

## The Historical Development of the Lutheran Chorale

Fred L. Precht

[Editorial note]

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This article, which appeared in the inaugural edition of *Church Music* (66.1): *The Hymn in Christian Worship*, demonstrates his consummate knowledge in the area of the Lutheran chorale.

- Dr. James Freese

### *Pre-Reformation Developments in Germany*

One cannot conceive of the Lutheran Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century without thinking of the stalwart chorales that were written in this century to promote the cause of the Gospel. Furthermore, these hymns were destined to become one of the greatest single factors in the development of music as an art, for “the chorale melodies run like golden threads through nearly all the finest work of the German composers.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Archibald Wayet Wilson, *The Chorales, Their Origin and Influence* (London: The Faith Press, Ltd. 1920), p. 6. Space limitations prompt this article to restrict itself to the development of the chorale as a congregational hymn. It also omits developments in Scandinavia. For further information on the latter see Robert Thornton, “Scandinavian Hymnody.” *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, ed. John Julian (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892), pp. 998-1003; also Edwin Liemohn, *The Chorale: Through Four Hundred Years of Musical Development as a Congregational Hymn* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), *passim*.

The task of defining the chorale is a difficult one. It is considerably easier to state what is chorale-like (*choralmässig*) than to give a precise definition. Some definitions one sees stress the tune aspect, others both tune and text. Present purposes will consider the chorale as the congregational hymn of the evangelical church, comprised of both tune and text.

The beginnings of the Lutheran chorale are discernible many centuries prior to the Reformation. The Teutonic tribes, prior to their conversion to Christianity, had developed numerous hymns to their deities. After their conversion they turned their hymns “no less ardently to the service of their new allegiance.”<sup>2</sup> Wachernagel lists 1,448 religious lyrics in the German language composed between the years 868 and 1518.<sup>3</sup>

Up to the 11<sup>th</sup> century German church song was largely restricted to the singing of the *Kyrie eleison*, *Christe eleison*, for Latin hymns in the Mass were sung by the clerics. People sang these phrases on all possible occasions – at burials, processions, pilgrimages, and marches into battle. Before long, hymns with a *Kyrie eleison* refrain appeared. These gradually became known as *Kirleisen* or *Leisen*. They exhibit the early form of what might be called the German congregational hymn.<sup>4</sup>

Numerous controversies between the German rulers and the papacy in the 13<sup>th</sup> century furthered the cause of nationalism, which resulted in numerous vernacular hymns and songs. The *Christ is erstanden* was well known at this time and became the pattern for other songs. *Nun bitten wir den heiligen Geist* was a favorite.

The songs of troubadour and trouvère, minnesinger and meistersingers<sup>5</sup> kept the secular life well supplied with popular songs, many of which gradually infiltrated into the church in an unofficial way.<sup>6</sup>

Not to be overlooked are the ecstatic songs which the fanatical Flagellants and other such enthusiasts of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries utilized in their penitential processions.<sup>7</sup> Their songs (*Geisslerlieder*) often remarkably resemble the Lutheran chorale.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Dickinson, *Music in the History of the Western Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> Phillip Wachernagel, *Das deutsche Kirchenlied von der ältesten Zeit bis zu Anfang des XVII. Jahrhunderts, II* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1867), 1 – 1166.

<sup>4</sup> Dickinson, p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> One of the foremost composers was Hans Sachs (1494 – 1576), who devoted his talents to the spreading of the Reformation doctrine. In general, however, the Meisterlieder focused undue attention on the Virgin Mary, they were too long, too individualistic and subjective, and hence unsuited for church use. See Hoffmann von Fallersleben, *Geschichte des deutschen Kirchenliedes bis auf Luthers Zeit*, (Hildesheim: Geor Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Reprint, 1965), pp. 454 – 479; also Archibald T. Davison and Willi Apel, *Historical Anthology of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), No. 24; also Arnold Shering, *Geschichte der Music in Beispielen* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1931), No. 787.

<sup>6</sup> Erik Routley, *Hymns and Human Life* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 30

<sup>7</sup> See Fallersleben, pp. 130ff.

<sup>8</sup> See “Maria, Muoter” in Schering, No. 25; also Gustav Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1954), pp. 238 – 240.

