

# Giving God the Glory Through Music

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When our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod resolved to officially commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the man whose name our denomination bears; when the committee authorized by the synod to help arrange a suitable observance of this milestone encouraged pastoral conferences to undertake professional studies reviewing Martin Luther's considerable contributions to the life and work of the church on earth, the intent was certainly not to sound the praises of or attempt to canonize a man. Quite the contrary. The general theme of the anniversary, "Fear God and Give Glory to Him," ought to remind us that Martin Luther appeared on the scene of history as God's man for God's time, richly endowed with God's gifts to accomplish God's purposes in and for God's church on earth. As we, therefore, reacquaint ourselves and our people with the life and work of this extraordinary servant of God, may it be our joy "to educate, to edify, to confess and to give thanks," all to the glory of God.

The historian Schaff singles out three of the most edifying and enduring legacies that flowed to the church from the great reformer: "To Luther belongs the extraordinary merit of having given the German people in their own tongue the Bible, the catechism and the hymnbook, so that God might speak to them in His Word and they might directly answer Him in their songs."<sup>i</sup> In many respects the third of these legacies, the hymnbook, and the attendant musical tradition that has been passed down to us as a result of Luther's efforts in the field of music is the least appreciated of the three, and consequently, the one in the greatest danger of being lost. Martin Luther proclaimed, as did no other church leader since the Apostle Paul, the supreme value of music in church life; and he strove for superior musical quality in the church. His efforts and those of like-minded men who assisted and followed him, have given Lutherans a music and worship heritage unique in Christendom, a worship in which orderliness is combined with rich variety; solemnity with Gospel joy; awe and reverence with the individual Christian's role as a royal priest actively worshipping before God. In discussing Luther's musical contributions to the Evangelical church, we intend to look first at the reformer's musical training, ability and philosophy, then at the practical contributions to the worship life of the church in which they resulted.

To a greater or lesser degree, most, if not all of the reformers outside of the Lutheran camp, including men like Carlstadt, Bucer and Bullinger, opposed organ playing and choral singing. The haunting picture that comes to mind in this connection is that of the smashing to pieces by iconoclastic fanatics of the organ at the Great Minster, in Zurich, while the organist stood helplessly by, weeping. In the scheme of values of those reformers, music was to be employed, if at all, in a very subsidiary, rather than an exalted position. Luther's view was completely the opposite. Of music he said:

Experience proves that next to the Word of God, only music deserves being extolled as the mistress and governess of the human heart... Those who are not moved by this are, indeed, unmusical and deserve to hear some dunghill poet or the music of swine.<sup>ii</sup>

In 1538 he wrote in a *Treatise on Music*,

I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious, worthy and costly treasure given mankind by God ...In summa, next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world ...A person who gives this some thought and yet does not regard it as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed, and does not deserve to be called a human being.<sup>iii</sup>

Unlike the other reformers of his age Luther welcomed music with open arms into the worship and praise of God. To him music was a part of God's creation with the power to praise its creator, and found its

greatest fulfillment in the proclamation of His Word. He expressed that opinion in the *Tischreden*, which are full of the praises of music:

I am not satisfied with him who despises music, as all fanatics do; for music is an endowment and a gift of God, not a gift of men. It also drives away the devil and makes people cheerful; one forgets all anger, unchastity, pride and other vices. I place music next to theology and give it the highest praise. And we see how David and all saints put their pious thoughts into verse, rhyme and songs, because music reigns in times of peace.<sup>iv</sup>

The reformer's rather uncharitable attitude toward the non-musical is certainly also evident from the above quotations. He could not understand why any Christian could despise the art that he felt came closest to representing heaven on earth.

From his earlier years music was always a vital force in Luther's life. Natives of the Thuringian hills were known for their love of song; the miners of Mansfeld, Luther's childhood home, had the reputation of being excellent singers. As a student in Magdeburg and especially at Eisenach he was a "*kurrende singer*." These were students who sang for alms outside the homes of wealthy citizens, or for a small stipend at the weddings and funerals of rich burghers. His singing ability attracted Ursula Cotta and moved her to become his patroness in Eisenach. Luther's classical university training was equivalent to, perhaps even better than that received by candidates for music master. He once joked that the poet Virgil was the one who taught him the technique of combining text and melody into a harmonious unit. Finally, his monastic years and training for the priesthood gave him a thorough familiarity with and a deep love for the liturgical and musical traditions of the western church. The technique and style of the Gregorian chant clearly influenced him in his own attempts at musical composition. He loved the Latin hymns and later revised many of them for service in Evangelical worship. Although he attacked all the impurities of the Roman Church, he never lost his high regard for its musical traditions.

Although there are extreme opinions on either side, it appears that Luther himself had more than adequate ability as a musician. He played the lute and the flute, and showed some skill at polyphonic composition. He was well-versed in musical theory and showed a keen appreciation for the music of his age. On his journey to Rome (1511) he became particularly interested in the music of the Flemish composer Josquin des Prez, as well as in his somewhat revolutionary musical theories, including the idea that good music consisted not just of *ars* - laws and rules - but also of *ingenuim* - the original and creative impulse of the musician. Josquin became Luther's favorite composer, because, among other reasons, that composer's music reminded Luther of the singing of the birds and other music of nature. Luther related comfortably to other serious musicians of his day. He carried on a professional correspondence with Ludwig Senfl, the musician of the Catholic Bavarian court, and, although perhaps not an equal partner, nevertheless worked easily with Walther in developing suitable music for the Evangelical church. The *meistersingers*, or folk singers of the day, considered Luther one of their own. Cyriacus called him the best and most gifted of the *meistersingers*, and Hans Sachs referred to Luther as the nightingale of Wittenberg. Most scholars today credit Luther with a good deal of musical ability. Dr. Hoelty-Nickel, a modern Lutheran musical authority, writes:

Had Luther chosen music as a career, he no doubt would have ranked with the great musicians of his time ...Because of his gifts he used music as a special means of implementing his work.<sup>v</sup>

It would be saying too much to call Luther a great in the field of music per se. Luther himself never laid claim to particularly outstanding skills as an original composer. But it would be saying too little to call him only a gifted amateur or a musical dilettante, as some critics are fond of doing. The truth lies somewhere in between. Lutheran music professor Walter Buszin calls Luther:

Neither the Palestrina of Lutheranism and Protestantism (contra exaggerated opinion) nor a clever dilettante who indeed supplied his adherents with liturgical music that conformed to their teachings, but who cannot be regarded as a composer and an originator of tunes and who exerted no influence on the future development of musical art.<sup>vi</sup>

Paul Henry Lang, author of *Music in Western Civilization*, perhaps summarizes best:

Nothing is more unjust than to consider (Luther) a sort of enthusiastic and good natured dilettante. The ultimate fate of German Protestant music depended on this man, who as a student in Eisenach sang all sorts of merry student songs and as a celebrant priest, familiar with the gradual and polyphonic masses and motets, lived with music ringing in his ears.<sup>vii</sup>

Our present possession of a musical heritage is mainly attributable to Luther's love for and understanding of music.

