

He recommends it as an exercise, not a regular habit. And he limits it to things that affront his own taste, not things that affront conscience or sound doctrine. And Tolkien would be the first to admit that there is good reason we seek transcendent beauty in worship. Still, I think his advice is a good contribution to any discussion of worship style.

### The lamentably insufferable others

My approach to the modern dilemma of service styles—basically traditional worship but allowing for different styles periodically while not dedicating any service time to any style—is no cure-all. Nobody gets what they really want, which is to have the option of traditional or contemporary worship

every week, so as not to have to deal with the organ or guitar as the case may be. And some people have left the congregation because they can get what they really want elsewhere.

But my approach does train people over time to be in worship with people of varying tastes. And it does train everyone to receive the aesthetic experience of worship, when it is especially pleasing, as an added bonus, not the focal point or reason for being there. And in that way I think my approach makes a congregation more like a real family. Communion with Christ and communion with all the lamentably insufferable others and their malformed aesthetic preferences matter much more than enjoying the hymns.

— by Peter Speckhard, associate editor

## Book review: *Minister's Prayer Book* (revised edition)



John W. Doberstein, *Minister's Prayer Book: An Order of Prayers and Readings, Revised Edition*, Timothy J. Wengert, general editor (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020) ISBN 978-1506454528. Reviewed by the editor.

When a publisher decides to produce a “revised version” of a classic, I generally prepare to grind my teeth. A classic is, by definition, well, classic. It generally does not need to be revised. Shakespeare in modern English is an oxymoron. Nobody wants to hear Lady Macbeth cry “I must go wash my hands for at least twenty seconds!”

So it is with some trepidation that I opened a review copy of Fortress Press’s new revision of John Doberstein’s *Minister's Prayer Book*. I was not expecting to like it. I was very pleasantly surprised.

### Oddly classic

To call *Minister's Prayer Book* a “classic” is in some ways an odd description. First published in 1959 and reissued in 1986, it has been out of print for several years. Probably most Lutheran pastors under the age of 50 would not even recognize Doberstein’s name (though they likely know at least some of his work, such as his translation of Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together*; he also translated many of the writings of Helmut Thielicke and collaborated with

Theodore Tappert on the translation of Muhlenberg’s *Journals*). Doberstein was a pastor in Pennsylvania, then a professor and chaplain at Muhlenberg College; he was professor of practical theology and homiletics at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia from 1947 until his death in 1965.

Yet his 1959 *Minister's Prayer Book* was an influential devotional aid for a generation or two of Lutheran pastors. It was a frequent ordination gift, and it encouraged many pastors to develop a habit of daily prayer. It was arguably the most widely used of such resources among Lutheran pastors until the publication of the ALPB’s *For All the Saints* in 1994. It is worth emphasizing that both the original and the revision are specifically designed to be used by ministers. Doberstein’s target audience, he noted, was seminary students and working pastors.

### Daily themes

Timothy Wengert was the general editor for this revision, working with Mary Jane Haemig, Robb Harrell and Chris Halverson. Following quite closely the structure of Doberstein’s original, the book is divided into four primary sections. The first is an “Order of Prayer for the Days of the Week.” Somewhat differently structured than the Daily Office, the order each day contains many of the same elements—Psalm, Scripture lesson, hymn, prayers.

To these it adds readings from various Christian writers about the office of the ministry.

There are (obviously) seven days of the week, and for Doberstein's devotions, each day has a particular theme. Sunday, for example, is focused on the "divine institution and mission of the ministry." Subsequent days take up topics such as the minister's life, the minister as teacher, as confessor and pastor, as preacher, as intercessor.

One of the most helpful things about Section 1 is its inclusion of a "plan for intercession" for each day of the week. So on Sunday the pastor is encouraged to pray "for congregations and the whole church, that the blessing of worship and preaching may continue throughout the week; for the practice of family worship; for the baptized and communicants; for those absent from worship." Throughout the week the intercessory focus is on various aspects of church and world. Those of us (and that's probably most of us) who sometimes find our intercessory prayer perfunctory and repetitive will find this useful in expanding the scope of those for whom we pray.

#### When words do not come easily

Section 2 is a daily lectionary, with a suggested hymn and collect for each week. The editors chose to replace Doberstein's outdated lectionary with that in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. This was an inevitable choice, though those who much prefer the *Lutheran Book of Worship's* daily lectionary will find it a lamentable one. Still, the usefulness of Doberstein's book does not depend on following the *ELW* lectionary, and if having that schedule between the covers here encourages pastors to read the Bible devotionally every day, it's all good.

Section 3 is a collection of prayers, each related (sometimes loosely) to some different aspect of ministry. The sources of these prayers are wide-ranging—from the *Didache* to Desmond Tutu. I find particularly helpful the variety of prayers for Sunday mornings—vesting prayers, prayers before and after preaching, before and after Holy Communion. Many of the others—a prayer against resentment, a prayer in the midst of doubt—can help the pastor find words when words do not come easily.