The mystics of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, following the lead of Master Eckard of Strasbourg and Cologne, produced numerous songs of an inward, spiritual quality, voicing the joy of a personal love and union with the Redeemer.<sup>9</sup>

In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was a strong movement toward the vernacular in Germany. In 1410 a Schleswig Synod under Bishop Wenzel of Breslau decreed that the sermon, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed should be in the German language. Fallersleben attests that German songs were sung throughout the length and breadth of the land. *Christ ist erstanden* was perhaps the most popular of all. The decree of the Synod of Schwerin in 1492 indicates without a doubt that German hymns were sung in public worship.<sup>10</sup>

Numerous translations of Latin church songs made their appearance in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Already at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century there was a German version of the Credo, *Wir glauben all in [sic] einen Godt*, translated by Nicolaus von Kosel.<sup>11</sup> A German version of the Te Deum appeared in Brunswick around the year 1490.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, secular songs were often parodied into spiritual songs; secular melodies were often coupled to sacred texts, a practice, later known as contrafacting, which became an important avenue for supplying the chorale texts with tunes. Mixed songs, partly Latin and partly German, [macaronic] were popular with the people. A well-known example is *In dulci jubilo*.

The religious and political movements in Bohemia and Moravia and the strong effects which the martyrdom of John Hus produced in Germany dare not be minimized. Hus was virtually the founder of Bohemian hymnody, writing hymns in both Latin and Czech. The Utraquists published a hymnal in 1501 containing 92 hymns; the Unitas Fratrum in 1505 came out with a hymnal containing 400 hymns.<sup>13</sup>

On the eve of the Reformation there was thus available to Martin Luther and his collaborators a ready source of hymnody, liturgical, ecstatic, and devotional in character, hymns that the common people had come to love and that had become a part of their religious life. It remained for Luther and his associates to rework and recast those hymns worthy of such endeavor and to use them, sternly disciplined and immensely powerful, in the cause of the pure Gospel.

### *The Lutheran Reformation*

While the Reformation was still in its infancy, Luther became acutely conscious that one of the most urgent needs of the new church was something to sing. His efforts toward that end grew largely out of his concern for liturgical reform. As early as 1523 in

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<sup>9</sup> See Fallersleben, pp. 86ff.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 152ff.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 357 – 358.

<sup>13</sup> Dickinson, p. 233.

his *Formula Missae* he bemoans the lack of vernacular songs that people might sing during the Mass, and he encourages German poets to compose evangelical hymns for this purpose.<sup>14</sup>

This condition was short-lived. With Luther as their precept and example poets rose to supply the want. And thus, there began the great stream of hymnody that flowed in a spate for some two centuries. Beginning with what is known as the *Achtliederbuch* in 1524, a rash of hymnals appeared, prepared and compiled by such men as Johann Walter, the famous cantor at Torgau, Justus Jonas, Joseph Klug, and Valentin Babst. From 1524 to Luther's death in 1546 there appeared no less than one hundred hymnals. Wherever the Reformation made inroads, publishers vied to produce better and more hymnals.<sup>15</sup> Some of these early hymnals were under Luther's direct auspices. It is significant to note that the first of such hymnals is the *Geistlich Gesangbüchlein*, edited by his friend and musical advisor, Johann Walter, and published in Wittenberg toward the end of the year 1524. This was actually a collection of polyphonic motets designed for the choir with the cantus firmus, or melody, in the tenor.<sup>16</sup> Here was one method of familiarizing the congregation with these chorales. Twenty-four of the 38 hymns in this collection are by Luther, approximately two thirds of his total output. The sudden bursting forth of the Lutheran chorale under the impetus of Luther represents a thrilling chapter in the history of the Reformation.

Luther's hymns, so far as their source is concerned, can conveniently be grouped into five categories.<sup>17</sup> The Psalter furnished the immediate inspiration for the first group. The most celebrated and well-known in this class is "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,"<sup>18</sup> suggested by Psalm 46. Then there are less bold paraphrases such as "From Depths of Woe" (*TLH*, 329),<sup>19</sup> based on Psalm 130. Second, there are paraphrases of other portions of Scripture, such as "Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old" (*TLH*, 249), based on Is. 6:1-4, "In Peace and Joy I Now Depart" (*TLH*, 137), and "Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above" (*TLH*, 458). Third, there are the transcriptive translations of Latin office hymns and antiphons, approximately 12 in number. There is, for example, the buoyant "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord" (*TLH*, 224), based on *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, and "Now Praise We Christ, the Holy One" (*TLH*, 104), derived from *A solis ortus cardine*. The next group includes the pre-Reformation *Leisen*, songs which Luther

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<sup>14</sup> *Luther's Works*, American Edition, "Liturgy and Hymns," ed. Ulrich S. Leupold, 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 36-37.