Closely connected with one's view of Luther's skill as a musician is the matter of the originality of his hymn melodies. Soon after the Reformation well-meaning exaggerators ascribed as many as 100 hymn tunes to Luther. Critical writers from the Age of Rationalism to the present have reduced that number all the way down to a flat zero. Some say all the tunes associated with the Lutheran hymns were borrowed or patched together from other sources. Others say Luther received credit for original tunes composed by other Reformation era artists, most notably Walther. Again, the truth probably lies somewhere in between. The borrowing of various musical phrases from other sources to produce a new, original composition, is certainly not unusual in the musical world. Brahma, for one, did it quite successfully. One may argue if such a combination process may rightly be called original composition or not. But one cannot argue that a goodly amount of genius is required to produce a happy combination. If, for example, "A Mighty Fortress" is a combination of various musical phrases from other sources, as some musicologists believe, where else could a more forceful and effective combination of such phrases be found? Walther himself credited Luther with a masterly ability to combine notes and text. We also have to bear in mind here that the 16<sup>th</sup> Century had no copyright laws, and many composers regularly used musical phrases borrowed from others to produce their own "original" works. In his book *The Lutheran Chorale* Liemohn accepts the judgment that about twenty melodies plus about twenty revisions can be properly credited to Luther. Buszin, on the other hand, more conservatively credits him with eight original tunes. About three melodies there appears to be little question: "Ein feste Burg", (TLH, 0262); "Von Himmel Hoch," (TLH, ,085); and "Uesaia dem Propheten" (TLH, 0249).

Our Lutheran musical heritage has certainly also benefited from Luther's musical judgment. He possessed the intuition of the true artist. By precept and example he demanded excellence in the music of the Evangelical Church. He urged the retention of the best parts of the Roman Church's musical tradition. And, although he opened the church's doors to folk tunes that became one of the sources for the Lutheran chorale, he made it clear that not all music was suitable for worship. He depreciated the carnal and corrupt songs of the day and the "wicked gut scrapers and fiddlers who serve the purpose of enabling us to see and hear what fine and wholesome art music really is."<sup>viii</sup> Nor did he enjoy uninteresting music. "Artis sat habet, sed caret suavitate," he said after hearing the music of a certain colorless musician. "He has art, but lacks warmth."<sup>ix</sup>

That musical training should be an important element in the education offered by the Evangelical churches and schools was never in doubt as far as Luther was concerned. In his 1524 *Letter to the Alderman* he urged that singing be included as a standard part of the primary curriculum. Consequently, in the Evangelical schools, much as in the Roman schools, the boys were put through a carefully guided program of music study, starting with simple chants and continuing through four and eight part choral singing. Luther insisted on a thorough training in music for the Evangelical clergy. And he believed that local princes should always see to it that their churches and schools be provided with professional musicians or cantors, and that those musicians should be provided with an adequate income. He extolled the Catholic Bavarian house simply because the reigning dukes gave liberally in support of a musical establishment. And it keenly disappointed him when

Elector John the Constant failed to take an interest in providing Wittenberg with a trained musician. When John dissolved the Castle Church choir and the *Hofkapelle* after the Elector Frederick had died, Luther pleaded:

The art of music is worthy of being supported and maintained by princes and lords much more so than many other endeavors and enterprises for which there is not nearly so much need.<sup>x</sup>

The high regard in which Luther held music was a direct outgrowth of his theology. Luther saw music first and foremost as a gift of God and an instrument to the further glory of God. He considered music the highest of all the arts, and yet, not an independent art, but rather a means for promoting the work of proclaiming the Gospel. Music's power to move the soul, he believed, was a power to be used in the service of the Gospel. Music

Controls the thoughts, minds, hearts and spirits of the people. It stirs many seed-grains of precious virtue in the human heart ...it makes people fit for any task ...(It is) a gift of God which drives away the devil and makes people happy inducing one to forget all wrath, unchastity, arrogance and other vices.<sup>xi</sup>

Luther's statements praising music as a heart-softening, character-forming force were often coupled with others pertaining to theology. He considered music as one of the most effective means of imprinting the good news of the Gospel on people's hearts and minds.

Luther saw in music both the orderliness which reflects God's creation and a freedom of expression that mirrors the liberty of the Christian under the Gospel. Both of these features, he concluded, make music a medium ideally suited to the worship of God. Above all, though, he regarded the music and songs of believers as the spontaneous fruits of Gospel faith. He who believes in Christ's salvation cannot help but be happy, sing and tell about it. To say and sing the Gospel is the natural result of the inevitable eruption of joyful song in a heart touched by the Gospel. Nor did Luther believe that the outward expression of the new song called forth by the Gospel in a Christian's heart had to be restricted to one form of song. Gospel joy could be expressed in many forms, from the folk song of the common man to the sophisticated art forms of the great composers, and sung by Christians in a wholesome manner, so that the devil wouldn't have all the good times. Luther's belief that the Gospel allowed Christians the freedom to use many different forms of music to praise and worship God has resulted in a musical tradition that is not stilted, formal, inaccessible or mysterious, but rich and varied; not something to be observed with uncomprehending wonder or dull disinterest, but to be used by every believer as a royal priest to the praise and glory of a gracious God. Even when Christians are weighed down by crosses, Luther taught, they can still sing hymns, because Christ has died that they might live eternally. A Christian under the Gospel cannot help but sing. So, in emphasizing music as God's creation and as God's gift to man to be used in His praise and proclamation; in emphasizing the royal priesthood of all believers to encourage the involvement of every Christian in corporate praise at the highest level of his or her ability; and in viewing all of music as under God's redemptive hand and free to Christians to use in the proclamation of the Gospel and the praise of His Gospel grace, Luther laid a theological foundation for the healthy and wholesome atmosphere in which Christians can sing and make music in the praise of God.

Other reformers, most notably Calvin and Zwingli, did not share Luther's high view of music. Calvin agreed that music is a gift of God, and its proper work is to praise God. He likewise agreed that it can fire the heart of the believer in adoring God. Calvin, however, could not shake off the fear of music's power. He believed that experience showed that the proper use of music was rare; consequently, his philosophy was that the Christian should avoid the dangerous powers of music, dangers which he felt lay not only in ungodly texts, but in the subtle dangers of aesthetic pleasure. This view saw music as a distraction rather than Luther's "living voice of the Gospel." The result of their leader's view of music in the churches of the Calvinistic tradition was a musical puritanism. The use of instruments and choirs was rejected altogether. The congregation could sing, but it had to be in unison and unaccompanied. Vernacular psalm texts and some canticles were the total contents of what could be sung. Likewise, the music for these settings was to have a certain gravity and solemnity, in a

rather rigidly defined “church style.” Calvin’s severe restrictions were relaxed, somewhat after his death. Some Reformed churches developed fine practices of congregational song; yet even that was primarily restricted to the use of texts from the Psalms.