Section 4 is really the meat of the book. Here are many, many pages of brief readings on the various themes established for each day. It becomes

something of a compendium of reflection on the pastoral office. Doberstein's original work included quotations from many German theologians not well known and not easily accessible in America, as well as a good representation of writings from Puritan, Anglican and other theologians. Thankfully, the editors of the new edition have "revised" mostly by adding rather than subtracting. The new material offers quotations from contemporary or more recent writers like Fleming Rutledge, Eugene Peterson, Michael Ramsey, and Sarah Hinlicky Wilson.

There is no end of books on the ministry in recent decades, and one should perhaps not be critical of the editors' choices, given the limited space and the desire to let most of Doberstein's selections remain. Still, I wish there had been a quotation or two from Richard John Neuhaus's *Freedom for Ministry* or Walter Brueggeman's *Finally Comes the Poet*.

#### Bringing language up to date

The "revisions" in the new edition are more extensive than simply adding some contemporary readings. Throughout, there is updated language—sometimes in a move toward gender inclusivity, but not irritatingly so. More to the point, things like quotations from the Scripture or the Confessions substitute more recent translations (the *NRSV* for the Scripture, the Kolb-Wengert edition of the *Book of Concord* for the Confessions). Quite often verbiage is changed to reflect current usage. So, for example, Doberstein had one pray, on Monday, for "fellow-workers in the parish, vestrymen, parish workers, assistants, deaconesses, sextons, officers and leaders of the congregation"; but in the revised edition we pray for "all who work in the parish, council members, parish workers, administrative assistants, members of the diaconate, maintenance staff, and all who lead or contribute to various ministries."

That's a salutary change, to be sure, although occasionally in this effort to update the language there is an unfortunate misstep. On Tuesdays, Doberstein bid us pray for "congregations, clergy and laity" while the revised version refers to "congregations, rostered leaders [and] lay officers." The use of such ELCA-exclusive language as "rostered leaders" is unfelicitous, and it also inhibits the usefulness of the book to clergy not in the ELCA loop.

On the other hand, on that same day Dober-

stein's prayers were focused on the "Churches of Christ in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches." The new edition has us pray for "religious people of all kinds, for Christians in North America, for ecumenical and full communion partners, and for Lutherans throughout North America and the world." That is wider in scope, but again somewhat narrower in jargon.

Some quotations are edited to save space, or made slightly longer to provide more context. I admit to laughing out loud at one instance I noticed. On p. 141 of the original, under the heading of "Prayers in Secret Before Preaching," Doberstein quoted Acts 4.29, "O Lord, grant to thy servants to speak thy Word with all boldness." The revisers altered the heading to "Personal Prayers before Preaching" (OK, fine; "secret" has a different nuance today) and then quoted the same text: "And now, O Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness." I suppose most preachers have looked out over the congregation and seen a personal threat or two!

### Using the book

The revised edition very wisely included Doberstein's introduction, though with some editorial changes that are not always easy to notice (shortened quotations, for example). It also includes a preface by Wengert, which is useful and engaging. Perhaps most helpfully, Wengert notes that "if our own experience is any indication, ministers will find their own best ways to harvest the riches of this little book for their devotions." That is permission, in other words, to use the book in a variety of ways.

What I have done during Lent, for example, is to continue to pray Morning Prayer as found in Phillip Pfatteicher's *Daily Prayer of the Church* (based largely on the LBW rite), and Evening Prayer from

the *Book of Common Prayer*. But to these I have added one or more readings from the *Minister's Prayer Book* for each day. This has made my Lent a time of reflection on the office of the ministry, considered from several different perspectives. As a retired pastor who no longer serves a parish (though I have the joy of doing some pastoral work in our congregation), it has been a fruitful opportunity to think about my "priestly identity" at this stage of life. I've also used Doberstein's guidance for intercessions and found it to be helpful.

A word about the physical book itself. It is larger than the original, which could be slipped in a coat pocket, but still a manageable size. It is attractively bound and printed. I wish that Fortress had included bookmark ribbons as was true of the original; that would make navigating the various sections a bit easier. But I suppose that would have increased the cost (which is presently \$24.99). A Kindle version is available for half the price, surely an excellent option, and one with digital ribbons!

### Praying as we yearn to do

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton hits the nail on the head when she writes: "Ministers, like all Christians, need to pray. Yet they often need help to pray as they yearn to do. Generations have found this classic a faithful companion through each week, through the Christian year, and through the dimensions of pastoral vocation--all in conversation with Scripture and the church's wisdom. This affectionate update freshens language and expands sources to reflect ministry in our time, when ministers are more diverse but prayer is as urgent as ever." In short, this particular "revised edition" is very nicely done and a good addition to any pastor's library. Fortress is to be commended, as are the book's editors.

## Luther on COVID-19

by William M. Cwirla



Martin Luther was well-acquainted with epidemics. Waves of Black Plague wiped out significant portions of the local population. Pastors conducted thousands of burials; some buried entire congregations. Luther's Wittenberg experienced an outbreak of the plague in 1527,

prompting him to write a treatise addressed to a fellow pastor in Breslau concerning the question "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague" (*Luther's Works* 43:119-38). Luther's approach provides some good reflection for our day.