<sup>15</sup> For a listing of such hymnals, see *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 35 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1923), *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> See Johann Walter, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Otto Schröder (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag: St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Eduard Emil Koch, *Geschichte des Kirchenlieds und Kirchengesangs*, I (Stuttgart: Chr. Belsersche Verlagshandlung, 1866), 240 – 242.

<sup>18</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal*, Authorized by the Synods Constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), No. 262. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *TLH*.

<sup>19</sup> In the opening phrase with the low melody on "depths" is an interesting early example of "pictorial" music.

recast and revised, examples of which are “We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost” (*TLH*, 231) and “God the Father, Be Our Stay” (*TLH*, 247). Finally, there are original hymns such as “Flung to the Heedless Winds” (*TLH*, 259), commemorating the burning at the stake in Brussels in 1523 of the two Augustinian monks Heinrich Voes and Johann Esch, the first martyrs of the Reformation. This hymn is modeled after the earlier folk ballads. Included in this category is also “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice” (*TLH*, 387), a clear and forceful expression of the whole plan of God’s salvation for sinful mankind.

At first sight Luther’s texts may strike one as being awkward and clumsy; they lack the artfully modulated diction, the subtle and far-reaching imagination, the metrical regularity one seeks in ordinary poetry. It must be remembered that the rules of German poetry were not organized and standardized until the reform of Martin Opitz (1597 – 1639).<sup>20</sup> One must not consider Luther’s verse structure in terms of long and short, weak and strong, but following the pattern of the meistersingers, his is a matter of counting syllables, with every syllable receiving a strong accent, and the accents often varying from line to line. Luther, Moser says, simply counted off the syllables with his fingers, and with every syllable he pounded the table.<sup>21</sup> Luther was not hampered with the rigidity of metrical feet; he “was able to stress certain words irrespective of the tyranny of ‘light’ and ‘heavy’ accents.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the flexibility of the plainsong melodies which Luther adapted to his texts readily lent itself to the rhythm of speech.<sup>23</sup> The chorale thus differs from, say, the English hymn by its greater variety in length and the internal structure of its stanzas. The chorales are of manifold rhythm, thereby avoiding the deadening uniformity of, for instance the common meter, long meter, and short meter.<sup>24</sup>

Luther’s speech is that of the people – idiomatic, penetrating, often coarse and rugged. But it is the speech of a tremendously earnest man concerned with a momentous religious cause. The simple, home-made, domestic form of these chorales went straight to the heart of the common man. Small wonder that few translations have been able to reproduce the ruggedness, particularly when attempting to turn his verse forms into later and more generally accepted metric patterns.

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<sup>20</sup> Phillip Schaff, “German Hymnody,” *A Dictionary of Hymnody*, ed. John Julian (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892), p. 415.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Joachim Moser, *Die melodien der Lutherlieder*, No. 4 in the series *Welt des Gesangbuchs* (Leipzig: Gustave Schloessmanns Verlagbuchhandlung, 1935), 31ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Luther’ Works*, American Edition, 53, 198.

<sup>23</sup> Concerning the meter of Luther’s hymns see also Hans Joachim Moser, *Die evangelische Kirchenmusik in Deutschland* (Berlin-Darmstadt: Verlag Carl Merseburger, 1954), pp. 42ff. Ernst Sommer exhibits a novel approach when he insists that Luther created his text with the melody in mind and that any analysis of Luther’s metrical devices must be undertaken from the musical rather than from the textual contents of the various stanzas. The result of Luther’s procedure, he says, brings about great discrepancies between textual and musical accents. Ernst Sommer, “Die Metric in Luthers Liedern,” *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie*, edited by Konrad Ameln, Christhard Mahrenholz, and Karl Ferdinand Müller, IX (Kassel: Johannes Stauda Verlag, 1964), 29-81.

<sup>24</sup> Compare *TLH* 6, 23, 25, 34, 77, 96, 143, to cite but a few examples.

Luther was also aware of the advantages of the sung Word over against the spoken Word. In his Preface to Johann Walter's *Geistlich Gesangbüchlein* he points up [*sic*] that the tunes are to assist the text in becoming living voices of the Gospel.<sup>25</sup>

The hymnals of the 16<sup>th</sup> century furnish each hymn with its proper tune; in some instances, a specific tune is mated to several hymns. With the exception of certain choir or polyphonic editions, such as Walter's hymnal of 1524, only the melody is given.