Zwingli is perhaps the most puzzling of the reformers in regard to his view of music. Personally he was a cultivated man with some skill in music. He expressed high regard for the art. But he thought that music should be used only in private. He rejected all forms of music in worship. Zwingli believed that worship should be a spiritualistic singing of the heart rather than a literal singing with the mouth. It was the moment of silence before God that constituted the real, undisturbed dialog to which Christians should aspire. Song disturbed this dialog because of the sensuality of the music, and because in congregational song it drew one’s thoughts away from one’s own personal encounter with God to the whole of the congregation.

In their philosophies and theologies of music both Calvin and Zwingli tried to compartmentalize music. The former tried to separate the music of worship from the rest of music. The latter sought to restrict the use of music to extra-liturgical situations. Luther refused to separate Christian joy and freedom from all aspects of music, worship and life. He believed that music could and should both instruct and delight. That concept of wholeness is evident in the practical contributions Luther made to the musical life of the Evangelical church.

The worship of the western church of the Renaissance and the late Middle Ages serves as the background against which Luther’s ideas need to be seen and understood if his contributions are to be placed in proper perspective. The worship and music of the medieval church reflected a wide variety of situations and practices. At papal chapels, courts, cathedrals and other places where artistic and financial resources were great, there was the pomp and ceremony of the brilliantly sung polyphonic mass. In the more secluded monastic communities, where worship and musical traditions were carefully preserved and maintained and musical innovation flourished, there was the daily round of chanted services. The common man, however, couldn’t identify very well with this musical tradition. In the more modest circumstances of the average parish the mass was usually spoken. In addition, the people were isolated from the action of the mass. While the sacrifice of the mass was being enacted by the priest, the people attending the mass were expected to be attending to their own private devotions. Various attempts by the people to involve themselves more directly in the worship, such as the singing of “*leisen*,” vernacular folk hymns evolving from the refrain, “*Kyrie, eleison*,” were usually opposed by the church. or, at best, were grudgingly allowed only on special occasions and with strict limits, such as “only outside the church building.” Luther’s monastic and priestly training instilled in him a deep love for the Gregorian chant and the richness of the polyphonic mass. As a general rule he retained what he could from the Roman musical heritage. As a result of his understanding of the doctrine of the universal priesthood, however, he wanted the people to be more active in the worship services. His intention was that through-the medium of song the Word of God should remain among the people. To that ultimate goal all of his efforts in both liturgical reform and hymnody were directed.

Meanwhile, on the secular scene, a musical revolution which directly affected the average middle class person eras taking place. Renaissance men of letters were fascinated, not only with the language, learning and arts of ancient Greece and Rome, but with vernacular music and secular folk music. New economic prosperity and increased leisure gave rise to a massive song literature for the newly created middle classes. The first German songbooks were published In 1512 by Emperor Maximilian’s court printer Oeglin. They were followed by many others. Singing at home and at community gatherings became popular. Well-to-do city dwellers commissioned composers to write music especially designed for various occasions. Music itself, and music making were moving outward from the church and the court and into the home of the common man.

The new music of the common man was the music of a much simpler style than that employed by the church and court. It was a musical language composed of secular and folk elements. Martin Luther synthesized the new folk and secular music and the music of the Roman Church to create a new idiom which reached the educated and uneducated alike. This music gave the members of Evangelical congregations a means of participating actively and with understanding in the worship of the new church.

Luther didn’t originally intend to write an order of service for general use in Evangelical churches. He had a great deal of respect, as we have seen, for the traditional music of the church. And he was hopeful that

Evangelical congregations, under the influence of the Gospel, would be able to determine for themselves what was edifying and what was offensive and unretainable. But the fast-moving events surrounding the Reformation, as well as the overzealous efforts of the more radical reformers to “purify” the mass or eliminate it completely, dictated otherwise. On Christmas Day 1521, while Luther was at the Wartburg, Carlstadt appeared at the Castle Church in Wittenberg in street clothes, without vestments, and conducted a “purified mass “ with various innovations that elicited even bolder iconoclasm from certain sections of the populace. The result is well known. In 1522 Kaspar Kantz published an “evangelical mass” in the vernacular. Thomas Muentzer’s liturgies added fuel to the controversy. The result was confusion. Luther spoke of “Widespread demand for German masses and services and the general dissatisfaction and offense that has been caused by .the great variety of new masses.” His immediate response to the confusion was to urge moderation, love and regard for consciences, especially the consciences of the weak. His long range response was the preparation of two service orders, one in Latin and one in German, orders he intended to be not imposed on the Evangelical churches, but offered as guidelines for their worship. Each congregation was free to use the suggested orders as they pleased, and incorporate changes and additions suited to their own requirements or stemming from local customs and traditions. Most did.

Luther’s *Formula Missae* of 1523 provided an entirely Latin mass for use primarily in the monasteries and cathedrals. The music that Luther envisioned for the Latin service was the traditional music of the church: Gregorian chant, and, where possible, polyphonic settings of appropriate texts by the choir. The Introit, Kyrie, Gloria, Gradual and Alleluia, Scripture lessons, Creed, Sanctus and Agnus Dei were to be chanted in simple recitative tones, along with appropriate dialogs. There was no specific provision for hymns, although Luther made it clear that hymns could be inserted after such portions of the liturgy as the Gradual, the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei.

Although he is remembered most as the champion of vernacular worship and hymns, Luther never lost his taste for the Latin language. For him the service seemed to be more festive when it was sung in Latin. Pure Latin masses, along with German ones, were still being held in Wittenberg in 1530. In fact, toward the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, after the initial novelty of the vernacular service had worn off a bit, the use of Latin in worship experienced a renaissance in many places. Throughout the century men who composed music for Evangelical congregations like Walther, Dietrich and Praetorius continued to provide polyphonic settings of the Latin ordinary and proper texts, as well as Latin settings of the canticles, antiphons, responsories and hymns used in Matins and Vespers. Choirs sang in Latin until the days of Bach.

By encouraging the continuation of Latin services Luther was by no means trying to prevent the common man from understanding the service. For those with no training in Latin he provided a vernacular service. But he wanted the educated to continue to enjoy the stately flavor of what was considered their language of learning. Evangelical schools required their students to study Latin. Latin classes, incidentally, were usually scheduled after lunch, reportedly to promote good digestion.

