigation that includes similar studies of the Anglican and Roman Catholic liturgies. This of course is merely a first step in what should be a broader and deeper study of this subject, carried out by many. Additional texts undoubtedly remain to be identified, and all of them need to be placed in context with respect to the place and period of their composition and use. They deserve further analysis and reflection. Implications for Christian-Moslem relations in the past, the present and the future need to be drawn out, especially regarding ways in which Christians today refer to Moslems in their liturgies.

For many centuries Christians commonly referred to Moslems as Turks, Saracens, and Moors.

For the works of Martin Luther I have used the 55 volume English version, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1965), especially volume 53, *Liturgy and Hymns*, edited by Ulrich S Leupold.

Luther was much concerned with the “Turks,” as Moslems were commonly referred to in his day. The *General Index to Luther’s Works* (vol. 55) includes a large number of citations under the word “Turk” (pp 321-322), plus a few others under “Saracens” (p 281). Only a few of these touch on liturgy, however, and even some such references in liturgical materials are incidental. For example, the “Preface” to “The German Mass and Order of Service” (1526) simply uses “Turks” and “heathens” in descriptive ways to speak about non-Christians or uninformed Christians. Thus:

The two orders of service must be used publicly, in the churches, for all the people, among whom are many who do not believe and are not yet Christian. Most of them stand around and gape, hoping to see something new, just as if we were holding a service among the Turks or the heathen in a public square or out in a field. (vol 53, p 63)

Liturgical matters are a minor concern in Luther’s treatise “On War Against the Turk” (1529) (vol. 46, pp 155-205. The most pertinent section reads:

After people have thus been taught and exhorted to confess their sin and amend their ways they should then be most diligently exhorted to prayer and shown that such prayer pleases God, that he has commanded it and promised to hear it, and that no one ought to think lightly of his own praying or have doubts about it, but with firm faith be sure that it will be heard; all of which has been published by us in many tracts. The man who doubts, or prays for good luck, would do better to let prayer alone because such prayer is merely tempting God and only makes things worse. Therefore I would advise against processions, which are a heathenish and useless practice, for they are more pomp and show than prayer. I say the same thing about celebrating a lot of masses and calling upon the saints. It might, indeed, be of some use to have the people, especially the young people, sing the Litany at mass or vespers or in the church after the sermon, provided that everyone, even at home by himself, constantly raised to Christ at least a sigh of the heart for grace to lead a better life and for help against the Turk. (Vol 46, p 172-173)

Wars with the Turks did influence Luther’s liturgical works in that it drew him to revise the litany. Luther’s “German Litany” and “The Latin Litany Corrected” (1529) are generally attributed to “the national emergency created when the Turks threatened the faith and freedom of all Christian lands” (vol 53, p 153). However, Moslems are not explicitly referred to in the texts of these litanies. [See also Luther D Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*. Philadelphia: Fortress 1960, pp 626-627.]

One collect and one hymn that do explicitly refer to Moslems were written by Luther.

Collect: Merciful God, Heavenly Father, Thou Hast Said to Us

Luther's Works, vol 53, pp 145-146.

[“This is the final collect in Luther’s “Ordination of Ministers of the Word,” 1539. It is to be considered original. The German text is *Barmhertziger Gott, Himmlischer Vater, Du hast durch den mund*”.]

Merciful God, heavenly Father, thou hast said to us through the mouth of thy dear Son our Lord Jesus Christ: “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest” [Matt 9:37-38]. Upon this thy divine command, we pray heartily that thou wouldst grant thy Holy Spirit richly to these thy servants, to us, and to all those who are called to serve thy Word so that the company of us who publish the good tidings may be great, and that we may stand faithful and firm against the devil, the world, and the flesh, to the end that thy name may be hallowed, thy kingdom grow, and thy will be done. Be also pleased at length to check and stop the detestable abomination of the pope, Mohammed, and other sects which blaspheme thy name, hinder thy kingdom, and oppose thy will. Graciously hear this our prayer, since thou hast so commanded, taught, and promised, even as we believe and trust through thy dear Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, world without end. Amen.

Hymn: Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Work 1541/1542

Luther's Works, vol 53, pp 304-305

“This short hymn has been and perhaps still is the most widely used of all of Luther’s hymns. Countless agendas of the Reformation and post-Reformation era assign it to be sung either immediately after the sermon or at the end of the service, frequently followed by “Grant Peace in Mercy, Lord, We Pray.” [. . .] Luther may have written it sometime between the end of 1541 and the spring of 1542.

“These were turbulent and critical days for the Empire. King Ferdinand of Austria was decisively defeated by the Turks at Budapest in August, 1541. Two months later a storm destroyed the imperial fleet near Algiers. Luther responded with his *Vermanunge zum Gebet Wider den Turcken* (Admonition to Pray Against the Turk). The Elector requested pastors to offer special prayers for divine help and protection. Our hymn may have been written with this in mind, for Luther repeatedly stressed the children’s prayers as the best defense against the Turks.

“But many people took bitter offense at the juxtaposition of “Turk” and “papist” in the second line of the first stanza. In predominantly Catholic principalities the hymn was forbidden, and after the interim of 1548, even Lutherans attempted to revise this line. Under the influence of pietism it was commonly changed to a petition for protection from the enemies of the Word, and today the original version has almost completely disappeared from use. But it must be remembered that at the time of writing not only the Turks but also many of the European princes loyal to Rome were ready to liquidate Lutheranism by force. Francis I of France, e.g., who posed as a defender of the church, made common cause with the Sultan against the Empire. These were the conditions that inspired Luther’s prayer for protection against both pope and Turk.” (p 304)

Lord, keep us steadfast in thy Word
And curb the Turks and papist sword
Who Jesus Christ thine only son
Fain would tumble from off thy throne. (Verse 1)

Service Book and Hymnal: Collect for Islam 1958

Finally, the 1958 *Service Book and Hymnal* included a collect For Islam (p 223).

According to Luther D Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*. Philadelphia: Fortress 1960, p 591, this was adapted from the 1912 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* (Scotland), p 51.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who in thy goodness hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine in our land: Extend thy mercy, we beseech thee, to the nations of the world that still walk in darkness. Enlighten the Moslems with the knowledge of thy truth; and grant that the Gospel of salvation may be made known in every land, that the hearts of all people may be turned unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.