For centuries the debate has raged over Luther's contribution as a melodist or tune-maker. Early 16<sup>th</sup>-century estimates credited him with far too many melodies; later 19<sup>th</sup>-century estimates denied that he composed any.<sup>26</sup> Granted that Luther appropriated the tunes of the *Leisen* hymns and the Latin office hymns, what about the tunes to his new and original hymns such as "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" or "From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee"? Musicologists today are inclined to ascribe his authorship to most, if not all, of the new tunes that appeared with his hymns, particularly in Wittenberg hymnals, and they credit him with having arranged some of the older tunes.<sup>27</sup>

In line with the prevailing type of church music in his day, the majority of Luther's tunes are in the modal system of plainsong or Gregorian chant. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century began to mark the transition from the modes to the major-minor system, some of his tunes strongly reflect major tonality.<sup>28</sup> In general these tunes exhibit a fusion of the exalted character of plainsong with the intense musical feeling of the German people as expressed in their folk songs. This, together with their air of Christian optimism and cheerfulness, made the chorale all the more practical and usable.

The often-complex rhythmic structure of the early chorale tunes has evoked numerous questions. Furthermore, the varied forms of notation complicate matters. The question most frequently voiced is: Were the congregations, who had heretofore done little singing in worship, able to sing such intricate rhythms? Most of these early chorale tunes are known to us from their employment as the *cantus firmus* in polyphonic compositions. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the organ did not support congregational singing, but when such singing was not in unison without accompaniment, the motet choir did the accompanying. This meant that the congregation sang an inner voice, albeit the main melody (*cantus firmus*), with the choir furnishing the harmony and embellishment. While some of Luther's tunes may thus have been given their polyrhythmic form by Walter for the sake of such polyphony, it is very possible that the congregations often

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<sup>25</sup> *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 53, 316.

<sup>26</sup> Bäumker was especially critical of Luther's musical talents and of his influence on the development of the art of music. Wilhelm Bäumker, *Zur Geschichte der Tonkunst* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1881), p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 53, 202. See also Konrad Ameln, *The Roots of German Hymnody of the Reformation Era*, Church Music Pamphlet Series No. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), and Carl von Winterfeld, *Der evangelische Kirchengesang und sein Verhältnis zur Kunst des Tonsatzes*, II (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1844), 89ff.

<sup>28</sup> Compare, for instance, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come," *TLH*, 85.

sang the tunes in more simple rhythmic forms. The early hymnals often present tunes in varied rhythmic forms. This naturally compounds the problem of attempting to declare which rhythmic version is the only correct one. That the polyrhythmic version of “A Mighty Fortress” appeared as a unison melody some 15 years before its polyphonic counterpart substantiates the opinion that the ordinary layman may readily have leaped the rhythmic hurdles. It was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the isometric form of this tune with equal quarter or half notes supplanted the polyrhythmic form.<sup>29</sup>

Some of the great hymnists, inspired by Luther’s example and closely associated with him in this early period, are Paul Speratus (1493 – 1551), remembered especially for his “Salvation unto Us Has Come” (*TLH*, 377), Justas Jonas (1493 – 1555), Elizabeth Creuziger (d. 1535), and Lazarus Spengler (1479 – 1534) with his “All Mankind Fell in Adam’s Fall” (*TLH*, 369). Poets not immediately associated with him are Johannes Schneising (d. 1567), especially esteemed for his “In Thee Alone, O Christ, My Lord” (*TLH*, 319), which as someone has said, presents the Christian life in a nutshell; Johann Mathesius (1504 – 1565), whose “My Inmost Heart Now Raises” (*TLH*, 548) has enjoyed wide acceptance; and Nikolaus Herman (ca. 1480 – 1561) with his “When My Last Hour Is Close at Hand” (*TLH*, 594). Herman created a type of hymn in which the more simple circumstances of the Christian faith are presented.

Many excellent hymns were first introduced in Low German, the language of Northern Germany. Of these, two hymns, commonly ascribed to Nikolaus Decius (ca. 1485 – 1546), became immensely popular as metrical settings of the Ordinary – “All Glory Be to God on High” (*TLH*, 237) and “Lamb of God, Pure and Holy” (*TLH*, 146).