The *Deutsche Messe* of 1526 was a German vernacular service. While retaining a recognizable outline of the traditional mass structure, it radically altered parts of the service and made provision for a greater lay participation through vernacular hymns, with a corresponding reduction of material to be presented by the choir. In fact, almost nothing is mentioned in the service order about the choir, although it is clear that if one existed it was to take part in the service. The performance of this order was largely dependent on the local priests. Luther included a number of musical examples in the *Deutsche Messe* to indicate how the difficult parts of the service were to be chanted.

Luther’s skill as a musician is particularly evident in the *Deutsche Messe*. This was a vernacular service, but certainly not a cheap or irreverent service. His high standards of excellence and his musical taste prevented that. Instead of merely using a German translation with the old Latin tunes, he developed new tunes, which he felt would properly match music and words. He used some Gregorian melodies, but only those which seemed to fit the German words. He worked carefully at selecting the proper modes (forerunners of modern major and minor keys) for the chants, deciding on the octave tone for the Gospel, because Christ is benevolent and His

words are pleasant, and the sixth tone for the epistle, because St. Paul is a serious-minded apostle. Finally, the chants were simplified to one note per syllable.

In introducing his German service Luther, as he always did, urged caution. He did not want to encourage fanatics. He urged that the German service be introduced only in congregations where the majority of the members no longer understood Latin. Liturgical orders, he concluded, should be maintained for the sake of growth in faith. They should serve love and not be a hindrance to faith.

It may be instructive for us at this time to compare outlines of the Roman mass, Luther's *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe*.

### Mass

Confiteor

Introit

Kyrie (9-fold)

Gloria in Excelsis

Salutation and collect

Epistle

Gradual/Alleluia

Gospel with acclamation

Homily (optional)

Nicene Creed

Offertory and the secret

Preface

Salutation; sursum corda

Sanctus

Canon

Benedictus

Agnus Dei

Communion antiphon

Communion distribution

Post communion

Salutation/Benedicamus/Benediction

### Formula Missae

Introit

Kyrie ( 9-fold )

Gloria in Excelsis

Collect

Epistle

Gradual/Alleluia

Gospel

Nicene Creed (sung)

Sermon

Preparation of elements

Preface

Words of institution

Sanctus

Lord's Prayer

Agnus Dei

Communion distribution  
Post communion  
Collect  
Benedicamus  
Aaronic Benediction

*Deutsche Messe*

Hymn or German psalm  
Kyrie (3-fold)  
Collect  
Epistle  
German hymn  
Gospel  
Creed, to German versification  
Sermon  
Paraphrase of Lord's Prayer  
Admonition to communicants  
Words of institution  
Distribution of elements  
Hymns during communion  
(men commune first, then women)  
Collect  
Aaronic Benediction

In these orders two ideas predominate: the desire to retain as much as possible the historic practices of the church; and the desire to enlarge the involvement of the people as much as possible and appropriate. The similarity of Luther's worship orders to those of the ancient church surely flowed from and reinforced the Evangelical contention that Luther and his followers were not iconoclasts, but reformers, attempting not to form a new church, but to return the church to its apostolic roots.

Luther also encouraged the continued use of the medieval "hour" services, especially the Matins and Vespers. These services, too, were to follow the general pattern of the Roman services, consisting chiefly of psalms, lessons, hymns and prayers. He was particularly concerned that the entire psalter remain in regular use. It may surprise us to know that Luther did not favor long services. He felt that a one hour service was sufficient, lest the people be wearied. He did, however, conduct two services every Sunday, and daily services for the priests and students, with a systematic plan for reading the Scriptures completely through in one year.

In applying his musical training and philosophy to service orders, Luther did not eradicate the traditional music and liturgy of the church, but sought to reshape it, to fit the Gospel emphasis of the Evangelical church. The difference between the Roman mass and Luther's worship orders is not so much in structure as in emphasis. The Evangelical believer was not to view his attendance at corporate worship as a meritorious work, but as an opportunity and a privilege to hear and study God's Word, a blessed interaction by which God comes to His believers through Word and sacrament, and his believers approach Him in prayer and praise. While Luther's contribution to hymnody tended to overshadow interest in the chant, he actually wanted both hymns and chants to be sung by the congregation as well as by the choir. The difference in musical style between chants and hymns was much smaller than it is today. Among the chants Luther recommended and arranged for liturgical use, besides those of the *Deutsche Messe* were the "Agnus Dei" for use during communion, and the litany. The latter was a revision of the Roman litany, omitting the invocation for saints and the dead. Intercessions were made more specific, and the music for the responses was simplified. The litany was to be sung antiphonally. Choir I consisted of cantors or choir boys kneeling on the altar steps; choir II was a second choir with which the congregation was invited to join.



One of the grandest hymns of Christendom was the “Te Deum,” a confession of faith, song of praise and prayer for help. It was tremendously popular in the Middle Ages. Luther loved it, calling it a symbol after the Apostles’ and the Athanasian Creeds. Although several previous attempts at prose translations had been made, Luther proved more original and creative than his predecessors. His “Te Deum” consisted of five stanzas sung antiphonally, each with its own melodic pattern. The German “Te Deum” became as popular in the Lutheran Church as its Latin predecessor had been in the medieval church. Were he a pastor in our 20<sup>th</sup> Century WELS Luther would no doubt find great joy in teaching and using the complete Matins (p. 32) with its two stately chants, including the “Te Deum,” as well as the litany and musical chants listed as hymn numbers 661 to 668. Are our hymnals even broken in in those places?

Luther’s most ambitious contribution by far to the heritage of Lutheran church music was his work with hymns. True to his philosophy his hymns have been called “Altogether wonderful and powerful, without equal and unsurpassed by other masters ...songs emanating from a happy and confident spirit, out of a faith that God has given us through faith in His Son, our Savior.”<sup>xiii</sup> “*Nun freut euch lieben Christen g’mein*,” (1523) for example, was subtitled, “A hymn of thanks for the highest blessings which God has shown us in Christ.” Christ, Luther asserted, must be the subject and content of the church’s songs. Hymnody was a proclamation, a necessary sign of the universal priesthood of believers, the confession of the church. He wanted the people to sing heartily, “the spirit within the body and enjoying it greatly.”

It is again giving Luther too much credit to claim that he instituted congregational hymnody. He didn’t. He did, however, revive a long dormant treasure of the church and provide Gospel-oriented materials to make full use of that treasure, supplement it and pass it down to succeeding generations. Although there may have been hymns used in congregational worship much earlier (St. Paul, Col. 3: 16 17, speaks of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs), and although the Gnostics and the Arians seem to have quite adeptly promoted their heretical views by means of popular songs, Ambrose, bishop of Milan (ca. 335) is generally credited with being the tether of congregational hymnody, at least in the western church. Augustine tells us that an embattled Ambrose had to take refuge from the wrath of the Empress Justina in the basilica at Milan. While there he organized his followers who were with him into a band of constant worshipers, preaching, arranging courses of devotion and writing hymns in simple lyric meter, which he trained his followers to sing.

Following Ambrose’ beginning, popular hymn singing spread quickly through Italy and Gaul. An order of singing for the psalms was developed, and churches were opened for prayer hour services. But there was also opposition. The Ambrosian hymns were never really received in Rome, perhaps because the success with which heretical groups had used popular hymns had given hymns a rather shady reputation. There was also the misguided notion among some church leaders that only words taken directly from Scripture could be sung or spoken in the service. (The latter completely forgot, in their arguments, about already accepted parts of the liturgy like the Gloria.) When the monastic movement gained popularity, the ascetics took congregational singing with them into their private communities, and later on even the singing of the psalter became the exclusive possession of the monks. Early in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Benedict of Nursia issued his famous “Rule,” which reduced monks’ lives to clock-like regularity. Benedict made the singing of Latin hymns a part of the “Rule” and distributed the Ambrosian hymns and psalms among the various prayer hours. Meanwhile, the role of the congregation in the worship became quite passive. Vernacular singing was reduced to the “*leisen*,” folk hymns which were extensions of the “Kyrie, eleison” response; and these were tolerated only at special festivals. The Hussite movement in Bohemia encouraged congregational song. But the Council of Constance burned Huss at the stake and issued a stern warning to his followers to stop singing their popular hymns. The desire for congregational singing wasn’t completely exterminated in Bohemia, however. One of the key factors in a Hussite revival in Bohemia in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century was a publication of a hymnal for the Bohemian Brethren in 1501. Some Hussite hymns were later included in German Evangelical hymnals.

Luther’s Scriptural view of the universal priesthood of believers made it inevitable that provision should be made for the participation of the laity in the worship of the Evangelical churches. The reformer also appreciated what a powerful ally spiritual song could be in disseminating Evangelical doctrine. Restoration of popular congregational singing became a matter of the highest priority for Luther and the other early leaders of

the Evangelical church. Luther himself took the lead in finding, producing and supplying materials which would satisfy this need. And he urged others to follow. In a letter to Spalatin in 1524 the reformer sought to encourage all German poets to put God's Word into hymns, "Simple and familiar to the people, and yet, at the same time, pure and apt and the meaning clear and faithful to the Psalms."<sup>xiii</sup>

As Luther and his colleagues worked to provide a vernacular hymnody for Evangelical believers, they had basically four hymn sources at their disposal

- 1.) Official Latin hymnody, which included plainsong melodies; melodies from Latin sequences (hymnlike liturgical responses); and Latin popular hymns written by monks (music and texts)
- 2.) Pre-Reformation popular hymns, religious folk songs which had collected over the centuries (melodies and texts)
- 3.) Secular song melodies from Germany and occasionally other nations (songs only with new texts-*contrafacta*)
- 4.) Original, new melodies and texts written specifically for Evangelical worship, including paraphrases of the psalms and other portions of Scripture

His Augustinian training had given Luther a love and appreciation for the church's treasury of Latin hymns and sequences. In translating and reworking many of them he swung the emphasis away from the ideas of judgment and fear which originally permeated many of them to the mercy of God and the consolation of faith. Occasionally Luther added stanzas of his own to the Latin hymns he translated. He took one stanza that Notker Balbulus had written, for example, translated it and added six more stanzas of his own to bring the entire Christmas message to the people. Among the hymns that were adapted in some way from original Latin sources are:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1524 | <i>"Jesus Christus, Noster Salus"</i> - <i>"Jesus Christus, unser Heiland"</i> (TLH, #311) |
| 1524 | <i>"Victimae Pascali"</i> - <i>"Christ lag in Todesbanden"</i> (TLH, 0195)                 |
| 1524 | <i>"Veni, Redemptor Gentium"</i> - <i>"Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland"</i> (TLH, 095)        |
| 1524 | <i>"Veni, Creator Spiritus"</i> - <i>"Komm Gott Schoepfer, Heiliger Geist"</i> (TLH, 0233) |
| 1524 | <i>"A Solis Ortu Cardine"</i> - <i>"Christus wir sollen loben schon"</i> (TLH, 1104)       |
| 1529 | <i>"Da Pacem Domine"</i> - <i>"Verleih uns Frieden, gnaediglich"</i>                       |
| 1529 | <i>"Te Deum Laudamus"</i> - <i>"Herr Gott, dich loben wir"</i>                             |
| 1541 | <i>"Hostis Herodis Impie"</i> - <i>"Was fuerchtest du, Feind Herod, sehr"</i> (TLH, 0131)  |
| 1543 | <i>"O Lux Beats Trinitas"</i> - <i>"Der du bist drei in Ewigkeit"</i>                      |

The *leisen*, or vernacular hymns already in use for pilgrimages, processions and special occasions in the Roman Church, also furnished material for evangelical hymnody: Luther enlarged on some *leisen* and wrote several original hymns in the same style. "*Gott sei gelobet*" (ME, #313) was originally a Corpus Christi *leise*. Luther discontinued the Corpus Christi, but reworked the *leise* into a post-communion hymn. Thus he saved a popular folk hymn that the people, and he himself, cherished. "*Gott der Vater wohn uns bei*," (TLH, #247) was patterned after medieval pilgrims' songs invoking the saints. Luther's hymn invokes the Trinity. Because Luther felt that whatever could be given a new label and laden with the power of the Gospel could serve to propagate the Gospel's message and drive it deeper into the hearts of the people, he did not hesitate to take many different known sources and modes of expression, alter their contents and reshape their meanings without desolating their forms. In producing a hymnody for the Evangelical churches by this method he was eclectic in the best sense of the word.

Luther knew and admired the folk music heritage of the German people. He selected many of the materials for his hymnody from the style of music familiar to both educated and uneducated in Germany, the folk music of the meistersingers. The Guild of the Meistersingers, successors to the minnesingers, or wandering

troubadours, of the Middle Ages, flourished throughout Germany in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Schools of the meistersingers and highly organized music festivals became a part of cultural life in cities like Nuernberg, Augsburg, Strasbourg, Ulm and Breslau. Guild singers followed “a randomlike conglomeration of complicated tablature rules” as they improvised melodies and displayed their poetic skills at popular competitions. These activities left their permanent mark on the German lied, as well as on the German hymn. Indeed, a precise artistic distinction between folk songs and religious carols in the music of the meistersingers is sometimes hard to make, because the meistersingers frequently attempted to tell Biblical stories in epic style. Luther absorbed the techniques of the meistersingers and won the praise of accomplished singers like Spangenburg and Hans Sachs. One of the latter’s tunes, “*Silberweise*,” is somewhat similar to “*Ein feste Burg*.” These secular folk melodies, the music most familiar to the average German, were the melodies Luther and his co-workers used most frequently for their new hymns. The device by which new Gospel texts were set to already existing secular melodies is known as *contrafacta*. Examples of *contrafacta* include: “*Ach Gott von Himmel sieh darein*” (TLH, 0260), sung to the folk tune, “*Begierlich in dem Herzen mein*”; “*O Welt, ich musz dich lassen*,” adapted from “*Innsbruck ich musz dich lassen*”; and “*Von Himmel hoch*” sung to the tune of “*Aus fremden Mender*.” If a tune remained too closely associated with worldly lyrics, however, Luther generally sought another melody. He probably wrote an original melody for “*From Heaven Above*,” because the original, adapted melody was still being heard too frequently in taverns.