The hymns of the Bohemian Brethren also enriched the treasure of German hymnody during this period, with Michael Weisse (1480 – 1534) as their foremost poet. And the interchange of hymns in the Lutheran hymnbooks, and those of the Bohemian Brethren, numbering approximately 130, is noteworthy.<sup>30</sup>

The hymns of this period breathe the bold, confident, and joyous spirit of justifying faith in its objective universality. They speak the great truths of salvation not in dry doctrinal tones or individualistic reflection but in the form of testimony and confession.

### *Developments ca. 1577 – 1617*

The productive period of hymnody in the Lutheran Church came to a close with the signing of the Formula of Concord in 1577, the event which gave final shape to its creed after the violent doctrinal controversies.<sup>31</sup> It was inescapable that these disputes should have their effects on subsequent hymnody. Dry, dogmatic, didactic, and oftentimes bombastic verses became the vogue. There were rhymed Epistles and

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<sup>29</sup> *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 53, 205.

<sup>30</sup> Wilhelm Nelle, *Geschichte des deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieds*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Hildesheim: Geor Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Reprint 1962), p. 73.

<sup>31</sup> Phillip Schaff, p. 415.

Gospels; the poetic expression became weak and unyielding.<sup>32</sup> However, there were still poets who produced an appreciable number of splendid hymns characterized by objectivity, childlike naïveté, and a general popular vein. Among such poets are Nikolaus Selnecker (1528 – 1592) with his “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word” (*TLH*, 261); Bartholomaeus Ringwaldt (1530 – 1599) with his “The Day Is Surely Drawing Near” (*TLH*, 611); Martin Behm (1557 – 1622) with his Passion hymns; Valerius Herberger (1562 – 1627) nicknamed the “Little Luther,” with his “Farewell, I Gladly Bid Thee” (*TLH*, 407); and Ludwig Helmbold (1532 – 1598), often called the “German Asaph,” with his “From God Shall Naught Divide Me” (*TLH*, 393). It was Helmbold who wrote a complete metrical version of the Augsburg Confession. There is also Martin Schalling (1532 – 1608) with his heartwarming “Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart” (*TLH*, 429), and Phillip Nicolai (1556 – 1608), who wrote what are known as the king and queen of chorales – “Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying” (*TLH*, 609) and “How Lovely Shines the Morning Star” (*TLH*, 546).

### *Developments 1618 – 1675*

Toward the end of the previous period the strong, confessional, objective character of hymnody began to wane, and there appeared a tendency away from the confessional hymn to the hymn of Christian testimony. The objective faith is now brought into closer relationship to actual life situations, a fact evidenced particularly in the cross-and-comfort hymns. Sperber gives two factors that contributed to the character of the hymns of this period: (1) inwardly, the sorrow and afflictions of the Thirty Years’ War (1618 – 1648); (2) outwardly, the new activity in the realm of poetry.<sup>33</sup> These combined the true faith, hope, and trust in God with a true folklike and Biblical expression.

It was Martin Opitz (1597 – 1639), founder of the Silesian school of poets, “who reformed the art of poetry and introduced greater purity of language and metrical regularity.”<sup>34</sup> The hymns of this period are therefore both rhythmically and poetically smoother and cleaner, softer, and warmer in their theological content.

The transition from the previous type of hymn to that of this period is effected by Johann Heermann (1585 – 1647). He was the first to adopt the new rules of poetry. Standing between the old and new periods, his hymns possess both the strong objective character of the Reformation period plus the clean poetic type of the later period. He ranks with the best hymnists of his century and is often regarded as second only to Paul Gerhardt. His total output ran to some 400 hymns, of which the best are possibly “O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken” (*TLH*, 143) and “O God, Thou Faithful God.” (*TLH*, 395)

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<sup>32</sup> E. Sperber, *Die Entwicklung des deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieders*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1901), p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 182.

<sup>34</sup> Schaff, p. 415.



Heinrich Held (1620 – 1659) is considered one of the best Silesian hymn writers. His “Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord” (*TLH*, 91) has enjoyed wide acceptance.