The Book of Psalms also provided Luther with a rich source of hymn material. Luther hymns based on psalms, in addition to “*Ein feste Burg*,” (Psalm 46) include “*Aus tiefer Not*,” (Psalm 130, TLH, #329); “*Ach Gott von Himmel sieh darein*,” (Psalm 12, TLH, #260); “*Es wollt uns Gott gnaedig sein*,” (Psalm 67, TLH, 0500). “*Aus tiefer Not*” became a favorite Evangelical funeral hymn. It was sung at the funeral of Electors Frederick and John, as well as at the funeral of Luther himself.

Although the word *chorale* is sometimes used to denote the whole body of Reformation hymnody, including the translated Latin hymns and the secular tunes adapted to sacred use, it can also be applied in a narrow sense to the original compositions, which included both texts and tunes, written by Luther and the other reformers themselves. Eggert calls the *chorale* a happy marriage between the cultured, ornamental, plainsong of the ancient church and the simple, hearty German folk song. Characteristics of the *chorale* (narrow sense) are rugged vitality; a modest melodic range; a variety of metric patterns; and a modal flavor. The content of the Lutheran *chorale* is Scriptural, confessional and perhaps most characteristic of all, objective. “*Ein feste Burg*,” “*Nun freut euch lieben Christen g’mein*,” and “*Es ist das Heil*,” the latter by Speratus, are *chorales* in the strict sense of the word.

The texts and tunes of the German meistersingers followed a remarkable system of textual and musical phrase treatment known as *barform* structure. In its simplest form *barform* consisted of one musical phrase and its repetition (*stollen*) and a concluding, contrasting section (*abgesang*), an AAB structure. This style was applied to a minimum of seven verse lines (two *stollen*, three *abgesang*). Numerous variations were possible. These *barforms* became the major device for the versification of many of the robust German *chorales* composed by Luther and his co-workers. “*Wenn meine Suend mich kraenken*,” (#152) “*Es ist gewisslich an der Zeit*,” TLH, #611); “*Es is das Heil uns kommen her*,” (TLH, #377). are *barform chorales*. In employing these *barforms* Luther and the others were following the artistic principle that perhaps best characterizes *chorale* composition: a careful, orderly adaption of melody, rhythm and versification to give proper emphasis to the Gospel contents of the text. Rhythmic notation, something fairly new in the early Sixteenth Century, was also used by *chorale* composers to give greater emphasis to the message. It appears as if the rhythm of most *chorales* was quite rapid. Historically speaking, there is no excuse to drag these *chorales* as we sing them today.

As a composer Luther preserved and extended the traditions of the *meistersingers* and was at home in the complex world of their *barforms*. But he was not just a preserver of the traditional and the familiar; he was an innovator as well. He was in touch with the most progressive aspects of music theory in his day, and is credited with being in the forefront of the musical world’s transition from the ancient church modes to the major and minor keys that we know today. Again, there was a theological purpose behind Luther’s pioneering musical spirit. He did not want all of his hymns to be austere, ascetic and restrained. The traditional church modes, for

the most part, projected that spirit. But Luther wanted his Gospel hymns to reflect Gospel joy. So he unashamedly made use of new hybrid modes, especially the Ionian and Aeolian modes which were the forerunners of major keys. Luther wanted both music and message to convey Gospel joy to the man in the pew and deliberately aimed at freedom, variety and popularity of style. Thus he brought new, contemporary, life-related sounds within the walls of the church. His four so-called personal hymns, "From Heaven Above," "A Mighty Fortress," "A New Song" and "Our Father in Heaven" are extroverted, optimistic manifestations of the faith, not to be passively listened to, but to be sung, to resound mightily within country chapels and huge cathedrals. They are like trumpet calls, proclaiming that God's salvation has come.

Though the vernacular hymns were a new innovation Luther did not want them to disrupt the orderliness of worship. In the Wittenberg Gottesdienstordnung of 1533 the following possibilities were suggested for the use of hymns in the service: at the Introit (except on festivals, when the Latin psalmody was still used); after the Gradual and Alleluia in alternation with the sequence, sung by the choir; after the Latin Credo, the German hymn "*Wir glauben all an einen Gott*"; after the sermon and following the Latin *Da pacem*, the German hymn "*Verleih uns gnaediglich*"; at the beginning of the distribution, in place of a versicle by the pastor; during the distribution, after the Latin *Sanctus* and, *Agnus Dei*. During the Reformation era the hymns were sung in unison by the congregation without instrumental accompaniment. The singing was led and supported by the choir. The greatest flurry of Luther's personal hymn-writing activity took place during the years 1523 and 1524. The spark that lit the flame seems to have been the martyrs' deaths of an Augustinian prior at Antwerp and two young men, Heinrich Voes and Johannes Esch. When they refused to renounce Luther's teachings, the prior was strangled in his cell and the youths were sentenced to death by the Inquisition and burned at the stake in Brussels on July 1, 1523. Luther wanted both to make known the bold witness of these men and squelch rumors started by the Catholics that the young monks had recanted. The song, written in the ballad form of the *meistereingem*, begins with the characteristic folk song phrase, "A new song here shall be begun." It first appeared on a broadsheet in the fall of 1523.

In May of 1524 a peddler was arrested in the market place at Magdeburg for singing Lutheran hymns and selling leaflets containing the hymns.irate protests by the citizens, however, led the mayor to release the peddler immediately. The German hymn movement was beginning to catch fire.

The first Lutheran hymnal, the *Achtliederbuch* (1524) contained four hymns attributed to Luther. A hymnbook published in Erfurt that same year contained eighteen of his hymns. It is thought that 23 of the 36 hymns ascribed to Luther by scholars today were written in a 12-month period from 1523 - 24. Quite possibly his Bible translation activity and the time he spent preparing the catechisms curtailed his hymnwriting activity somewhat after that. Our present Lutheran Hymnal contains twenty hymns that it credits to Luther as original texts, three of Luther's translations of hymns and two original melodies, "*Jesaia den Propheten*," (0249); and "*Ein feste Burg*," 4262). I personally am surprised that "*Von Himmel Hoch*" is not also credited to Luther as an original tune.

Many of the Luther hymns have a fascinating history. "*Ein feste Burg*," the battle hymn of the Reformation and without a doubt the best known of all the Lutheran hymns, is supposed to have appeared in hymnals in 1528 and 1529, although the earliest extant version is from an Erfurt hymnal of 1531. Luther wrote the hymn to explain and apply the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm to the church of his day and its struggles. It was probably written in 1527 - 28, when the Evangelicals had fallen on hard times between the first and second Diet of Speyer. Frederick the Great called this hymn "God Almighty's Grenadier March." And Thomas Carlyle, who produced a rugged English translation said of the melody, "It jars upon our ears ...yet there is something in it like the sound of Alpine avalanches, or the first murmur of earthquake, in the very vastness of which dissonance a higher unison is revealed to us."<sup>xiv</sup> Never has one hymn been adapted so often. In 1730 J.S. Bach used it as the theme for his Reformation Cantata. Beethoven's canon on the melody was finished in 1825. Meyerbeer's opera used it; Liszt adapted it as a festival overture for organ; and Mendelssohn's *Reformation Symphony* revolves around it. It is said that the troops of Gustavus Adolphus marched into battle singing it. Today even Roman Catholics sing it, although the implications in that are not exactly what Luther would have appreciated.

Many of Luther's hymns were directed against what he considered the two greatest enemies of the church - the Pope and the Turk. "*Verleih uns gnaediglich*" was written when the Turks were pressing against the west in 1528.

In 1541, when the Suleiman Turks had overrun all of Hungary and parts of Austria and were knocking at the gates of Vienna, all Germany trembled with apprehension. Several days of national humiliation and prayer were ordered, and services of intercession were held in all the churches. For one of these services in Wittenberg Luther wrote, "*Erhalt uns Herr, bei deinem Wort*" (TLH,#261). The original words are quite a bit sharper than the translation used in our hymnbook. They read:

Lord, keep us in Thy Word and work  
Restrain the murderous pope and Turk  
Who fain would tear from off thy throne  
Christ Jesus, Thy beloved Son.<sup>xv</sup>

Needless to say, this hymn was not a favorite in Roman circles. After the Augsburg Interim its public singing was forbidden on pain of death. A Bavarian duke is quoted as having told his servants:

"For aught I care you may gormandize, get drunk and profligate, only do not become Lutheran and sing the infamous hymn "*Erhalt uns Herr Herr bei deinem Wort.*"<sup>xvi</sup>

"If we wish to train children," Luther once said, "We must become children with them." "*Von Himmel hoch*" (TLH, 985) is simple and folklike in structure. Luther probably wrote it for his own children, to describe the visit of the angels at Christ's birth. The reformer's tender side is shown in the universally loved stanza:

Ah dearest Jesus, holy child  
Make Thee a bed soft, undefiled  
Within my heart, that it may be  
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

The German people welcomed the introduction of hymn singing into their churches with remarkable enthusiasm. As the new German hymns left the hands of Luther and rolled off the presses in leaflets, broadsheets and hymnals, they were eagerly snatched up by the people. They took them home; committed them to memory; sang them at work and social gatherings. In the worship services the congregation would join the choir as it sang the hymns in unison or alternate with the choir. On occasion the choir would accompany the congregation with four and five part harmonizations by Walther or some other composer. The organ, however, was not used for accompanying the congregational singing until a century after Luther's death.

One reason that the congregational singing caught on so quickly, especially in the rural parishes, was that the people loved to sing. In this respect they were less inhibited and self conscious than many Lutherans seem to be today. There were other important factors as well. But the most important was the stimulating power of the Gospel. The Gospel had only recently come to those who had long languished in the bondage of work righteousness, bringing its good news with urgency and freshness. The joyful nature of that good news made those who received it feel like singing; and it gave them something to sing about. Under Luther's hand vernacular hymns came forth breathing the spirit of the Gospel, proclaiming the power of Christ, speaking in a universal way to every Christian, the ideal vehicles for the expression of the German people's newfound Gospel joy. "Luther's hymns have condemned more souls than have his writings and sermons" was the Jesuit Konzenius' backhanded acknowledgement of the popularity of Lutheran vernacular song.

The amazing popularity of the new chorales and of congregational singing in general was attested to by a flood of new hymnals. The *Achtliederbuch* (1524) was the first Lutheran hymnal. It contained eight hymns, four by Luther, three by Speratus, and one by an anonymous author, quite possibly Justus Jonas, and was

published by an enterprising Nuernberg printer named Jobs Gutknecht. The first Luther hymns were “*Nun freit euch*” (TLH 0377); “*Ach Gott von Himmel*” (TLH, #260); “*Aus tiefer Not*”(TLH, 0329); and “*Es spricht der unweisen Mund.*” The title page of the *Achtliederbuch* was inscribed:

Some Christian hymns, canticles and psalms made according to the pure Word of God by several very learned men to sing in church as is in part already practiced in Wittenberg.<sup>xvii</sup>

Three different editions of the *Achtliederbuch* appeared in 1524.

In the summer of that same year the *Achtliederbuch* was followed by two hymnals called *Enchiridia*, published by two different printers at Erfurt. These collections, about three times as large as the *Achtliederbuch*, are practically identical. Each contained 18 hymns by Luther. From 1524 on, each new year witnessed the publication of more and larger hymn collections. The Reformation produced close to a hundred hymnals from 1524 to Luther’s death in 1546. Wherever the Reformation gained entrance publishers vied with each other to bring out better and more comprehensive editions. The invention of printing made it possible for this music to be published very quickly and to appear in many different places. New hymn publications appeared almost simultaneously in Magdeburg, Nuernberg, Erfurt, Wittenberg, Breslau, Strassbourg, Augsburg and Mainz. From the *Achtliederbuch* on, the hymnals provided music for the hymns they offered. Most gave only the melody lines. Gradually each hymn tended to acquire a distinct melody with which it was ultimately identified and became popular. Later editions settled on a single melody for each hymn.