The hymns of Matthaëus von Löwenstern (1594 – 1648) are smooth, simple, and folklike. He himself composed the tunes to many of his texts, some of which J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750) valued so highly that he appropriated seven of them in his cantatas.<sup>35</sup> Two of his hymns appear in *The Lutheran Hymnal* – “Now Let Us All Loudly Sing” (28) and “Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation.” (258)

Martin Rinkart (1586 – 1649), both a cantor and a pastor, is especially known for his “Now Thank We All Our God” (*TLH*, 36), often referred to as the “German Te Deum.” Of all the hymns in Christian hymnals, this one bears the distinction of being most frequently sung on festival occasions.

Other prominent hymnists during these years are Johann M. Meyfart (1590 – 1642) with his “Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High” (*TLH*, 619); Josua Stegmann (1558 – 1632) with his fervent prayer for the church amidst her many trials – “Abide, O Dearest Jesus” (*TLH*, 53); Joshua Wegelin (1604 – 1640) with his simple, clear, and folklike Ascension hymn, “On Christ’s Ascension Now I Build” (*TLH*, 216); and Simon Dach (1605 – 1659) with his “Through Jesus’ Blood and Merit.” (*TLH*, 372).

Among the poets of lower Germany Johann Rist (1607 – 1667), stands next to Opitz in fame and productivity, having written about 680 hymns and spiritual songs. Not all these are good congregational hymns, for he intended most of them for private use.

With Paul Gerhardt (1607 – 1676), the beloved pastor of St. Nicholas in Berlin, the individualistic hymn begins to appear. Now the mind becomes more introspective. Sixteen of his 123 hymns begin with “I.” Yet his hymns express the most beautiful and fervent faith; they are the finest in all sacred poetry and are probably next in importance to those of Martin Luther.

The individualistic tendency continues also in Johann Franck (1618 – 1677), who wrote one of the greatest of Communion hymns, “Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness.” (*TLH*, 305).

While poets were producing their hymns, musicians were also at work. They had gradually become dissatisfied with the limited congregational singing being done, with the union of choir and congregation in this activity, and with the difficulties imposed by the polyphonic settings and their tenor cantus firmi. Furthermore, under the influence of the Italian opera in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, polyphony had gradually given way to the homophonic style, consisting of melody with a simple harmonic accompaniment. Musicians felt that a new kind of music, more simple and uniform in rhythm, should be

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<sup>35</sup> Sperber, p. 191.

employed and that the organ, gradually becoming more perfected, should put to greater use.

In 1586 Lucas Osiander, pastor and onetime organist in Nuremberg, published a series of chorales with the cantus firmus in the soprano part, accompanied by the lower voices in more strict chordal style and movement. Now the congregation could more easily hear the chorale melody and readily join the choir in its song. Other composers such as Eccard (1553 – 1611) and Vulpinus (1560 – 1615) soon followed suit. With Crüger's *Praxis pietatis melica* (1647),<sup>36</sup> the most influential German *Liederbuch* of the century, the *simplified* soprano cantus firmus became firmly established.

Michael Praetorius (1571 – 1621), Kapellmeister to the Elector of Saxony, produced one of the most monumental publications of this period, with his *Musae Sioniae*, issued from 1605 – 1610.<sup>37</sup> It contains 1,248 settings of 537 chorales. It is interesting to note that in Walter's day there were only about 35 tunes in use. Now there were at least 537, an increase of 502 within a span of 85 years.

With the organ gradually coming into its own, organ accompaniments for congregational hymn singing began to be issued. Samuel Scheidt's (1587 – 1654) *Tablaturbuch*, published in 1650, was the first satisfactory book of this type. It contained 112 settings of 100 melodies. With the issuance of such books the organ soon displaced the choir as leader in congregational singing.

### *The Age of Pietism: (1675–1750)*

The subjective tendency of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century gradually developed into what is known as the Pietistic Movement, a reaction against the so-called dry scholasticism, cold formalism, and dead orthodoxy.<sup>38</sup> Philipp J. Spener (1635 – 1705), pastor of St. Nicholas Church in Berlin, gave this movement its direction, about the year 1670, in his efforts toward reviving a vital, living, and practical Christianity.

Although there are a goodly number of hymn writers who represent this movement, such as Adam Drese (1620 – 1701), Wolfgang Dessler (1660 – 1722), Johann Rambach (1693 – 1735), and Karl Bogatzky (1690 – 1744) with his "Awake, Thou Spirit, Who Didst Fire" (*TLH*, 494), to mention but a few, the greatest contribution to the cause was the *Gesangbuch* of 1704 edited by Johann Freylinghausen (1670 – 1739).<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> Johann Crüger, *Praxis pietatis melica* (Frankfurt am Mayn: Balthasar Ch. Wust, 1647). For an interesting article on Crüger see Walter E. Buszin, "Johann Crüger: On the Tercentenary of His Death," *Response*, IV (Advent 1962), 89-97.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Praetorius, *Musae Sioniae*, ed. Friedrich Blume (Wolfenbüttel-Berlin: Georg Kallmeyer Verlag, 1932).