Literary piracy, especially of music, was already a problem in Luther’s day. Many unauthorized publications of chorale collections contained chorales that had been tampered with, and, in Luther’s opinion, ruined. Printed on the title page of several editions of hymnals whose publication he approved was this warning:

Many false masters new hymns indite  
Be on your guard and judge them aright  
Where God is building His church and Word  
There comes the devil with lie and sword.<sup>xviii</sup>

The *Erfurter Enchiridion* became the basic Evangelical hymnal of the early Reformation era. Other hymnal editions worthy of note include *Etliche Christliche Gesenge and Psalme*, 1525; *Klugsche Gesangbuch*, 1529 (also known as *Geistliche Lieder aufs neu gebessert zu Wittenberg*); *Schumann Gesangbuch*, 1539; and *Baptsche Gesangbuch*, 1545. The latter three were named after the printers who published them. The Klug hymnal contained fifty hymns and melodies, 28 of which were attributed to Luther. The Klug hymnal went through four editions. The fourth includes Luther’s last five hymns: “*Der du bist drei in Ewigkeit*”; “*Was fuerchtest du, Feind Herod, sehr*” (TLH, #131); “*Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam*”; “*Erhalt uns Herr bei deinem Wort* (TLH #261); and “*Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schaar*,” (TLH, #103). Printer Klug made numerous mistakes in the 1543 editions, and Luther was dissatisfied with what appeared to be shoddy workmanship. So he asked Valentin Bapst, a Leipzig printer, to publish a hymnbook. Bapst considered the commission an honor and produced a beautiful, complete hymnal, the finest of the era. Its 129 texts and 98 melodies contained all of Luther’s 36 hymns and brought Luther’s work on behalf of Evangelical hymnody to a close. In addition to the warning against false hymnists and tamperers reported from the Klug edition the following imprecation was also included:

God grant that it (this hymnbook) may cause great loss and harm to the Roman pope, who through his damned, intolerable and abominable laws has caused nothing but howling, mourning and grief in the whole world. Amen.<sup>xix</sup>

Luther’s encouragement and example sparked a tremendous flurry of musical activity in the Evangelical church. Others followed his lead. Friends such as Jonas, Eber, Walther and Cruciger followed his example in

writing hymns. Even after Luther's death the furious pace of Evangelical hymnody continued. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century hymnbooks with as many as 600 hymns were in use. At the time of Bach over 75,000 German hymns had been produced as the chorale tradition passed from Luther to Nicholai and Hermann to Crueger, Gerhardt, Freylinghausen and Bach.

1524 also marked the beginning of musical composition based -on the chorales. Johann Walter (1496 -1570), Luther's friend and musical co-worker, published *Geistliche Gesangbuechlein*, which contained polyphonic settings for three to six voices in the style of the Flemish motet, with the melody in the tenor. In 1586 Osiander published *50 Spiritual Songs and Psalms*, set with the melodies in the upper voice and simple, homophonic accompaniment. George Rhau's *Neue Deutsche geistliche Gesenge fuer die Gemeinen Schulen* (1544) became the classical anthology of choral settings of chorale tunes by favorite composers of the Reformation era. In a later age men like Schuetz, Pachelbel, Buxtehude and Bach, inspired by Luther's example, could survive the Counter-Reformation and the cheap, borrowed music of the Age of Pietism, and preserve to us the joy and beauty, edification and jubilation of the Lutheran chorales. Throughout its history the Lutheran chorale has been and continues to be the basis and fountainhead of a great body of church music.

### Conclusion

What does a study of Luther's music accomplishments have to teach us today? If Luther were a 20<sup>th</sup> Century WEIS cleric or professor, what would he think of some of the recent innovations in church music? Would he use rock music in the service of the Gospel? What would he think of *Lutheran Worship*? What advice would he give us as we study the question of a new hymnal for our synod? Too often, I think, Luther is indiscriminately quoted or embraced in support of one's pet personal theories. Our Lutheran musical heritage, it seems to me, is best served and preserved by avoiding extremes. Yes, Luther was an innovator. He successfully appropriated music taken from the workaday world for use in worship. But he had high standards. He rejected the inappropriate and pronounced unfit for church use that which could not be freed of its identification with the lowlife of the world. Without a doubt, Luther would fail to find most of the rock music of our day, some of which has actually been dedicated to the service of Satan, adaptable for proclaiming the Gospel. He might not even classify some of it as music at all. "Wicked gut scrapers" would be about as complimentary as he would become. On the other hand Luther would be equally repelled by any attempt on our part to replace the freedom of his method with the letter of his personal tunes. Music to Luther was a gift of God. And he welcomed a contribution of available music from any source, if it could be adapted to holy words and consecrated by holy association. Appreciation of and greater use of the Reformation era chorales is surely to be commended. But insisting that God can properly be worshiped only by means of Reformation chorales isn't.

And what about the new hymnal? The number of hymnal editions published in his own lifetime would certainly argue against Luther's objection to the concept of a new hymnal edition. But again, there are cautions. Luther cherished the traditional music of the church. He refused to advocate change for change's sake. And he urged against unduly disturbing the common man. And all the new hymns he did include in his new hymnals were hymns of high musical quality and Gospel content, hymns in which text and tune together gave thanks for salvation and glorified God. If these are truly the standards that are set and followed in selecting hymns for inclusion in a new hymnbook, we don't have to fear such a hymnbook. There will, of course, be a certain amount of subjectivity in deciding which specific hymns fit these standards; we may disagree with each other as to the appropriateness of certain selections. Perhaps a study like this can at least help us agree on some of the guidelines. May we all remember, too, that none of Luther's hymns or hymnbooks were ever forced on the German people. They won their way into the people's hearts and lives. And their ultimate purpose was to proclaim God's Word and give Him the glory.

Whether we realize it or not, even whether we like it or not, you and I are among the musicians of the church. Luther's high regard for music resulted in his demanding musical excellence of himself and of those he trained for the church's ministry. Such excellence has given our church a heritage that Luther himself would place right next to our Gospel heritage. Luther would want us to work to preserve both in their pristine excellence. God grant that we do.

When sadness comes to you and threatens to gain the upper hand, then say: Come, I must play our Lord Christ a song on the organ, for Scripture tells me that He loved to hear joyful song and stringed instruments. And strike the keys with a will, and sing out until the thoughts disappear, as David and Elisha did. If the devil returns and suggests cares or sad thoughts, then defend yourselves with a will and say, “Get out, devil, I must now sing and play to my Lord Christ.”<sup>xx</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> As quoted by E.E. Ryden, *The Story of Christian Hymnody* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 57.

<sup>ii</sup> Walter Buszin, *Luther on Music*, (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1958), p. 4.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>iv</sup> Ewald Plass (ed.), “Music”, *What Luther Says, II* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 908.

<sup>v</sup> Theo. Hoelty-Nickel, “Luther and Music”, *Luther and Culture*, (Decorah: Luther College Press, 1960) p. 148.

<sup>vi</sup> Buszin, *Luther on Music*, p. 3.



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- vii As quoted by Walter Buszin, "Luther as a Creative Musician", *Concordia Theological Monthly* (XV, 9, September 1944). P. 626.
- viii Buszin, *Luther on Music*, p. 12.
- ix Ibid, p. 9.
- x Ryden, op. cit. p. 62.
- xi Johannes Riedel, *The Lutheran Chorale*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1967), p. 35.
- xii Ulrich Leopold (ed). *Luther's Works, Vol. 53*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 155.
- xiii Buszin, *Luther and Music*, p. 9.
- xiv Ryden, op. cit. p. 52.
- xv Ibid, p. 66.
- xvi Idem.
- xvii Leupold, op. cit. p. 192.
- xviii Ibid, p. 330.
- xix Ibid, p. 333.
- xx Plass, op. cit. p. 983.