<sup>38</sup> Granted that the 17<sup>th</sup> century was an age of polemics, a juster evaluation describes the term "dead orthodoxy" as a caricature and recognizes that the influential men in this era of orthodoxy were almost without exception profoundly interested in the maintenance of a living spirituality. See Hans Leube, *Die Reformation in der deutschen lutherische Kirche zur Zeit der Orthodoxie* (Leipzig: Verlag von Dörfling und Francke, 1924).

<sup>39</sup> Johann A. Freylinghausen, *Geistreiches Gesang-Buch* (Halle: Verlegung des Waysenhauses, 1741). This is the later, more complete collection containing 1,600 hymns and over 600 melodies. Very few hymns

hymns in this collection, which give expression to various stages of Christian experience, although at times fresh and lively, and charged with devotional fervor, often degenerate into what might be considered irreverent sentimentalism. The extreme emphasis by the Pietists on individualism produced well-nigh ludicrous hymns for every imaginable profession and situation in life.<sup>40</sup>

Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700 – 1760), founder of the Moravian Brethren, drew much of his zeal from Pietism. There he acquired the passion for hymn writing that led him to compose over 2,000 hymns. Most of them have been forgotten, but two of his better works remain in use – “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness” (*TLH*, 371) and “Jesus, Lead Thou On.” (*TLH*, 410)

Joachim Neander (1650 – 1680), one of the great hymn writers of the German Reformed Church, may also be classed in this school. His “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (*TLH*, 39) is worthy of note.

Erdmann Neumeister (1671 – 1756) represents a reaction to Pietism in his dignified and evangelical “Jesus Sinners Doth Receive” (*TLH*, 324). The same may be said for Benjamin Schmolck (1672 – 1737), who wrote the tender baptismal hymn “Dearest Jesus, We Are Here” (*TLH*, 300). Not only poetry but also music came upon evil days at the hands of Pietism. The spate of subjective, emotional, and sentimental hymn texts would not suit the sturdy, rugged chorale tunes of earlier days. Waltzlike triple meters became common parlance. The old tunes became frilly and decorative. Ornamantal [*sic*] Italian music found a welcome haven on the grounds that is was more “artistic.” Where the old sturdy chorale tunes were retained, they were frequently chiseled off into dull, plodding isometric forms.

The organ now assumed a role of greater importance than the congregational singing. The organist frequently embroidered the melody with arbitrary ornamentations.<sup>41</sup> Flourishing interludes, or *Zwischenspiele*, either at the end of the stanzas or of verse lines, became common.<sup>42</sup>

This is the very period in which the immortal Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) lived and worked. By the time he had arrived on the scene, Pietism had well-nigh done away with good church music, limiting the available hymnic resources.<sup>43</sup>

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written by Freylinghausen himself are presently being sung by Lutherans in Americas. *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *Service Book and Hymnal* of the Lutheran Church in America (Authorized by the Churches cooperating in the Commission on Liturgy and the Commission on the Hymnal, Music Edition [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1958]) contain none of his hymns. The former utilizes one of his melodies. See *TLH*, 73, Second Tune.

<sup>40</sup> See Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York; W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1941), pp. 470-471.

<sup>41</sup> Phillip Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach* (London: Novello & Co., 1899), I, 594.)

<sup>42</sup> For some interesting examples of this “art” see Liemohn, pp. 68-71.

<sup>43</sup> Spitta, II, 115.

In Leipzig, for instance, Lutherans were singing hymns in worship without organ accompaniment; parts of the liturgy were being sung in Latin, perhaps the result of the city's cultural demands.<sup>44</sup>

Insofar as the history of the congregational chorale is concerned, Bach did not direct his efforts toward the writing of new tunes. His chief contribution lies in his numerous chorale harmonizations and his treatment of the chorale for organ. In fact, the chorale constitutes the warp and woof of most of his work. He used the isometric rather than the rhythmic form of the chorale. However, superb craftsman that he was, his use of passing tones, syncopations, and other rhythmic devices lessened the austerity of the simple isometric form and resulted in works of often indescribable beauty.<sup>45</sup>

With the passing of Bach, the close of an era had arrived. His works were little known; few of his compositions were published during his lifetime. For nearly a century the precious manuscripts which cause his name to be venerated today lay gathering dust.

### *The Age of Rationalism: ca. 1750 – 1817*

Pietism's lack of intellectual strength left the field vacant for a movement generally known as Rationalism and in Germany as the Enlightenment. Now reason, science, humanism, and naturalism shook the very foundations of the Christian faith. Neither hymnody nor music were spared. The subtle process of revising hymns to suit the taste of the age caused the greatest harm. Originally perhaps well meant, this procedure gradually led to the loss of the saving message of Christ. As Philip Schall so ably puts it:

Conversion and sanctification were changed into self-improvement, piety into virtue, heaven into the better world, Christ into Christianity; God into providence, Providence into fate. Instead of hymns of faith and salvation, the congregations were obliged to sing rhymed sermons on the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the delights of reunion, the dignity of man, the duty of self-improvement, the nurture of the body, and the care of animals and flowers.<sup>46</sup>

Of the few poets worthy of note, but one brave name stands out, that of Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715 – 1769). His "Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won" (*TLH*, 201) is primitively apologetical.

Pietism's lack of interest in church music also extended into this period. Furthermore, it was the day of secular composers, opera, and the orchestra. The composing of tunes languished; the old tunes were further reduced to plodding isometric forms; bombastic organ interludes flourished.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>45</sup> See Walter E. Buszin, "The Rhythmic Chorale in America," *The Hymn*, July 1962, 80.

<sup>46</sup> Schaff, p. 417.

## *Efforts Toward Recovery*

The confessional revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a reaction against Rationalism.<sup>47</sup> In 1817 Claus Harms (1778 – 1855), archdeacon of St. Michael's Church in Kiel, reissued Luther's Ninety-five Theses together with his own. In these he sought strenuously to arouse German Lutherans to the dangers of the "papacy of reason."<sup>48</sup>

Revised liturgies and hymnals based on earlier models began to appear in the state churches of Saxony, Hannover, Baden, Brunswick, and other districts. Scholars produced extensive literature. Eduard Koch, Philipp Wackernagel, and Ludwig Schoeberlein<sup>49</sup> produced their significant volumes on hymnody and church music. Professors Friedrich Spitta and Julius Smend of the University of Strasbourg founded in 1896, the *Monatschrift für Gottesdienst und kirchliche Kunst*, an influential liturgical-musical periodical. Johannes Zahn's 6-volume monumental work discussed nearly 8,000 chorale melodies with their variant forms.<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, Mendelssohn rediscovered the forgotten works of Bach; music leaders established choral societies, promoted church music conferences, and advanced the standards of music, thereby helping to quicken the entire church life.

It is significant to note that C. F. W. Walther (1811 – 1887), who came to America with Saxon emigrants in 1839 and played such a leading role in organizing the Missouri Synod in 1847, was part of this confessional revival. The fruits of his theological and hymnological efforts are still in evidence today.<sup>51</sup>

In retrospect one must conclude that the Lutheran chorale in its long and oftentimes precarious history has exerted a tremendous influence on the development of both church music and music as an art, as well as on the Christian faith itself. In a sense it has been a poetic, musical, and theological expression of that church's history. Its heritage offers one of the greatest single sources of congregational music and the greatest challenge to Lutherans in America to refine and preserve this treasure for posterity.

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<sup>47</sup> Regarding this entire revival see Holstein Fagerberg, *Bekentnis, Kirche und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Uppsala: Almqvist och Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1952) and J. L. Neve and O. W. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), II, 128-141. For a critical approach see Emmanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie*, V (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1954), 185 – 210.

<sup>48</sup> See William A. Lamberg, "Theses," *The Lutheran Cyclopedia*, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs and John A. W. Haas (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), pp. 512 – 514.

<sup>49</sup> Ludwig Schoeberlein, *Schatz des liturgischen Chor- und Gemeindegesangs* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896).

<sup>50</sup> Johannes Zahn, *Die Melodien der deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieder* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1899 – 1893),

<sup>51</sup> For a brief, concise, and well-documented overview of the hymnological developments in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod from its founding to the present, see Carl Schalk, *The Roots of Hymnody in The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Church Music Pamphlet Series Number 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965).

